

UBIAS Topic of the year 2024 event
TAISI Symposium • IHS-NTU Vanguard Summit

Human/Non-human Relationships and Sustainable Development

Date: November 5th, 2024
Time:
9:50-18:30 (Japan Standard Time)
8:50-17:30 (China Standard Time)

Organized by:
Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences,
National Taiwan University
Waseda Institute for Advanced Study, Waseda University
Co-organized by:
Institute for Advanced Social Sciences, Waseda University

Program

- A. Morning Session (9:50-12:50)
Theme: New Cosmopolitanism
- B. Afternoon Session (14:00-16:50)
Theme: Distant Future Generations as Imaginary Human and Their Perils
- C. Round Table (17:00-18:30)

Time (JST)	Session	Speaker	Topic
09:50 – 10:00	Opening Remarks	Sebastian Hsien-hao Liao & Ken-Ichi Akao	
10:00 – 10:50	A1	Sebastian Hsien-hao Liao (Distinguished professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures; Dean, Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and the Social Sciences, National Taiwan University, Taiwan)	Mind and Compassion: From Settler Colonialism to Panpsychism
11:00 – 11:50	A2	Hung-chiung Li (Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University, Taiwan)	Intra-active Causality: From Democracy to Accountability in Karen Barad
12:00 – 12:50	A3	Chishe Li (Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University, Taiwan)	Looking Backward: Realism by the Future Generations
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch Break		

14:00 – 14:50	B1	Ken-Ichi Akao (Professor, School of Social Sciences, Waseda University, Japan)	Distant future generations and the emissions gap in climate change issues
15:00 – 15:50	B2	Tatsuyoshi Saijo (Director, Future Design Research Center, Kyoto University of Advanced Science; Emeritus Professor, Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Japan)	Future Design: Futurability, Presentability and Pastability
16:00 – 16:50	B3	Ryuji Yamazaki-Skov (Specially Appointed Associate Professor, Faculty of Glocal Policy Management and Communication, Yamanashi Prefectural University; Guest Associate Professor at Osaka University, Institute for Open and Transdisciplinary Research Initiatives, Osaka University, Japan)	Enhancing Empathy for Future Generations: An Approach Beyond Human/Non-Human Dualism
17:00 – 18:30	Round Table	All Speakers	

*In each session, the speaker will have 35 mins to talk and 15 mins for QA.

Statement

As the looming effects of the Anthropocene grow more menacing, the world scrambles to propose remedies to the existential crisis for humanity brought about by climate change and biodiversity loss. The 2024 UBIAS common theme, "Human/Non-human," may provide a key to addressing this issue. In this symposium, we will explore potential solutions from two apparently contrasting but in fact mutually complementary approaches.

In the first part, as a radical approach to the issue, we will delve into its roots: the anthropocentrism deeply embedded in Western cultures, where the idea of the Great Chain of Being has changed little except replacing God with Man at the top of the hierarchy. The fact that animal rights advocates prioritize animals that exhibit empathy toward humans, for instance, lends evidence to this unyielding anthropocentrism. Consequently, what we are in dire need of is a "flat ontology" that does not forsake human accountability—one that reorients the human-nonhuman relationship not by treating the nonhuman as merely necessary for human survival, but by recognizing that all beings have equal rights to exist on this planet. A key issue in this reorientation involves the relative value of the myriad entities, a subject that is critical to the extent to which de-anthropocentrism can be pursued and has sparked heated debates. We believe that further academic discussions on the human-nonhuman relationship will help clarify these issues and contribute to the development of more concrete strategies to combat the Anthropocene.

In the second part, the issue will be addressed from a more piecemeal approach. While framing the problem as a crisis of human survival have obviously been prompted by anthropocentric concerns, the slowness in enhancing sustainability indicates that future generations are not being treated equally with the current generation. If they were, we would be implementing stronger measures for climate change and biodiversity conservation. In other words, future generations exist on the boundary between human and non-human. While anthropocentrism suggests we treat them as human, they are not being afforded the same rights as present-day humans.

