DIJ Newsletter

Interdisciplinary Japanese Studies On Site

JR blues

JR train stations in Tokyo are the most recent in the country to have blue lights installed on platforms. The blue illumination, which is switched on at night, is supposed to have a soothing effect and is intended to discourage people from jumping in front of oncoming trains. JR is taking this initiative for a reason: while Japan may boast the world's highest longevity, its suicide numbers are also at a record high with 32,829 cases in fiscal 2009. Roughly half are linked to health problems such as depression, followed by financial difficulties, family and work related problems. *K.I.-W.*

Happily ever after?

The romantic love ideal has firmly taken hold in Japan. The analysis of media discourses on marriage sheds light on how this ideal is lived out, discussed and, more than often, not achieved.

It is said that Japanese marrying less and later in life has been a major factor contributing to Japan's declining fertility rate since the beginning of the 1970s. While changes in Japanese marital behaviour are in the majority initiated by women, female-oriented media such as women's magazines remain understudied. Yet they function both as mirror and motor of society, are an agent of socialization, and thus can be understood as partially contributing to the changes we see in marriage patterns.

Marriage and social change

The current DIJ research project "Marital Happiness: Discourses on Marriage in Japanese Women's Magazines" examines four well-known women's magazines (*An An*, *More*, *Croissant*, and *Fujin Kōron*), targeting different age groups, over three decades since 1970. Through a qualitative and quantitative content analysis, the project analyses the shifting discourses on motivations for marriage, and how constructions of marital happiness and discord have changed over time.

Happiness and discord

Frequent motivations for marriage include the desire for a family and children, love and security. But peer and parental pressures as well as age-related concerns also remain viable considerations for marriage. Sources of marital happiness include equality between the partners, sexuality, and the wife's employment. Among the sources of marital discord are the usual suspects, including extramarital affairs, domestic violence and financial problems. Their frequency of occurrence greatly depends on the age of the target group of a magazine and when an article was published.

Overall the data suggest a greater heterogeneity of marital experiences than so far had been assumed by the academic literature of the time. This is particularly the case for the generation of women born in the 1930s and 1940s: The fact that women's magazines in this regard are "ahead of their time" can be seen as one factor contributing to the large-scale transformations of family and family lives in Japan during the last few decades.

▲ **Dr. Barbara Holthus**, sociologist, heads the research project "Marital Happiness: Discourses on Marriage in Japanese Women's Magazines". **holthus@dijtokyo.org**

Series of workshops on the ageing society (SWAS)

At the initiative of the ISMB-Politecnico di Torino and Hokkaido University, and in cooperation with Banca d'Italia and the University of Milano-Bicocca, the DIJ co-organized and hosted a series of workshops on the ageing society. Between February and July 2010, six SWAS workshops took place. The overarching question was how market forces, policy interventions and technological innovation can best be coordinated to build a sustainable aged society. In closed sessions of some 20 participants, the invited Japanese and international experts addressed a range of issues concerning population ageing: public finances and pension funds, innovation and technology, marketing to ageing customers, healthcare, policy measures, and ethical questions.

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Or visit the homepage at: www.csai.disco.unimib.it/CSAI/SWAS/

Fear of social decline – results of a DIJ survey

Self-proclaimed strata

upper: 0.9 / 3.6
upper middle: 26.4 / 40.5
lower middle: 47.5 / 38.0
lower: 17.9 / 12.0
lower of lower: 4.7 / 2.9

in per cent

■ Today ■ 10 years ago

Nearly 60 per cent of the Japanese population are afraid of the future.

Dr. Carola Hommerich, sociologist, heads the Japanese part of the project "'Comparatively Happy' – Objective precarity and perception of social exclusion in Germany and Japan". hommerich@dijtokyo.org

For more than three decades, social inequality and poverty hardly registered as matters of public concern. But with the increasing precariousness of living conditions they have now become prominent topics in the public discourse.

Japan, a society which hitherto perceived itself as a homogeneous middle-class society, now feels itself split into seemingly distinct top and bottom strata. All of a sudden, the middle stratum of society seems to have disappeared. Close examination, however, reveals that it has only taken a back seat behind a general fear of status loss and social decline.

Media coverage of the working poor and of net cafe refugees (*netto kafe nanmin*) show that such a decline can happen fast and often ends tragically. Results of a representative population survey carried out by the DIJ in September 2009 show that the awareness of increasing financial and social distress is high: 89 per cent of respondents felt that the social climate in Japan had worsened.

