Artificial Intelligence and the Human –

Cross-Cultural Perspectives

on Science and Fiction

A Japanese-German Conference

in Berlin, Germany

17 and 18 June 2021

Katharina Kaiser-Müller

Aktuelle Debatten über künstliche Intelligenz verbinden häufig die Realitäten von KI-Technologien mit den fiktiven Darstellungen dessen, was sie eines Tages werden könnten. Sie sollen in der Lage sein, viel schneller zu lernen, autonome Entscheidungen zu treffen oder Informationen zu verarbeiten als Menschen, was Hoffnungen und Ängste gleichermaßen weckt. Was ist, wenn diese nützlichen Technologien eines Tages ihre eigenen Absichten entwickeln, die denen des Menschen zuwiderlaufen?

Current debates on artificial intelligence often conflate the realities of AI technologies with the fictional renditions of what they might one day become. They are said to be able to learn, make autonomous decisions or process information much faster than humans, which raises hopes and fears alike. What if these useful technologies will one day develop their own intentions that run contrary to those of humans?

Abbildung 1: Screenshot – Arthist.net [CC-BY-SA])

The line between science and fiction is becoming increasingly blurry: what is already a fact, what is still only imagination; and is it even possible to make this clear-cut distinction? Innovation and development goals in the field of AI are inspired by popular culture, such as its portrayal in literature, comics, film or television. At the same time, images of these technologies drive discussions and set particular priorities in politics, business, journalism, religion, civil society, ethics or research. Fictions, potentials and scenarios inform a society about the hopes, risks, solutions and expectations associated with new technologies. But what is more, the discourses on AI, robots and intelligent, even sentient machines are nothing short of a mirror of the human condition: they renew

fundamental questions on concepts such as consciousness, free will and autonomy or the ways we humans think, act and feel.

Imaginations about the human and technologies are far from universal, they are culturally specific. This is why a cross-cultural comparison is crucial for better understanding the relationship between AI and the human and how they are mutually constructed by uncovering those aspects that are regarded as natural, normal or given. Focusing on concepts, representations and narratives from different cultures, the conference aims to address two axes of comparison that help us make sense of the diverse realities of artificial intelligence and the ideas of what is human: Science and fiction, East Asia and the West.

Papers are invited on the following topics (among others):

- Which meanings and functions are ascribed to AI technologies and robots?

- How is science informed by popular discursive images of AI?

- Which cultural differences are there concerning the relationship between the natural and the artificial? What are the particular traditions of how to represent the human and its technological surrogates?

- What can the different cultural and conceptual histories tell us about our present and future with artificial intelligence?

Besides papers on these more general topics, we also invite case studies on innovative technologies and their fictional precursors as well as on the social, ethical or political contexts in which they are applied. All contributions are expected to address the comparative perspective on East Asian and Euro-American discourses.

Relevant issues and perspectives for these comparisons include but are not limited to cyberpunk and science-fiction in literature and film, public debates and imaginations of AI, the relation between simulation and reality, materiality, historical and legal accounts, sociotechnical imaginaries and politics.

We welcome contributions from scholars of diverse disciplines, such as cognitive science, computer science, cultural studies, literature and film studies, media and communication studies, psychology, political science, science and technology studies or sociology. Interdisciplinary approaches (e.g., those combining social, cultural and technical perspectives) as well as perspectives from practitioners and developers are particularly encouraged.

Submission process

- Extended abstracts of approximately 4,000 to 6,000 characters in length (excl. references) should be submitted no later than 10 February 2021 to ai21@hiig.de

- Speakers will be notified by 15 March 2021.

Conference and publication of selected papers in an edited volume

- The conference will take place on Thursday 17 and Friday 18 June 2021 in Berlin.

- Invitations for the submission of selected full manuscripts sent out in July 2021.

- Full manuscripts of between 30.000 to 50.000 characters (excluding references) to be submitted by September 2021.

- Comprehensive review returned to authors in December 2021; final papers due in February 2022.

- The edited volume will be published in early 2022.

If you have any questions, you can contact the conference organi-sers via ai21@hiig.de.