The second part of the symposium will begin by highlighting the gap between the "should be" and the "is" in this context, using climate change as a case study. Following this, two practical solutions to treating future generations as equals will be proposed. The first solution introduces the idea of "future design," a concept that encourages thinking from the future back to the present, rather than from the present forward to the future. The second solution will present practical attempts to enhance our empathy for future generations.

Abstracts

Morning Session (8:50-11:50)

Theme: New Cosmopolitanism

A1. Mind and Compassion: From Settler Colonialism to Panpsychism

Hsien-hao Liao (National Taiwan University)

In trying to tackle the Anthropocene, we have no other choice but to radically re-negotiate the human-nonhuman relationship so as to develop a kind of flat ontology in which all things are on a par with one another. It is not because there are indeed no differences between all things, which would have prevented life from emerging on earth at all, but because we need to do away with anthropocentrism based on human exceptionalism, which touts nothing other than the human mind. Consequently, the oriental idea of "all life/things are equal" does not mean to promote an idea of equality that is blind to differences but one that could eliminate the neoliberal idea of basing everything's worth on "power", i.e., the capacity for competition, and replaces it with "compassion" so that the Heideggerian worry over "enframing", or treating everything and even everybody as resources.

Thus, to prove that all things are equal is not to advocate that we are all the same but that we are rooted in a commonality which is “life”. But what is life if it is not at the same time “mind”? “Panpsychism” is precisely the philosophical endeavor that has been trying to prove that all things from the very beginning and at the very foundation indeed has mind. This doctrine has developed since the inception of human civilization and gone through ups and downs but has never been as urgent an enterprise as now. For we are facing a “practice or perish” choice as the Anthropocene worsens. While most recently having received tremendous input from quantum mechanics, this doctrine, far from being a unified one, remains a minor discourse within Posthumanism and lacks strong advocacy. But more unfortunately for the popularization of this doctrine is the fact that the animist cultures of the world’s indigenous peoples’, labeled “panpsychism in practice” by some critics, are facing biocultural extinction.

Due to the destruction of their traditional habitat by modernity and their apparent distance from modernity’s way of life, the indigenous peoples all over the world have been considered living fossils worthy of at most a place in the museum. And their invariable fate of being the ethnic “minorities” in settler colonial states further aggravates their marginalized status to the point that most of world do not see the fact that their animist cultures hold the key to our future. As “panpsychism in practice”, animist cultures may help develop a new ethics for the Anthropocene and beyond. Thus, in addition to modernity in general, settler colonialism is another related but more immediate obstacle to the development of such an ethics. And even as we try to promote posthumanism, especially panpsychism, we stand by and watch the world’s indigenous cultures wither away in settler colonial societies—probably the most inexplicable contradictions that human history has witnessed. This essay proposes to highlight the central importance of keeping the indigenous cultures alive somehow by articulating their values with panpsychism as well as overcoming settler colonialism and for that matter neoliberalism’s domination of contemporary societies.

A2. Intra-active Causality: From Democracy to Accountability in Karen Barad

Hung-chiung Li (National Taiwan University)

In Karen Barad’s new materialist theory, “entanglement” and “intra-action” are two core concepts. Both of them seem to pertain to simple relational ontology and apparently advocate the democracy of objects or things, as also championed by some versions of object-oriented ontology (OOO) and new materialism that valorize flat ontology or relationality. But there exists some tension between the two concepts, since Barad emphatically indicates that the notion of intra-action is put forward to explain “causality” and “accountability” rather than