The risk of status loss, however, is not only seen as something concerning others. The majority of the population feels personally threatened: 72 per cent fear that they will have to lower their financial expectations in the future, while 65 per cent of employees expect to experience a setback in their career in the near future. What is more, 85 per cent are afraid that they will be forced to drastically reduce their expenditure in old age in order to get by.

*High proportion of self-proclaimed poor*

Taking a look at people's financial situation, it seems that such fears are not unfounded: 52 per cent state that they have no savings whatsoever to get them through hard times. For this group, sudden unforeseen expenses can quickly lead to financial distress. More than half of the respondents feel that it is a constant struggle to make ends meet, and a total of 42 per cent describe themselves as poor.

Such a high proportion of self-proclaimed poor does not tally with the objective rate of relative poverty (15.7 per cent) as given by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2009. It does, however, deserve attention, as it bears witness to experiences of financial setbacks and insecurities. Even though 74 per cent of respondents continue to identify themselves as "middle class", as many as 37 per cent report that they have experienced social decline over the past ten years.

Is help at hand? Expectations of welfare services provided by the state are low. Only 16 per cent are confident that they would receive assistance from governmental institutions in times of distress. Confidence in government support in old age is even lower (7 per cent). Overall, nearly 60 per cent of the population are afraid of the future. A stronger safety net of welfare services could help to alleviate this fear.

Comparison with others is decisive

Signs of anxiety and insecurity can be detected throughout the whole of society. Not only among precarious groups, but also among those who are materially well off and socially well integrated, people are afraid of financial setbacks and loss of social status. The DIJ survey data show that objective precariousness of living conditions is not the best predictor for a persons' fear of social decline. What is more influential is the self-proclaimed affiliation to a social class: The lower one's perceived position in the social hierarchy, the greater the fear of status loss. This fear is highest in the lowest stratum: Those who categorize themselves as "lower of lower" are afraid of being excluded from the social network altogether. However, the "middle" strata also disclose above-average levels of fear of social decline. Most of all, it is the "lower middle" that is afraid of forfeiting its middle-class status.
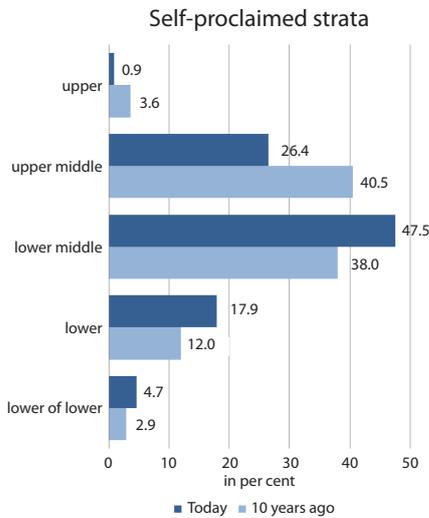
Ten years of adult guardianship in Japan

Ten years ago the new adult guardianship law replaced the former guardianship law which was put into force in 1898. To mark the occasion, the World Congress on Adult Guardianship Law 2010 will take place in Yokohama on October 2–4.

According to official estimates, the number of people suffering from dementia, mental handicaps or psychological disorders has reached approximately 5 million in Japan. Although there is a considerable need for legal protection for people incapable of managing their own affairs partly or fully, so far the utilization of adult guardianship has not met expectations. There are two major reasons which may have discouraged people from using it. One was the insufficient public informa-

tion about the new guardianship law after its introduction, the other the application procedure which is not only complicated but also expensive.

Japan is expecting an explosive increase in the number of people aged 65 or older in the following decades. Currently standing at 23.1 per cent, this ratio will reach 33.7 per cent in 2035 and 40.5 per cent in 2055. The problem that accompanies the population ageing will be the growing number of people with dementia.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice has started to prepare for reform of the present adult guardianship law. A user-friendly guardianship system is required, one that everybody concerned can use without hesitation.

◄ **Dr. Junko Ando** heads the DIJ project "Adult Guardianship". **ando@dijtokyo.org**

Enclave urbanism advancing in Japan

It is frequently stated that social disparities are on the rise in Japan. While empirical evidence does not always support this contention, there are clear signs that socio-spatial disparities in Japanese cities are in fact increasing. One important trend is that many affluent members of society are withdrawing into insulated enclaves.

Towa-House Corporation has developed a residential settlement called "British Town Fussa", situated in the Western suburbs of Tokyo and consisting of 265 owner-occupied houses, all uniformly designed in a mock Tudor style and accessible by only one road, which is tightly monitored by surveillance cameras. In Gifu City, there are plans to build a "Gate Town" intended to conform to the needs of an elderly clientele. And in the city centres of Tokyo and Osaka, hundreds of pricey condominium towers have already popped up, often termed "vertical gated communities". These are just a few examples which show that recent urban development in Japan is enclave-centric.

