

Interdisciplinary Japanese Studies On Site

Change! JPN

The Japanese language lends itself well for playing on words – this time for the latest campaign by the Cabinet Office to promote work-life balance. The double meaning of *kaeru* as both “frog” and “change” is playfully used here to urge people to change their work styles. It is suggested that the improvement of personal work styles, such as making a daily To-Do list and trying to keep meetings to one hour, can lead to changes of people’s lives. But the efforts are put solely into the hands of individual employees, freeing companies of their responsibility to do their part: A no-cost idea with a cute mascot – but with a doubtful outcome.



Longevity and happiness

In the healthiest, wealthiest and most highly educated society that Japan has ever been, life expectancy is at a record high. But there are some indications that this has not necessarily brought more happiness to Japan.

Widespread belief has it that growth equals success and decline equals failure. In the course of the twentieth century the Japanese population more than doubled. Today, Japanese enjoy the highest life expectancy of all industrialized nations. Furthermore, since the 1980s, Japan has consistently ranked among the top ten countries in all three categories of the United Nations Human Development Index: health, education, and standard of living. However, as fertility rates have dropped, population growth has slowed. For the past couple of decades only the older age groups have continued to grow, while the workforce has begun to shrink. And eventually, in 2005, Japan entered the age of depopulation.

福寿

Fukuju, a long and happy life

Fruits of success

If health, education and standard of living are any indication, Japan’s development has been a huge success. But do the Japanese enjoy their success? On the individual level the association of longevity and happiness is proverbial. But what about longevity *en masse*? Some recent developments suggest that increased longevity has not only brought more happiness to Japan.

Among them are the emergence of poverty and widening income inequality, as well as growing disparities between urban and rural areas, a growing discrepancy between the actual and the desired number of children, and an accelerating increase in cases of clinical depression.

New research focus

These developments are disquieting, prompting the question: Where is happiness to be found in Japan? Of late this question has gained a measure of prominence in public discourse, and therefore has been chosen as the overarching question of the DIJ’s new research focus entitled “Happiness in Japan – Continuities and discontinuities.” From now on it will complement and interact with the current focus, “Challenges of demographic change.”

Cooperation with White Rose

The White Rose East Asia Centre of the Universities of Leeds/Sheffield (WREAC) and the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo (DIJ) have concluded an agreement on academic and research collaboration. Henceforth, the two institutes will offer each other academic hospitality, pursue research projects of common interest, and on occasion organize seminars, workshops and round tables together. Taking advantage of the Internet, the potential of online discussion forums and a Web-based inter-institutional platform will be explored. Having a mutual interest in advancing knowledge in Japanese Studies, both institutes will exchange publications and information on work in progress.

◀ **Prof. Dr. Florian Coulmas**
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Fertility and social stratification

The names of all speakers and abstracts of the presentations can be found on the DIJ homepage at: www.dijtokyo.org



Dr. Barbara Holthus and **Dr. Axel Klein** conceptualized and organized the conference. In addition, Barbara Holthus, sociologist, heads the DIJ project on “Childcare and Low Fertility” (holthus@dijtokyo.org), and Axel Klein, political scientist, heads the DIJ project “Political Responses to Low Fertility” (klein@dijtokyo.org).

A declining birth rate as well as growing social inequalities are each a significant burden on any society. When both coincide, the government’s need to act is exponentially higher. For Japan and Germany, that is exactly the case.

Japan and Germany share the fact of very low fertility rates. The search for the reasons has led to a multitude of findings and policy recommendations. Both countries also share the fact that social inequalities are on the rise, albeit on different levels. In general, low fertility and social stratification are more often reported on as separate issues rather than together. Yet both are on many levels connected. On the one hand, though we do not exactly know how this highly complex relationship plays out, people’s overall economic standing has an influence on how many children they are likely to have. On the other hand, as a recent OECD study stated, demographic shifts are one reason why inequalities of income distribution have widened in most countries.

International symposium

Twenty-five scholars from Japan, Germany and the US presented their research results on this problem at the international and interdisciplinary DIJ symposium, “Fertility and Social Stratification – Japan and Germany in Comparison,” which was held on November 6 and 7, 2008 in Tokyo. The conference was organized in cooperation with Sophia University and was in part funded by the Japan Foundation. Kuniko Inoguchi, former Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs, in her keynote speech presented a cautiously optimistic outlook on the future trends in fertility rates of Japan and Germany, whereas the presentations thereafter focused more on the overt and covert obstacles that young people encounter in securing their economic future and starting a family. Presentations from the fields of sociology, political science, demography, geography and economics focused on these problems in seven sections: “Social Class, Social Reproduction and Fertility,” “Fathers and Work-Life Balance,” “Region,” “Health Care,”

“Gender,” “Policy,” and “Employment and Education.” It became obvious that all these factors are inextricably linked.

