

Interdisciplinary Japanese Studies On Site

On the road to happiness

Until 1987, it was possible to embark on a trip to “happiness” in Japan. That is, if you used the Hiroo Line in Hokkaidō. This train line featured a small station by the name of *Kōfuku* [happiness], which today is a tourist attraction. One can still buy tickets to that station, a popular souvenir especially for newly-weds in search of marital happiness.

On the first page of this and the following issues, we will introduce the individual projects of the DIJ's new research focus “Happiness in Japan: Continuities and Discontinuities”.



Comparably happy

Over the past decade, a new awareness of social inequalities has emerged in Japan. The so-called “gap society” (*kakusa shakai*) has become a dominant topic in media and academic discourse. The topic’s popularity is closely connected to individual worries about social decline.

Statistics show that Japanese are rather pessimistic: 29 per cent assume that their standard of living will worsen in the future – a steep increase from 10 per cent in 1992. The share of Japanese who feel worried or insecure in their daily life grows, reaching 70 per cent in 2007. Happiness in the sense of subjective wellbeing seems to have become an increasingly rare commodity in contemporary Japan.

Subjective perception of exclusion

This raises the question of to what extent individuals’ subjective perception of social status corresponds to their objective position in the social system. Recent sociological discourse on inequality has begun to pay attention not merely to objectively precarious living conditions. Subjective perception of social status is also taken into account as a factor influencing an individual’s course of action. Who perceives himself

as socially integrated, who as excluded? And what factors are responsible for that perception?

Comparing Germany and Japan

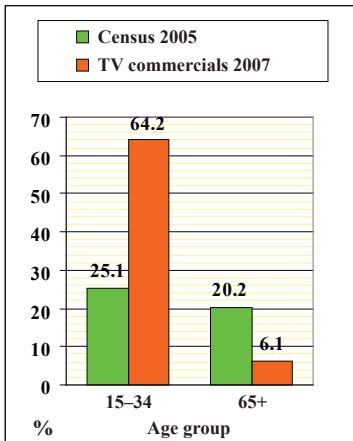
In Germany too, the increasing precarity of living conditions has become a topic of discussion. In order to reach a better understanding of the interrelationships between objective marginalization and subjective perceptions of exclusion, Ernst-Dieter Lantermann and Heinz Bude of the University of Kassel, developed a model that combines the two factors. Additionally, the model includes various individual competences which, it is thought, may influence one’s perception of exclusion – how optimistic one’s outlook on life is, and how well one deals with situations that are outside one’s experience, for example. In co-operation with the DIJ, the theoretical model will be empirically tested in Germany and Japan. This will enable us to analyze the interrelationships of the different factors in each country and to make cross-cultural comparisons.

Imploding populations

On June 2–4, 2009, the DIJ will hold an international conference in Tokyo on “Imploding Populations – Global and Local Challenges of Demographic Change”. Renowned scholars and practitioners along with DIJ research fellows will compare current demographic developments in industrialized countries with a focus on Japan and Germany. The resultant challenges will be analyzed both at national and local levels and countermeasures examined. The conference will also feature the latest results from the DIJ research focus on “Challenges of Demographic Change” that has been running since 2005. For further information please refer to the attached flyer or visit our home page: www.dijtokyo.org.

◀ **Dr. Carola Hommerich**, sociologist, heads the Japanese part of the project “Objective Precarity and Subjective Perception of Social Exclusion in Germany and Japan”. hommerich@dijtokyo.org

Japan's invisible majority



► Invisible seniors

(Note: More than one age group may appear in each commercial).

The project "Advertising to the Silver Market in Japan" received a research grant from the Yoshida Hideo Memorial Foundation.

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Japan's population is greying and companies discover the growth market "age" as a new business opportunity. But what does the implementation into marketing practice look like? A current DIJ project found that the silver market phenomenon has not really reached the Japanese TV advertising landscape yet.

The joint project "Advertising to the Silver Market in Japan" by researchers from the DIJ, Keio University, and Tokyo Woman's Christian University attempts to answer two main research questions. One is based in the marketing research tradition and asks how older consumers are *targeted* in Japanese TV advertising. The other question addresses the cultural/media studies research tradition and asks how older people are *represented* in Japanese TV advertising.

Where have all the seniors gone?

