

Interdisciplinary Japanese Studies On Site

308, not 310

“Why are you still so tense?” For the fifth time on this election night, Prime Minister-elect Yukio Hatoyama heard this question through his in-ear monitor. TV anchormen seemed surprised that his face did not show any joy about the historic victory of his Democratic Party against the eternally-ruling Liberal Democrats. But perhaps Hatoyama’s countenance just reflected amazement. After all, the victory of his party was of such a margin that the DPJ had to leave two seats unfilled due to a lack of candidates. As a result, the party now occupies 308, not 310 seats, in the Lower House. *A.K.*



Happiness in Parliament

When Jesus, Muhammad and Buddha spoke to Ryūhō Ōkawa in the 1980s, he felt not only like “El Cantare”, the Bringer of Happiness, but also founded *kōfuku no kagaku* (“The Science of Happiness”).

This religious organization has grown fast and today claims to have eleven million members. Based on Buddhist ideas, its teaching also contains elements of other world religions. Its primary goal, however, is to deliver one thing: Happiness. Shortly after its foundation in 1986, the “Science of Happiness” became politically active, supporting some conservative politicians. About the same time, the Aum Shinrikyō cult too entered politics and campaigned for seats in the Lower House in 1990. Their failure in that election is believed to have been one reason for the deranged idea in 1995 to attack subway stations in the government district of Nagatachō with Sarin gas.

Protect Japan

This act of terror, which killed twelve people and injured over a thousand, prompted Ōkawa to retreat from the political world. In May this year, however, he returned. When Kim Jong-il

sent a missile over Japanese territory, Ōkawa founded the “Happiness Realization Party” (*kōfuku jitsugentō*), his proclaimed goal being to protect Japan from aggressions like these.

Unhappy campaigners

Given the financial and human resources of his religious organization, Ōkawa was able to field candidates in almost all electoral districts of the country for the 2009 Lower House election. In response to critics who say that the constitution demands a strict separation of state and religion, the party line was: “What would the gods and Buddha (*shinbutsu*) do if they were in our position?” It remains an open question. When the election results were published, disenchantment spread among the “realizers of happiness”. Despite collecting a million votes, not a single seat was won. Even top candidate Ōkawa who ran on the party list in Kinki failed. However, he is not giving up and has already announced the party’s participation in the Upper House election next summer, preparations for which are already underway. Maybe the new party will then manage to bring some happiness to Parliament.

Religion and the politics of happiness

The project “Religious Organizations and the Politics of Happiness in Japan” is part of the new DIJ research focus on “Happiness in Japan: Continuities and Discontinuities”.

The day after a closed international workshop on “Religion and Politics”, the DIJ will hold a conference on this topic on November 19, 2009, in conjunction with the East Asian Studies Seminar of the University of Zurich. Mostly Japanese experts will present their research on the inside of religious organizations and their political activities.

Further information on the event is available on the DIJ website.

◀ **PD Dr. Axel Klein**, political scientist, is in charge of the DIJ project “Religious Organizations and the Politics of Happiness”. klein@dijtokyo.org

The Japanese way of life – change and continuity

The public discourse on ageing and low fertility (*shōshi kōreika*) tends to emphasize aspects such as the changing population structure and its impact on the economic and social welfare system. Another important perspective on demographic change opens up by examining individual lives and living.

Life course research says that Japan experienced a standardization of male and female life courses during the post-war years and the period of high economic growth. These modern life courses reflected an idealized image of family and working life in Japanese society and a notion of “happiness”. Men were working in the life-long employment system, securing the economic base for the family. Women on the other hand were responsible for the household and the upbringing of – on average – two to three children. This socially constructed family model was widely accepted in Japanese “middle-class” society.

Changing life courses in Japan

Since the 1980s, however, the proportion of families that conform to this model has been decreasing. Life course research suggests that part of the change is occurring in the timing of significant events in people’s lives. Younger generations spend more years in school and education: More than half of all high school graduates advance to an institution of tertiary education – a much higher proportion than in previous decades (e.g. 24.2% in 1970, *Gakkō kihon chōsa*, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). Consequently, they finish education and start paid employment later.

New behavioural patterns in adolescence and early adulthood

Younger generations also tend to leave their parental home and/or marry much later than in the past. This is partly because of the prolonged period of education. Another important factor, however, is changing marital behaviour. Before the Second World War, a young woman would usually leave her parental home to live with

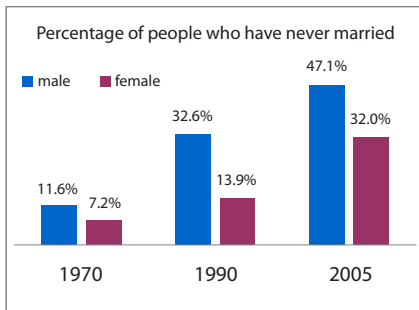
her husband and parents-in-law. This changed in the process of economic development after the war, particularly through the migration of young people from rural areas to urban centres. Many young, unmarried women moved to the cities in search of employment, while married women followed their husbands. From this generation onward, Japanese started living first alone or with their spouse, later with their children.

