

Audrey Tang: Tokyo's Role in a World of Rapid Change



Audrey Tang during the online interview (c) Tokyo Metropolitan Government

Audrey Tang, Taiwanese Cyber Ambassador-at-large and the country's first Minister of Digital Affairs from 2022 to 2024, will be speaking at the innovation and startup conference SusHi Tech Tokyo 2025 in May. Globally recognized for her work using digital technology to foster democratic participation and government transparency, Tang says she looks forward to engaging with entrepreneurs from around the world at SusHi Tech Tokyo 2025 to promote sustainable, prosocial innovation.

Tech for Good

Launched in November 2022, SusHi Tech Tokyo, which stands for Sustainable High City Tech Tokyo, is a global startup and innovation conference hosted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG). The platform offers a collaborative space for Japanese and overseas entrepreneurs to explore the use of technology for sustainable development. This year too, the event will bring together a range of actors committed to realizing sustainable cities, with special focus on AI, quantum technology, and foodtech.

Those planning to attend this year's conference are no doubt looking forward to hearing from Audrey Tang, whose work using digital technologies to cultivate participatory democracy and social trust in Taiwan has earned her global recognition over the past decade, in addition to her already impressive career in the tech industry.

Tang—who first visited Tokyo in the late 1990s to attend a championship for Magic: The Gathering, a digital collectible card game with fans all over the world—says she appreciates SusHi Tech Tokyo's focus on innovation that contributes to society.

"Our urban landscapes must chart creative pathways to secure long-term well-being," Tang emphasizes. "In Tokyo, it is very clear that people have this common, shared idea of tech for good."

"SusHi Tech Tokyo 2025, at least to me, symbolizes this idea of skipping the 'hype curve,'" she continues. In a "hype curve cycle," inflated expectations for a new technology lead to collective disappointment when it does not deliver as promised, before finally reaching a sustainable innovation phase. "I've seen many new creators—including Sakana AI, which I met in Tokyo last time—who focus on sustainable business models that deliver value on day one, and that are balancing the environmental, the social, and governance."

Augmenting SusHi Tech Tokyo's focus on uniting cutting-edge tech with community stewardship, Tang says she plans to speak about "democracy with AI" in her talk at the upcoming conference.

"There is so much that has been said about how AI can disrupt democracy," she notes, "but my main idea is to do democracy with the help of assistive AI, and then use upgraded democracy as such to govern AI better. I will be talking about how to scale the model that we pioneered in Taiwan."

With the help of Tang and others, the Taiwanese government has successfully used open-source AI platforms such as Polis, which can gather and analyze ideas from large groups in real time, to collaborate with citizens to develop new laws and other government initiatives. Such tools have contributed to regulating Uber and banning online deepfake scams—which use AI to edit or generate images, video, or audio of real people—by mandating digital signatures on online ads, according to Tang.

“We have steered these kinds of integrations of AI in our lives quite successfully,” she says. “You see the conflicts, you see the various worries, but you do not see these as fires on the ground to be put down. You see these as energy sources that you can then harness to co-create better regulations, better agendas, and so on, to steer such technologies toward prosocial goals.”

Harmony from Differences

In Tang’s view, Tokyo and Taiwan share a common belief that technology should serve society. “I think we share many similarities in terms of agile governance and community-driven innovation, so the rich blend of technological research and cultural depth work together, not against each other,” she says.

Based on conversations with TMG and other officials, Tang also sees government playing a “space-holding role” in Tokyo.

“I rarely hear that idea anywhere else in government; many leaders want to impose their vision on their constituency,” she says. “But here, I explicitly heard that in order to prepare Tokyo for the future, we need to hold space so that people with different ideas, different cultural upbringings, different ethnicities, different takes on the shape of the future, and so on can mingle in the space. They can exchange freely in the space and again turn those differences into co-creation. I think this emphasis on space, this emphasis on harmony out of differences is very traditional.”