Among other research methods, we conducted a content analysis of TV commercials aired in the years 1997 and 2007. With a systematic sample of 2,972 unduplicated commercials in total, our study is the biggest of its kind so far undertaken; and it is also the first study to compare two systematically sampled periods of time. The overall results of this research confirm the major findings from previous research conducted in various countries, namely: a general under-representation of older people, especially older women; an indoor setting for most commercials featuring older people; and the predominance of situations in which elderly people appear together with other age groups. Between 1997 and 2007 the visibility of older celebrities (*tarento*) increased, and so did the total number of older people shown in commercials. Nevertheless, the under-representation was still prevalent in 2007 and can be seen as an indication of the fact that many companies either have not discovered the growth market "age" or still resist using older models. However, there are also differences between industries and product categories. Thus, we found a stronger presence of older people in commercials advertising food or beverages for instance.

Under-represented but happy?

Data on the perceptions and images of and about older people were collected through a representative survey in the greater Tokyo area (n=720). The results show that the image of older people is, in general, positive. Most participants did not agree with the statements that life becomes worse as one gets older, and that older people are less useful. On the contrary, the majority believed that even as one grows older, it is possible to stay healthy and happy. But older people were perceived as appearing happier in commercials than they are in reality. Most did not think that there were too few older people appearing in commercials. Thus, it seems that the objectively detected under-representation is not consistent with what is subjectively perceived. However, many respondents still noticed and confirmed that the number of older people has increased in recent years.

Will Japan's advertising have to grey further?

Considering the positive image found in our data of older people, advertising agencies and companies would be well advised to make greater use of older models in their promotional activities. However, advertising experts indicated in interviews that it is imperative to avoid both age stereotyping and addressing directly the issue of age itself. Furthermore, it is interesting to see that, even though our results confirm the findings of recent research, at the same time they refute certain conclusions by other researchers from different countries. Thus, under-representation and the particular depictions of older people have also been common in Japan for a long time, but do not seem to have led to a negative image of age and ageing.

Rethinking international migration to Japan

During the DIJ workshop on “International Migration in Global Governance” (January 20, 2009), possible avenues for migration policy reform in Japan were discussed. Change is deemed necessary in light of Japan’s shrinking workforce.

The presenters stressed that the right to social participation is a necessary precondition for migrant workers to contribute to the economic development of the destination country. Takashi Kibe (International Christian University) therefore argued that migration policy reform needs to go hand in hand with remodelling the

structure of Japan’s welfare state. Successful migration policy furthermore needs to adhere to international norms of migration control and integration practice alike. Midori Okabe (Sophia University) and Stephen Nagy (Waseda University) added. Yet, each state also needs to shape migration policy in a way that makes it compatible with its unique cultural roots. This is reflected, for example, in how different states understand the concept of “citizenship”, as Apichai Shipper (University of Southern California) pointed out.

◀ **Dr. Gabriele Vogt**, political scientist, co-ordinated the workshop. She heads the DIJ project on “Migration and Integration in Japan”. vogt@diptokyo.org

Wanted: effective strategies against rural decline

The rural periphery has to cope with depopulation, ageing, and economic structural change, be it Johanngeorgenstadt in Saxony or Ani in Northern Tōhoku.

At the international workshop “Rural Areas without Hope? Structural Change and Policy Options in Japan and Germany”, which was supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and held on December 4 and 5, 2008 at the DIJ in Tokyo, the participants quickly realized that there are more similarities than dissimilarities between Japan and Germany with regard to the situation in rural areas. In both coun-

tries, the consequences of demographic change and neo-liberal reform policies that contribute to the widening gap between growing and shrinking regions are visible. To be sure, there are some examples of villages that succeeded against the trend in strengthening local communities through civil society commitment. However, on all administrative levels, conventional top-down planning instruments are still central. The workshop participants agreed that rural areas should not be left to their own devices, but rather receive continued support wherever possible.

◀ **Dr. Volker Elis**, economic geographer, organized the workshop together with Dr. Ralph Lützel. He is head of the DIJ Business and Economics section. elis@diptokyo.org



► Nature quickly reclaims areas: an abandoned hamlet in Kozagawa (Wakayama prefecture).

Corporate social responsibility

In recent years corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an important element of business strategy. Participants of the workshop “CSR in Japan, Europe and the US”, which was held in collaboration with TÜV Rheinland Japan at the DIJ on November 12, 2008, discussed the various aspects and challenges of CSR in different countries.