Why and how do these changes occur?

The delay of certain life events and prolonged early adulthood are distinct signs of changes in the lives of the Japanese. However, it is not clear why and how these changes occur. Theories of individualization and value change are often quoted as plausible reasons. At the same time, many surveys suggest that most Japanese still hold on to conventional ideals and notions of a happy life. This is particularly striking with regard to social norms concerning marriage and the family. Despite the declining birth rate and a decrease in marriage, most people – even working women – appear to want to marry and have children. Even today, many women between 20 and 40 years of age aspire to become housewives. This indicates a gap between desire and practice.

A new DIJ research project

A new research project at the DIJ called “Changing Life Courses in Japan” attempts to tackle this puzzle of change and continuity. The research project places particular focus on unmarried women in their 30s and 40s working in Tokyo, and examines their wishes and decisions regarding marriage and work. The project is part of a comparative research on single working women in East Asian urban spaces such as Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo.



► Later and fewer marriages: a significant sign of changing life courses in Japan (age group: 30 to 34).

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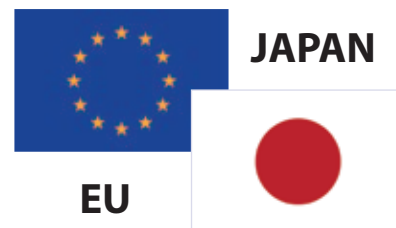
Dr. Hiromi Tanaka-Naji,
sociologist and political scientist,
heads the DIJ project “Changing
Life Courses in Contemporary
Japanese Society”.
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Learning from the EU

A comparison of regional policy in Japan and the European Union was the central topic of a seminar hosted on July 25, 2009 in Sendai by the Delegation of the European Commission to Japan.

In both the EU and Japan the problem of how to deal with widening regional disparities and unbalanced economic development is receiving growing attention. The keynote speeches delivered by Volker Elis (DIJ) and Haruyoshi Yamada (Professor Emeritus, Miyagi University) focused on issues of how municipalities – particularly

in rural areas – are responding to the challenges arising from new regional constellations and the impact of demographic change. In the subsequent panel discussion the participants came to the conclusion that the importance of the activities of NPOs in regional planning is growing and that a stronger orientation towards participatory approaches, as recently introduced in the EU, could offer new prospects for Japan's regional policy.



◀ **Dr. Volker Elis**, economic geographer, is head of the DIJ Business and Economics Section. elis@dijtokyo.org

Transpacific discussion on women and politics

As part of the 5th Japan-America Women Political Scientists Symposium (JAWS), an international workshop on women and politics was held at the DIJ on July 2 this year.

The initiative JAWS started in 2000 in Washington, D.C. as a forum for women political scientists from Japan and the United States. Its fifth meeting was held in Tokyo and Toyama in cooperation with the DIJ, Ochanomizu University, and Shakitto Toyama, a local women's group. Financial support came from the Nomura Foundation and Banyu Pharmaceutical. In addition to presentations and animated discussions, the participants visited the national parliament, met female legislators and observed the Tokyo parliamentary election campaigns, as well

as activities of local women's groups. Papers presented at the symposium and workshops covered issues such as women's political participation, women candidates in elections, strategies of women legislators in parliament, and the development of women's policy in both countries. As was to be expected, many similarities as well as differences between gendered practices and processes of politics in Japan and the US were revealed. As a result, all participants left Tokyo with heightened confidence in their ability to conduct better comparative research in the future.

◀ **Dr. Hiromi Tanaka-Naji**, joined JAWS in 2003 and was a member of the Organizing Committee of the 5th meeting. tanaka@dijtokyo.org

JAWS was founded in 2000 as a network of Japanese and American women political scientists.

How are we today?

Care facilities for elderly people are a special kind of environment which produces a very special kind of communication. On October 1–2, 2009, a DIJ conference looked into this matter from a cross-cultural perspective.

Funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the conference brought together a group of international specialists in the fields of linguistics, speech pathology, nursing and gerontology. Case studies

from Japan, New Zealand, the US, Denmark and the Netherlands were presented on resident-staff interaction and communication programmes for care personnel. Despite some obvious cultural differences, the participants agreed that many of the specific phenomena of care communication such as patronizing and highly routinized types of speech, were observed in all of the presented localities.