Holding space for collaboration, rather than imposing a top-down vision, also enables sustainable urban development that each member of society can take part in.

“To me, sustainable urban development means that the environmental, social, and governance concerns are not separated in different silos, but rather co-created so that the triple bottom line starts from day one, starts from the design, starts from the imagination,” Tang says, contrasting this framework with one that delegates each field only to its respective specialists.

“Because we are experts in our own feelings, in our own lives, and there is no expert that can really represent us in terms of such lived experiences,” she continues. “The technologies that I mentioned are about representing us, like fragments of our ideas, the degree of our resonance, the affinity of our needs and our ideas with other people’s ideas and needs, and to weave them together in a way that makes sense to the decision-makers and experts.”

A SusHi Tech Tokyo Movement

SusHi Tech Tokyo is a Tokyo-based concept that aims to create sustainable new value by overcoming global urban challenges through cutting-edge technology, diverse ideas, and digital expertise. This year’s event will include more exhibitors, business meetings, and

participants than previous years and will feature special programs designed to attract venture capital and investors.

But why stop there? Looking ahead, Tang says she hopes the ideas and values of SusHi Tech Tokyo will grow beyond its annual events.

In her experience, many people are captivated by the idea that “you can actually pursue innovation in a way that does not make a mess. So I think this is a good north star for many, especially the younger generation of entrepreneurs.”

The younger generation already has an awareness that “technology does not automatically align with sustainability,” Tang explains. They have seen and felt various types of pollution, from literal pollution of the environment to social media platforms amplifying divisions and conflict—whether intentional or not.

These pollutants are results of “the default path of seeking profit,” Tang says. “I think we need to collaborate together, Taiwan and Tokyo, to make (SusHi Tech Tokyo) not just an annual event, but rather a base upon which a movement around reorienting the ideas of capitalistic innovation to serve the people and the planet can flourish.”

To address current social media challenges, Tang offers an alternative vision, which she calls “prosocial media.” In this framework, content would be ranked not by controversy and engagement but by resonance, even among people with very different views, she explains, adding that she is looking forward to discussing this idea with the entrepreneurs gathered in the capital for SusHi Tech Tokyo.

“I truly believe a shift from this polarization into plurality is needed in today’s information landscape,” Tang emphasizes. “As long as you can introduce a suitable space, a room, a canvas for those conflicts to see the ‘uncommon’ ground, it then turns the conflict energy into co-creative energy.”

“This positive outcome is not guaranteed,” she cautions. “It depends on us, our willingness, our readiness to engage people who are different, who may say things that we find very objectionable. But then we need to keep investing our emotional energy and to insist that emerging technologies, including AI, amplify what is best in us, to connect us, instead of what’s worst in us.”

Profile: Audrey Tang

Audrey Tang, Taiwan’s Cyber Ambassador-at-large and Minister of Digital Affairs (2022-2024), is celebrated for her pioneering efforts in digital democracy. Named one of TIME’s “100 Most Influential People in AI” in 2023, Tang was instrumental in shaping Taiwan’s internationally acclaimed COVID-19 response and in safeguarding the 2024 presidential and legislative elections from foreign cyber interference. Tang is now focused on broadening her vision of Plurality—technology for collaborative diversity—to inspire global audiences.

By Annelise Giseburt, journalist.

About TOKYO UPDATES

TOKYO UPDATES is an online magazine offering fresh insights into Tokyo's latest developments. With contributions from prominent figures, journalists, and independent writers from diverse backgrounds, the platform covers **daily life, leading SDG initiatives, and urban challenges** in Japan's capital.

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About SusHi Tech Tokyo

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Press Kit

1. Tang (center), participating as a speaker at an event for startups hosted by the TMG in November 2024. (c) Tokyo Metropolitan Government



2. Tang explains how AI can be implemented to achieve prosocial goals. (c) Tokyo Metropolitan Government



3. Tang giving a talk for startups in Tokyo in November 2024. (c) Tokyo Metropolitan Government

