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Technology's International Histories: Communicating about the Past in the Age of Generative AI

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Popular histories of technology often describe progress as a succession of refinements to inventions originating in wealthy countries before spreading throughout the world. Typical histories of computing and the Internet, for example, suggest that these technologies emerged from isolated U.S. military research projects before being adopted elsewhere. Such narratives overlook competing technological alternatives and the contributions of diverse, international communities. They also reinforce misleading assumptions about the exceptional individuals and institutions responsible for technological innovation.

Drawing on historical research and the recent volume *Histories of Computing in Asia* (Springer, 2026), this lecture examines how our understanding of technology changes when we move beyond Western-centered narratives. Examples from the international development of the Internet and computing in Asia illustrate how technological innovation emerges through cultural encounters, competing priorities, and local adaptations. These histories challenge the assumption that technological development follows a single, inevitable path.

This historical perspective offers an important lesson for today's communicators and innovators. Although technological change is often presented as inevitable and unavoidable, history demonstrates that users are not simply compelled to accept technologies as they are given. They can adapt technologies, challenge assumptions, and pursue innovations that reflect their own cultural values and priorities. This lesson is particularly relevant in the age of generative AI. Although AI systems appear to offer universally applicable knowledge, they can reproduce dominant narratives while overlooking local experiences and alternative interpretations. Studying the international histories of technology therefore encourages us not only to question whose accounts of the past become authoritative, but also to recognize our own agency in shaping technological futures.

Biographical Statement: Christopher Leslie (he/him) is an Assistant Professor of English at Prince of Songkla University in Thailand, where his interdisciplinary research examines the relationships among technology, language, and society. His recent work investigates how generative AI reproduces assumptions about language, knowledge, and cultural identity, particularly in educational contexts. Dr. Leslie is the editor of Histories of Computing in Asia (Springer, 2026) and the author of From Hyperspace to Hypertext: Masculinity, Globalization, and Their Discontents (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). He is a former Chair and current Secretary of the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) Working Group 9.7 on the History of Computing. In this role, he has organized workshops on international in computing, histories of computing in Eastern Europe, and histories of computing in Asia. He was an editor of proceedings volumes for each of these workshops (which were published by Springer). A two-time U.S. Fulbright awardee, Dr. Leslie has also taught at the City University of New York, New York University, Universität Potsdam, and the South China University of Technology. He holds an M.A. and Ph.D. from the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City.

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