◀ **Dr. Peter Backhaus**, linguist, works on communication in Japanese institutional elderly care. backhaus@dijtokyo.org

Forthcoming events

Workshop:
The Pursuit of Happiness and Gender Politics
(DIJ Tokyo, XI/4–5/2009).
Organizer: DIJ.

Conference:
Religious Organizations and the Politics of Happiness
(DIJ Tokyo, XI/19/2009). Organizer: East Asian Studies Seminar, University of Zurich & DIJ.

Recent publications

Florian Coulmas:
The Illusion of Happiness. Japan and the West (in German).
Zurich, Darmstadt: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung / Primus Verlag, 2009.

Announcement

Following the publication of issue number 21 of *Japanstudien* on "Ageing in Japan", which is about to be released in its usual form, the journal of the German Institute for Japanese Studies is heading for a face-lift. As of 2010, the journal will change its name, publisher, and publication frequency. The next volume, entitled "Mind the Gap: Stratification and Social Inequalities in Japan", to be published in October 2010, will be a double issue; after that the journal will appear in two issues, spring and autumn. *Contemporary Japan* will be published by Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin and New York. We thank ludicium, the previous publisher of *Japanstudien*, for their gracious cooperation, which we will continue in other fields of publishing.

The DIJ Newsletter is published both in German and in English and is also available for download as a full-text version from our website.

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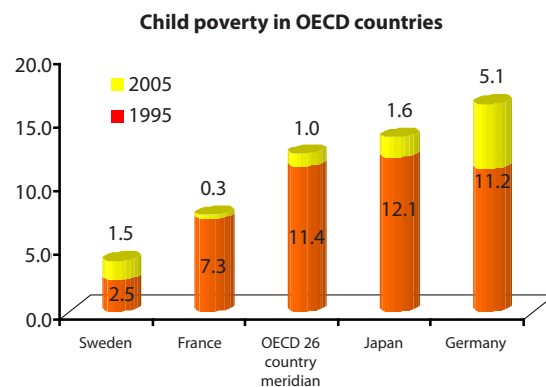
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Child poverty in Japan: No end in sight

According to OECD data, child poverty in Japan continues to rise.

In 2005, 13.7 per cent, or about one in seven, of all Japanese children lived below the poverty line. Just-released data show that the number further rose to 14.2 per cent in 2006. In comparison, whereas in 1995 the poverty rate in Japan was slightly higher than in Germany, ten years later, Germany's poverty rate had risen sharply to 16.3 per cent. In Japan, particularly, children of working single parents – which means mostly single mothers – are at risk. *B.H.*



Source: OECD (2008).

Read for you

HEBIZŌ and Nagiko UMINO (2009): *Nihonjin no shiranai nihongo [Japanese unknown to the Japanese]*.
Tokyo: Media Factory, 144 pages, 880 yen (ISBN 987-4-8401-2673-1).

In the style of an entertaining Manga, this book presents the experiences of a teacher of Japanese as a foreign language and her daily efforts to cope with her students' perplexing and at times extraordinarily tricky questions. Do the pronunciations of *o* and *wo* differ? And if so, how? Where does the term *onara* (fart) come from? What do the kanji of pigeon, mosquito, crow and cat have in common? What's the counter for toilet seats? Would you have known?*

The book, which has sold more than 200,000 copies to date, proves that these questions are of interest not only to students of Japanese but also to a large number of native speakers. *P.B.*

Answers: *No; Heian women's language; all four contain an onomatopoeic element; *sue*.

Catchword

小沢チルドレン (*Ozawa chirudoren*)

Ichirō Ozawa is widely seen as one of the most effective election strategists in Japan. His position within the Democratic Party is partly due to his ability to choose the right candidates and bring their campaigns to a successful conclusion. The Lower House election of August 30 bolstered his reputation. Many of his recruits won seats and were immediately referred to by the Japanese media as "Ozawa's children" (*Ozawa chirudoren*). This term alludes to "Koizumi's children" – inexperienced lawmakers who managed to get elected in 2005 largely thanks to the PM's popularity. After the LDP's landslide defeat this year, however, few of them remain. One reason for this are "Ozawa's children", the 26 women of which have even received their own labeling: They are "Ozawa's girls" (*Ozawa gāruzu*). *A.K.*

Picture credits:

Page 1 {Hatoyama} Axel Klein. Page 2 {statistic} Hiromi Tanaka-Naji. Page 3 {EU/Japan} Volker Elis. Page 4 {statistic} Barbara Holthus.

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