GLOBAL JAPANESE STUDIES RESEARCH WORKSHOP, DECEMBER 2026
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未来学



Christopher Perkins
University of Edinburgh

Managing the Future:
Japanese Futurology, 1965–1970

ABSTRACT

In the 1960s a new kind of expert appeared across the industrialised world who claimed that the future could be studied systematically. In the United States, forecasters at bodies such as the RAND Corporation used computers and systems analysis to calculate the likely consequences of present decisions. In Europe, figures such as Robert Jungk argued that thinking about the future should be imaginative and participatory, a way for ordinary people to envisage other possible worlds. Historians now call this broad movement future studies and argue that it left a lasting mark on think tanks, long-range planning and scenario methods still in use today. Yet despite a futurology boom in 1960s Japan, culminating in the second International Future Research Conference in Kyoto in 1970, Japan's part in the development of future studies is little discussed today.

This talk examines Japanese futurology (*miraigaku*), founded in the mid-1960s by a small group that included the anthropologist Umesao Tadao, the science-fiction writer Komatsu Sakyō and the government planner Hayashi Yūjirō. For these thinkers the great problem Japan faced was a consequence of its own success. Having caught up with the West, the nation no longer had a model to follow, and technological change was reshaping people's desires faster than government could respond. Their answer was to entrust the future to the state and its experts, who would put the new science of futurology to work for the good of the nation and whose visions of the future would take over the role religion had once played in restraining and guiding the masses. The talk argues that this approach made Japanese futurology a conservative body of thought, treating change as a force to be managed rather than a matter for public choice, and it considers why critics at the time accused the futurologists of removing politics from the future.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Christopher Perkins is Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He is Chief Editor of *Japan Forum*, sits on the council of the British Association for Japanese Studies, and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. His research examines the history of Japanese student politics, media representation and state policing responses, with particular focus on Japan's New Left movements of the 1960s and 1970s. He is Principal Investigator on the AHRC Responsive Mode Curiosity Award 'Contesting Japan's Future: Mapping Crisis, Governance, and Activism in the 1970s' (APP94840).

His recent work includes *The Tokyo University Trial and the Struggle Against Order in Postwar Japan* (Palgrave, 2024), which explores how the largest trial in Japanese legal history became a battleground over legal process and social order in the postwar period. With Ferran de Vargas he co-edited *Political Thought and Japan's New Left Movements: Transformations in Radical Theory* (Bloomsbury, 2025), the first comprehensive collection examining the radical theorists who shaped Japan's 1960s intellectual landscape. His earlier book, *The United Red Army on Screen* (Palgrave, 2015), analyses media memory of Japan's radical left. His work has also appeared in journals including the *European Journal of Social Theory*, *Global Society*, *Japan Forum*, *Television and New Media*, the *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* and *Asiatische Studien*, as well as in numerous edited collections.

Friday 18 December 2026

17:00–18:30 · In person only

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