

Call for Papers: Digital Games in Japanese Studies – Current Perspectives

Academic engagement with digital games has long been established within Japanese Studies. Over the past two decades, a wide range of theoretically and empirically grounded works has emerged that take digital games seriously as an important source for analyzing Japanese culture, society, and history. This research is diverse in terms of discipline, methodology, and subject matter – ranging from studies of industrial history, questions of aesthetics, spatial construction, or narration, to representations of gender, nation, or cultural difference.

The planned conference seeks to build on this existing research and sees itself as an academic forum for networking, reflecting on methodological approaches, and highlighting ongoing projects in Japan-related digital game studies. Its aim is to present, reflect upon, and discuss current issues, research interests, and theoretical perspectives. In doing so, the conference intends to contribute to a stronger anchoring of games as a subject within Japanese Studies.

We invite contributions that engage with digital games in the context of Japanese Studies. Topics may relate to “games from Japan” or “Japanese games” (a problematic distinction, as recently highlighted by Martin Roth (2025)), representations of “Japan” in games, or gaming experiences in Japan. The focus is not on national attributions but on analytical research questions that have been widely discussed in previous scholarship and remain highly relevant: What functions do cultural narratives, ideologemes, or spatial constructions serve within games? How is “Japan” staged as a place, an idea, or an aesthetic style—and through which media techniques? How can digital games be productively examined from the perspective of cultural, media, or social analysis within Japanese Studies? Which methodological concepts have proven effective, and which open up new avenues of inquiry? What new approaches and aspects of Japan-related game research are emerging?

Possible contributions may address (but are not limited to) the following fields:

- **History and Industry:** Historical development of digital games in Japan; the role of Japanese companies and creators in the global games industry; economic and technological aspects of the Japanese game industry.
- **Cultural and Aesthetic Analyses:** Digital games as cultural texts and (distorted) mirrors of Japanese society. Which themes, values, and narratives are negotiated in “Japanese” games? How are Japanese traditions, history, or mythology staged? How do games fit into the broader media mix?
- **Social Dynamics and Play Culture:** Play practices and gaming communities in Japan. Research on gaming communities, fan culture, cosplay, etc.; the significance of e-sports events and arcades/game centers in everyday Japanese culture; digital games in educational contexts or family socialization.
- **Discourses and Perceptions:** Societal debates surrounding digital games in Japan. Discourses on violence and youth protection, excessive gaming, or positive learning effects of games. Media and political framing of digital games and its influence on regulation and public opinion.
- **Identity, Diversity, and Representation:** Representations of gender roles, sexuality, and queer characters; portrayals of Japan and Japanese people in local and global games

(ludo-orientalism); cultural stereotypes and their re- or deconstruction through game content.

- Space and Topology: Urban topographies, imaginations of Japan, chronotopes, virtual spaces as social or cultural spaces of experience.
- Transnational Perspectives: Depending on the question of how meaningful the categories “Japanese” vs. “Western” games truly are, potential topics include: localization and cultural adaptation of “Japanese” games for global markets; international reception of “Japanese” games and, conversely, the reception of “Western” games in Japan; collaborations and influences in game design.
- Methodology and Theory: Reflections on research methods in digital game analysis from a Japanese Studies perspective. Database and metadata analysis of game catalogues; incorporation of concepts from Japanese intellectual history or media theory into game analysis; challenges in intercultural comparisons of game and gaming cultures.
- Science Communication and Research-Based Game Development: Digital games as a medium for conveying research in Japanese Studies, for popularizing academic knowledge, or as experimental forms of knowledge production.

We welcome conceptual as well as empirical contributions, project presentations, methodological reflections, and comparative analyses. Other topic proposals with a Japan-related and game-related focus are likewise very welcome.

Confirmed participants so far include:

Alisa Freedman

Rachael Hutchinson (opening keynote)

Martin Roth (closing keynote)

Date and Venue: The conference will take place on **September 25-26, 2026**, at the **University of Trier** (Germany).

Travel and accommodation costs may be covered in part (depending on final approval of funding). Details will be communicated to invited presenters in due course.

Please submit an abstract (max. 300 words) and a short biography (approx. 150 words) by February 28 to pham@uni-trier.de.

Conference languages are German, English, and Japanese. A potential publication of the contributions will also be discussed during the conference.

We look forward to your submissions and to discussing the current state of Japan-related video game research, as well as developing new perspectives for Japanese Studies in the context of digital games.

Organisers: Ronald Saladin
Van Thien Pham