simple democratic distribution of agency between humans and nonhumans, which hints at the insufficiency of Latour's network ontology. New materialism is usually taken as a theory that underscores nonhuman material forces, but Barad's version and concepts have the potential to move beyond reductive flatness or democracy in contemporary posthuman ontologies and materialisms. Furthermore, Barad's emphasis on causality and accountability significantly bears on the post-global backlashes against democracy as is seen in global right-wing populism and the rising call for capital punishment or penalty aggravation. The question touches upon the predicaments of democracy, as these backlashes are considerably related to the prevalent inequalities and injustices that are rendered unattributable and thus unaccountable. The predicament was also reflected in the naming of Covid-19 during the pandemic, while Barad once coincidentally discussed the case of H5N1 and might offer incisive observations. In this presentation, I will mainly explicate Barad's core argument by focusing on concepts such as intra-action and agential realism. I will also deal with the relationships between related ontologies, including OOO, Latour's thought, and new materialism. Some ecological or Anthropocene discourses, such as those by Timothy Morton and Rob Nixon, will be brought in. My ultimate aim is to formulate a fourfold structure of causality, consisting of mechanical causality, ontological causality, intra-active causality, and reflexive causality, that can cover democracy and accountability.

A3. Looking Backward: Realism by the Future Generations

Li Chishe (National Taiwan University)

When confronted with the moral quandary of the nonidentity problem, this study does not aim to resolve it through a definitive solution. Instead, it addresses this philosophical challenge by reframing it within a cosmopolitical context. In the longstanding tradition of cosmopolitanism, future generations are envisioned as individuals likely to bear the consequences of conflicts. From this perspective, cosmopolitanism asserts the rights of these future peoples to demand redress from preceding generations.

Central to this cosmopolitical ethics is the definition of future generations, which is not grounded in intrinsic value but rather shaped by diplomatic relations and acknowledgment. This approach mirrors practices found in international law among nation-states. The legal designation of a successor to a previously active nation-state depends on various factors, including multilateral recognition and diplomatic engagement. Crucially, the acknowledgment of a successor hinges on the transformation of individuals into a collective entity inhabiting a defined territory with its resources.

An integral aspect of governing a cosmopolitical world, I argue further, is narrative. Here,

narrative specifically refers to speculative fiction that explores imaginary futures likely to unfold. Margaret Atwood argues that speculative fiction should not be mistaken for fantasy but as a form of realistic future projection. Building on Atwood's insights, this study agrees that speculative fiction serves as a realism of the future, articulated through the perspectives of future generations. Such narratives are not fantastical or entirely anti-mimetic but adhere to the logic of plausibility and "what if" scenarios. Moreover, these narratives contribute to "worlding" as theorized by scholars like Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, and Donna Haraway, promoting symbiosis between human and nonhuman collectives. Thus, this narrative approach is crucial in understanding and envisioning futures that are both plausible and transformative.

Afternoon Session (13:00-15:50)

Theme: Distant Future Generations as Imaginary Human and Their Perils

B1. Distant future generations and the emissions gap in climate change issues

Ken-Ichi Akao (Waseda University)

The emissions gap refers to the difference between the projected greenhouse gas emissions path based on currently planned climate change mitigation policies and the optimal emissions path required to achieve the 1.5-degree (or 2-degree) target agreed upon in the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This gap reflects the disparity between what we intend to do for future generations (based on intergenerational altruism) and what we believe we ought to do for them (based on the morality of intergenerational equity). Closing this gap is crucial for avoiding climate catastrophe. To address this, it is necessary to strengthen intergenerational altruism and gather significant support for the ethics of intergenerational equity that underpin the 1.5-degree target.

As a primary approach to these goals, I will explore the theoretical issues surrounding intergenerational altruism and intergenerational equity. In terms of intergenerational altruism, the economically optimal path for agents with intergenerational altruism closely mirrors the projected greenhouse gas emissions path under current climate policies and thus diverges significantly from the 1.5-degree target path. This raises doubts about the economic optimality based on preferences. I will argue that the source of this doubt can be traced to the time inconsistency caused by intergenerational altruism.

On the topic of intergenerational equity, it is pointed out that in a society capable of achieving sustainable development, the optimal path based on utilitarianism, rather than egalitarianism, results in greater happiness for future generations. Moreover, the utilitarian optimal path closely resembles the 1.5-degree target path. The issue with the utilitarian optimal path is that an even better path, one that brings greater happiness to society, exists. Thus, the moral foundation for intergenerational equity must be sought beyond both egalitarianism and utilitarianism. In fact, the 1.5-degree target path is grounded in an environmental value norm known as strong sustainability. A preliminary argument for its justification is provided.