Japan is a latecomer to enclave urbanism, a trend that is already widespread in English-speaking countries and which has made inroads in Latin Amer-

ica, Eastern Europe and, more recently, China. Thus, there already exists a large body of tentative explanations for this trend. First, psychological reasons are given, stressing the need for the middle classes to provide a haven for their private life at a time when pressures and anxieties at the work place are rising. Second, the changing role of the government is highlighted. It is said that city politics today cares most about the economic performance of a municipality. This implies incentives to attract wealthy new citizens by providing – *inter alia* – a suitable neighbourhood environment.

Plausible as these hypotheses seem at first glance, it has to be asked whether they also apply to Japan. To start with, the physical layout and the social composition of the new residential enclaves in Japan should be compared with similar developments elsewhere. Furthermore, the role and attitudes of local actors have to be disclosed. To bring the case of Japan into the international debate could improve our general understanding of why so many urban middle-class residents in industrialized countries retreat into enclave-like neighbourhoods.

► Mark Springs, a secluded American-style suburban settlement in Yokohama, completed in 2003.

◄ **Priv.-Doz. Dr. Ralph Lützeler**, human geographer, is head of the DIJ Social Science Section. From September 2010 he will analyse forms of enclave urbanism in Japan as a guest researcher at the Centre of Interdisciplinary Regional Studies (ZEFIR) at Ruhr University Bochum. **luetzeler@dijtokyo.org**

Fairtrade and ethical consumption

Social and ecological responsibility in the manufacturing and consumption of products has become an issue of increasing significance for the economy and for society. An international, comparative study by Liverpool Business School carried out in collaboration with the DIJ investigates the influence of environmental and social sustainability of products on purchase decisions. Consumers are surveyed about their attitudes toward ethics, the environment and corporate social responsibility, as well as about their actual consumption behaviour. Japan's urgent need to catch up in the area of Fairtrade products can be gleaned from the figure. *F.K.*

Fairtrade consumption per capita 2008/2009
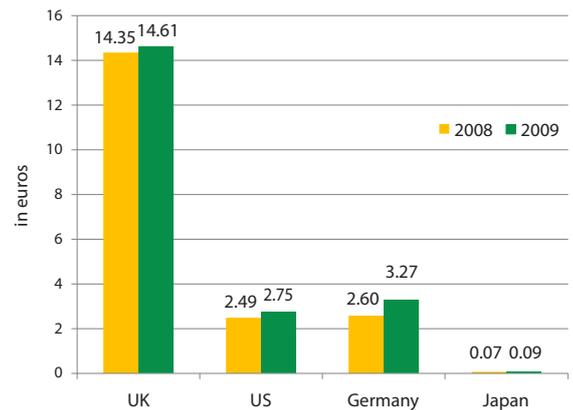
Source: Own calculations based on Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), *Annual Report 2010*.

Read for you

Shōin KAJII (2008): *Genkai shūraku – Marginal Village*. **Tokyo: Foil 176 pages, 1,400 yen (ISBN978-4-902943-29-0).**

The book cover carries the following thought-provoking question: "Japan, are you okay with this? In the next ten years, 423 hamlets are going to disappear." This volume contains thirteen portraits of senior citizens who live in rural areas across Japan. The book title "*Genkai shūraku*" refers to hamlets in which more than 50 per cent of the population is over 65 years old. Numerous photographs provide impressions of life in depopulated areas. The photographer and author of this book works as a full-time Buddhist priest. He shows not only idyllic landscapes but also people's routine working lives. These visual impressions are presented with interviews that make the specific challenges and perspectives of life in rural areas evident to the reader. *S.K.*

Catchword

イクメン (*ikumen*)

"Good-looking men are often called *ikemen* (*ikete iru men*), but in my opinion, really cool men are those who help raise children – in other words, *ikumen* (*ikuji suru men*). I would like to see *ikumen* become a buzz word". First used by women's magazines, the slang word *ikumen* did indeed greatly gain in popularity when the Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare, Akira Nagatsuma, used it in a parliamentary speech. By law, both parents are entitled to take parental leave. But while one third of Japanese fathers would like to apply for paternity leave, in 2008 only 1.23 per cent actually made use of the system. Following legal reforms that became effective in July 2010, the one-year parental leave period can now be extended by two months if both parents apply. However, it remains to be seen whether this will lead to an increase in "full-time *ikumen*". *K.I.-W.*