

## PREFACE

Japan has been termed the “most compared country in the world” (Johann Arnason). Why should this be so? One can easily suspect that it has to do with that widely accepted image of the country as an exceptional counterpart to the West within the non-Western world. But why another German-Japanese comparison?

That the Japanese term *kaigo hoken* (care insurance) is a loan translation from the German *Pflegeversicherung* may not be common knowledge, all the more so since much of the relevant vocabulary, beginning with *keā herupā* (care helper), *keā manējā* (care manager) or *kaunserā* (counselor), is of Anglo-American origin. It nevertheless hints at parallels and interconnections between Japan and Germany. And this is the reason why a comparative perspective on German and Japanese social policy promises to be of particular informative value. Both countries are facing similar structural challenges: They are faced with the necessity of rebuilding their industry-based economic systems and have to cope with demographic changes which require a thorough reform of their social systems. Thus, it is similarities as well as characteristic contrasts which invite a comparative approach. It is hoped that this will not only lead to a more differentiated picture of social policy in Germany and Japan, including, perhaps, practical conclusions, but also deepen our general understanding of the mechanisms and the potentials as well as the pitfalls of social policy in two crucial areas: long-term care insurance and public pensions.

The German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) is dedicated to research on German-Japanese relations as well as to studies in the fields of the humanities, the social sciences, and the economy of modern and contemporary Japan. Located in Tōkyō, it profits from close contacts with Japanese and international researchers and is actively and intimately involved in relevant international and intercontinental exchange. It is this particular position of an “on-the-spot” center for research on Japan which also enables it to seek an active scholarly dialogue between Japanologists and those engaged in the general disciplines and to identify topics of special concern in a globalized context.

Population aging and social policy were the subject of a DIJ symposium held in October 1997 in Bonn, organized by Ralph Lützeler and Christian Oberländer and co-sponsored by the Friedrich-Ebert Founda-

tion.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, in Germany the pension system was reformed in 2000 and 2001, and Japan saw the reform of its public pension system in 1999, the implementation of its long-term care insurance in 2000 and its occupational pension reform of 2001, important milestones in the system's development which called for adequate treatment in a volume dedicated to these issues. This book therefore comprises original contributions to the above-mentioned symposium as well as more recent essays that take these new developments into account. All of the earlier contributions, however, have been revised and updated for this publication. Its authors were recruited from among scholars as well as from practitioners. Some of them have actively participated in both countries' reform debates. Their views may have been adopted into the regulations. In other cases, they represent positions deviating from the reforms as they were eventually implemented.

This study will serve to revise the prevailing view to date of Japan's social security as a largely inadequate system. Much has been done to improve the situation of the elderly, and so at least in some important fields Japan now appears to be on par with Germany.

We appreciate the cooperation and patience of the symposium's participants, and we are also grateful to the authors of the new chapters for their willingness to contribute to this volume. Special thanks go to Harald Conrad and Ralph Lützelner whose editorial work now makes accessible a rich array of information and insights on a timely topic.

I wish this book the broad international attention it deserves among scholars as well as policy makers.

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<sup>1</sup> See the conference report in *DIJ Newsletter* 3 (February 1998), p. 2.