B2. Future Design: Futurability, Presentability and Pastability

Tatsuyoshi Saijo (Future Design Research Center, Kyoto University of Advanced Science;
and Research Institute for Humanity and Nature)

We are beginning to cross irreversible tipping points in many areas of the world. The three pillars of our society - the market, democracy, and science and technology - are not sufficient to cope with these future failures (or polycrises). It is therefore necessary to design new mechanisms to support them in some way. One such approach is Future Design (FD). FD began in Japan in the early 2010s with the aim of designing, experimenting, and practicing mechanisms that can demonstrate futurability (the ability of feeling happiness by aiming for the happiness of future generations, even at the expense of immediate gains) to deal with future failures. In addition to futurability, this paper introduces the concepts of presentability and pastability to extend the FD framework and attempts to situate the various FD studies of the past decade within this framework. We will then review the mechanisms for demonstrating these abilities and examine how the mechanism for demonstrating one ability affects the others. These abilities are what Meadows (1999) calls “leverage points,” and we consider the path to a paradigm shift by designing and using mechanisms that activate these points. We also want to show what is not known about FD and in which directions it might develop.

B3. Enhancing Empathy for Future Generations: An Approach Beyond Human/Non-Human Dualism

Ryuji Yamazaki-Skov (Yamanashi Prefectural University; Osaka University)

Tackling global challenges such as global warming and other environmental issues is a massive and complex task that cannot be accomplished by a single country, but it is also something that can be addressed locally and through the daily activities of individuals. Conversation is an everyday activity, but can it contribute to the fight against global warming? In the context

of climate change issues, altruism is the subject not only of the current generation but also of intergenerational altruism, and not only of the next generation but also of those generations to come who will be affected by the decisions of the current generation. Is it possible to empirically examine what altruism is toward those we cannot meet and how we can enhance it? This talk will showcase and discuss some of challenging initiatives in Japan. My research has explored ways in which people can empower intergenerational altruism in climate change issues by setting up a trial setting in which people interact with future generations in their daily lives, i.e., through dialogue. I proposed a communication design that employs a robot as an agent for future generations and as a research team, we investigated the effect of dialogue with a robot on our altruistic decision-making for future generations through experiments using the Dictator Game in Japan. We hypothesized that the dialogue would increase altruistic behavior as measured by the Game donations. The results showed a statistically significant increase in donations, suggesting that the conversation had a significant impact on participants. Also, our questionnaire results indicated that the conversation was successful in inducing empathy for the medium. The idea that empathy motivates altruistic behavior is supported by a wealth of research. As prior research has shown, empathy appears to be a good moderator of conversational effect on altruistic behavior, so enhancing empathy may be an effective strategy, but its effect may be limited and requires further discussion and investigation. Furthermore, our study showed that the effect of conversation on altruistic behavior varied with the age of the participants. The 2020 Environmental Survey by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) also shows that environmental concern increases with age in Japan. Comparatively speaking, there seems to be a lack of education about environmental issues at a young age in Japan. These trends are even more pronounced in Taiwan, for example, as shown in the same survey. However, our results showed that improvements can be made through dialogue. Furthermore, in light of the above, what does the idea of robots as interactive partners representing future generations and the results of people's empathy for them and behavioral change suggest for an anthropocentric worldview? In understanding the essence of technology, it is known that Heidegger's term "enframing (Gestell)" expresses concern about a system that conscripts and treating everything, including humans, as resources or standing-reserves and drives out any other possibility of revealing. However, it may be argued that the world disclosed by the interaction with social robots, including the dimension of compassion, prompts us to reconsider the dichotomy between human beings and objects, and the media may even become a kind of savior that discloses the potential of people to be prosocial or altruistic and gives us a glimpse of the possibility of solidarity among people that transcends generations.