Political efforts to raise the fertility rate in both Germany and Japan approach the problem in numerous ways, yet with quite different efforts and, as a matter of fact, different outcomes. Currently, the governments of both countries propagate the idea of “work-life balance”. Yet the difference between Japan and Germany in acceptance and use of parental leave by fathers as well as fathers’ share of housework and childcare duties is still significant. In direct comparison, Japan still appears to be lagging behind.

Dire prospects

Japanese economist Toshiaki Tachibana (Dōshisha University, Kyoto) for example pointed to the fact that social inequalities will worsen and a growing number of Japanese will fall below the poverty level. Particularly young people and senior citizens will be affected. Due to the fact that the Japanese state does not provide an adequate social safety net, it can be expected that the birth rate among economically deprived people will continue to fall. How the development of the “New Economy” in Japan accelerated this trend was explained by Masahiro Yamada (Chūō University, Tokyo). The current global economic crisis is likely to lead to even steeper social stratification.

Similar but different

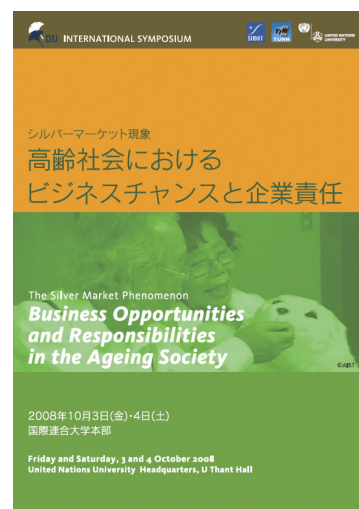
Most presentations confirmed that the problems in both Japan and Germany are similar in their effects, yet that the background is different. As the need to act continues to grow in both countries, the comparison between Japan and Germany provided new perspectives. These seem to be highly important in the analysis of the problems connected with low fertility.

The silver market phenomenon

Companies are beginning to discover the growth market “age” as a new business chance. On October 3 and 4, 2008, experts from various countries met at the international DIJ symposium, “The Silver Market Phenomenon: Business Opportunities and Responsibilities in the Ageing Society,” to discuss this topic at the United Nations University in Tokyo.

Japan is often seen as a pioneer in the “silver market”, which, however, is not a homogeneous segment. The experts who met at the symposium agreed on this point and discussed the challenges and opportunities of the silver market, as well as business responsibilities.

The kick-off event to the symposium was the DIJ forum held the previous day. Co-organizer Cornelius Herstatt from the Institute for Technology and Innovation Management at Hamburg University of Technology talked about the similarities and differences of the silver markets in Germany and Japan. The detailed programme, individual presentations and video recordings of the entire conference can be accessed via the DIJ homepage at www.dijtokyo.org.



◀ **Dr. Florian Kohlbacher**, management scholar, heads the DIJ project on “Business Implications of Demographic Change”.
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New forms of living for elderly people

The ministries of Social Welfare and Construction have been trying to improve the housing supply for the growing number of elderly people. Rarely cooperating with one another, their measures so far have not been very successful. The results are confusing, expensive and hardly attractive.

The DIJ workshop “Housing the Elderly in Japan” (October 16, 2008) provided an opportunity for scientists, representatives from NPOs and elderly people themselves to exchange their experiences with different forms of living for the elderly.

Group living

The main focus of the workshop, which was held in Japanese, was on alternative forms of living. One type is *group living* projects, a kind of living community for small groups of senior citizens, which are organized by NPOs, architects and elderly people themselves. Numerous goals for the future were formulated during the workshop. Considered most important was the setting up of a network in order to tie the separately existing projects together and further the exchange of experiences among the different stakeholders. In addition, the creation of a consulting agency to help overcome legal and prac-

tical hurdles was suggested in order to avoid the failure of existing projects and ease the founding of new ones. Moreover, raising the social awareness of *group living* projects was regarded as essential. One way that was identified to achieve this goal was better integration into the existing local communities. Thus some *group living* projects have now started running small coffee shops in their premises.

Using existing resources

Overall, NPOs are quite active in creating diverse forms of living for the various needs of elderly people. However, political measures to support existing or planned projects by these organizations are still very limited. Therefore NPOs are trying to get official recognition and support for their projects lest their energies, activities and resources remain unused. The hope is that in the future many more alternative forms of living will be offered and increasingly used by the growing number of elderly people in Japan.

Group living – living communities for small groups of senior citizens

◀ **Dr. Maren Godzik**, sociologist at the DIJ, organized the workshop in cooperation with Assistant Prof. Dr. Shinko Sasaki, Tokuyama College of Technology.
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Forthcoming events

Workshop:
**International Migration in
Global Governance:
A Japanese Perspective**
(DIJ Tokyo, 1/20/2009).
Organizer: DIJ.