For international companies, supplier management is a particularly essential issue. It is only through sufficient transparency in the supply chain that companies can escape the reproach of unethical or non-sustainable economic activity. Another topic of the discus-

sion was the challenges arising from demographic change. In this context, the participants emphasized two important implications: On the one hand, the challenge of effective and fair management of an ageing workforce; on the other hand, the development and adaptation of products in accordance with the desires and needs of ageing consumers.

◀ **Dr. Florian Kohlbacher**, management researcher, co-organized the workshop and heads the DIJ project “Business Opportunities and Corporate Social Responsibility in Times of Demographic Change”. kohlbacher@diptokyo.org

Forthcoming events

Workshop:

Communication in Health Care Contexts (DIJ Tokyo, IV/25/2009). Organizer: DIJ / National Institute for Japanese Language.

International Symposium: Imploding Populations – Global and Local Challenges of Demographic Change (Center for the Advancement of Working Women, Tokyo; VI/2–4/2009). Organizer: DIJ.

Recent publications

Florian Coulmas:

The Quest for Happiness in Japan. Working Paper 09/1. Tokyo: Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien / Stiftung DGIA, 2009.

Carola Hommerich:

„Freeter“ und „Generation Praktikum“ – Arbeitswerte im Wandel? Ein deutsch-japanischer Vergleich [“Freeter” and “generation internship” – are work values changing? A German-Japanese comparison] (= DIJ Monographs; 45). Munich: iudicum, 2009.

Florian Kohlbacher, Wolfgang H. Güttel and Beate Halmeyer (eds): The Ageing Workforce and HRM – Challenges, Chances, Perspectives [Special issue]. *International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management* 9(2–3), 2009.

Michael Prieler, Florian Kohlbacher, Shigeru Hagiwara and Akie Arima: How Older People are Represented in Japanese TV Commercials: A Content Analysis, *Keio Communication Review* 31, 2009, pp. 5–21.

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How many mistakes can you find in this picture?

Fortunately none, thanks to the planned reform of the so-called Jōyō-Kanji list. The new rules will officially allow writing the kanji for *don* (丼, “bowl”) without phonetic reading aids (*furigana*), as on this banner advertising a Japanese fast food chain. The list of 1,945 characters is to be expanded by another 191 items. Particularly astonishing is the high number of kanji like 誰 (*dare*, “who”) and 俺 (*ore*, “I; me”), which, despite their popularity, for some reason had been kept off the list until now. Another modification concerns the kanji for *watakushi* (私, “I; myself; self”), whose more common reading *watashi* will henceforth be acknowledged, too.



Read for you

Yoshiei ITŌ and Yoshihiro FUJITSUKA (eds) (2008): *Zusetsu 21-seiki Nihon no chiiki mondai* [Regional problems of Japan in the 21st century (with illustrations)]. Tokyo: Kokon Shoin, 130 pages, 2,625 yen (ISBN 978-4-7722-4124-3).

Many of the urgent problems Japanese society has to cope with cannot be understood properly without regard to their regional or local distribution patterns. This is the main impression one is left with after reading this well-illustrated and highly inspiring volume, which is structured into four parts: globalization, socio-economic disparities, environmental issues, and regional revitalization. The parts themselves contain a total of 56 two-page articles, each dealing with relevant topics in a concise yet competent manner. This book should find its readers not only among geographers but all people interested in or related to the social sciences.

Catchword

後期高齢者 (*kōki kōreisha*)

Kōki kōreisha literally means “late-term elderly person”. The expression is used to designate the growing number of people aged 75 and older, who at present already make up no less than ten per cent of the Japanese population. The expression has met with strong public disapproval, particularly since the introduction of the “medical system for late-term elderly” (*kōki kōreisha iryō seido*) in 2008, which entailed large cuts in public spending for medical expenses of Japan’s “old old” population. Some critics have even called the new law, passed by the Koizumi government back in 2006, a “citizen disposal law” (*haimin-hō*). The Fukuda government’s attempt at damage control was to suggest that the new law be renamed “health system of longevity” (*chōju iryō seido*).

Picture credits:

Page 1 {train ticket} Anna K. Skarpelis.
Page 2 {statistic} Florian Kohlbacher and Michael Prieler.
Page 3 {abandoned hamlet} Volker Elis.
Page 4 {banner} Peter Backhaus.

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