DIJ Forum:
**Stability and Fluidization of the
Social Stratification System in
Contemporary Japan**
(DIJ Tokyo, 1/22/2009).

Recent publications

Hiromi Tanaka-Naji:
*Low fertility, the wish for children,
and social inequalities in con-
temporary Japanese society.*
Working Paper 08/3.
Tokyo: Deutsches Institut für
Japanstudien / Stiftung DGIA,
2008.

**Volker Elis and
Ralph Lützelers (eds):**
*Regionalentwicklung
und regionale Disparitäten*
(= Japanstudien; 20).
Munich: ludicum, 2008.

**Florian Kohlbacher and
Cornelius Herstatt (eds):**
*The Silver Market Phenomenon.
Business Opportunities in an Era of
Demographic Change.*
Heidelberg: Springer, 2008.



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both in German and in English
and is also available for down-
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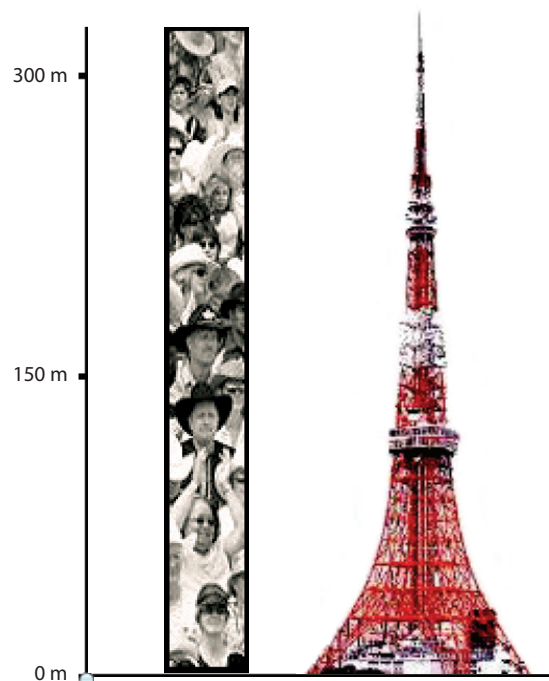
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Data at a glance

The DIJ is coming of age – Figures that speak for themselves

Since the DIJ was established 20 years
ago in December 1988, 245 publica-
tions have been written or edited and a
total of 72 conferences, 47 workshops,
95 DIJ forums, and 246 DIJ study
groups have been organized. So far,
the DIJ has employed a total of 65 staff
members, who, during their contract
periods, have been co-responsible for
the birth of 29 children. 120 doctoral
students have been supplied with schol-
arships. Assuming that staff members
and scholarship fellows are 175 cm tall
on average and standing one upon an-
other, they would form a 323.75-metre
human tower – almost as high as Tokyo
Tower, which stands 332.6 metres tall.



Read for you

Kiyoshi NAKAGAWA (2007):
Gendai no seikatsu mondai
[Contemporary social problems].
Tokyo: Hōsō Daigaku Kyōiku
Shinkōkai, 286 pages, ¥ 2,625
(ISBN 978-4-595-30719-5).

Nakagawa, a social scientist at
Dōshisha University and known for
his studies on the living conditions of
Japan's lower class, wrote a well-struc-
tured textbook for the Open University
of Japan in which he introduces a wide
range of aspects on recent develop-
ments of Japan's society. Social prob-
lems related to poverty, family, ageing
and other fields are presented on the
basis of current research in these areas.
This book provides the reader with a
wide range of background information
on the ongoing discussion about the
widening gap between rich and poor
(*kakusa shakai*).

Catchword

未妊 (*minin*)

Japan is known for its low birth rate,
yet this does not mean that the wish
for children is getting weaker. Today,
many women still want to have chil-
dren, but without fulfilling their wishes.
The journalist Ran Kawai coined the
term *minin* ["not yet pregnant" or "pre-
pregnancy"] to describe the situation of
such women. They neither have given
up their dream of having a baby nor are
they suffering from infertility. For vari-
ous reasons they have delayed the tim-
ing of childbirth or somehow missed
the opportunity. As a result of such a
delay, Kawai points to the increase in
late childbirth and the growing demand
for medical fertility treatment. Both
phenomena reflect the haste of "pre-
pregnant" women to become active in
fulfilling their wish for children.
Ran KAWAI, *Minin: "Umu" to kime-
rarenai*. NHK Shuppan, 2007.

Picture credits:

Page 1 {frog} by courtesy of the Cabinet Office.
Page 2 {cover} Conference booklet cover. Page 3 {cover} Conference booklet cover.
Page 4 {figure} Ralph Lützelers.

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