

Interdisciplinary Japanese Studies On Site

Expert talk

The joint project “Parental Well-being: A German–Japanese Comparison” (DIJ, Benesse Corporation and Humboldt University) organized an expert talk on family developments in Germany and Japan. The event was held on January 30, 2013, on the premises of the DIJ in Tokyo and was chaired by the director of the DIJ, Florian Coulmas. Discussants were Nobuko Nagase (Ochanomizu University; left) and Hans Bertram (Humboldt University Berlin; right). An abridged version of the talk will be published in mid-2014 as part of an edited volume on the project. *B.H.*



Historical discourse on happiness in modern Japan

Conceptions of happiness and their negotiation in the public sphere are by no means a recent phenomenon – they emerged from the late Meiji period onwards. In order to understand the significance, continuities and discontinuities of the contemporary discourse on happiness, a new DIJ project examines the history of happiness as a key concept in modern Japanese history.

In addition to conceptions of happiness as expressions of “quality of life” or “well-being”, which focus on subjective and scientifically measurable factors, a more abstract conception of happiness is defined as “desirable living conditions”. Historically, this latter conception has been connected closely with the work of August Comte and a positivistic belief in science and progress. In this sense, happiness is not only regarded as something desirable but also as something that can be realized on a larger scale level in “modern” societies – as long as they are committed to the pursuit of science and progress. This politicized conception of happiness during the Meiji period can be easily linked to Japan’s policy of modernization and its ideological foundations of evolutionary theory and Social Darwinism.

Rich country or happy people?

As with most other political ideas in modern Japan, Western models of progress and modernity have also domi-

nated Japanese discourses on happiness. Happiness was to be measured in terms of spiritual and, above all, material prosperity. Since the Meiji period, numerous works by European authors on the pursuit and theories of happiness have been published in Japanese translation. In addition, happiness was ideologized and used, for example, to justify Japan’s ambitions to become a “first-class nation”. Happiness took an important role in public discourse that contrasted the well-known idea of the “prosperity of the country” (*kokufu*) to that of “the people’s happiness” (*kokumin no kōfuku*). Of what use and to whom is a rich country if its people are not happy? Already around this time, the concept of happiness also emerged in the context of demands for better work, living and housing conditions.

Pluralizing the canon of political concepts

Focussing on happiness in its diverse conceptions allows national and imperial discourse in modern Japan – whose study has hitherto often centred on more familiar concepts such as race, nation and modernity – to be pluralized and defined more precisely. In addition to political aspects, the study of the socio-political history of happiness in modern Japan will also include religion and family.

“DIJ 25” anniversary scholarships

Given that the life expectancy at birth in Japan is edging up to 90 years and that, according to some psychologists, the start of adulthood has been pushed upwards to 26, reaching the age of 25 is hardly a remarkable occasion. However, we nonetheless gladly acknowledge the fact that this institute was established a quarter century ago. It was expected to contribute to a better understanding of what was then the first successful capitalist economy outside the Western world.

This continues to be the DIJ’s most important task, as despite the existence of more comfortable long-distance travel and computer-mediated communication, the experiential and intellectual distance between Japan and other industrialized countries is still considerable. It is to help reduce this distance that we decided to award two “DIJ 25” anniversary scholarships. Two students will be given the opportunity to spend two months at the institute to get a first taste of Japan and pursue a project of their own choosing. *F.C.*

◀ **Dr. Torsten Weber**, historian, heads the research project “Socio-political discourse on happiness in Imperial Japan: Towards a historical contextualization of the Japanese concept of happiness”. weber@dijtokyo.org



► Street sign pointing to the only convenience store in Kamiyama.

In March 2013, four DIJ grant students exchanged their DIJ workspaces in central Tokyo for the town of Kamiyama in Tokushima Prefecture. For two weeks, they had the opportunity to catch a glimpse of how demographic change, namely an ageing and declining population, affects small communities in rural Japan. In Kamiyama, however, since 2004, the local non-profit organization Green Valley has aimed to tackle these issues and has sought to revive the town.

During the last two decades Kamiyama has experienced a considerable population decline. 21,000 people used to reside in the town in 1995; by 2013, this figure had dropped to 6,270. However, in 2012, for the first time, the number of people moving to Kamiyama exceeded the number of people moving away from the community. Naturally, Green Valley considers this a great success. Nonetheless, with the number of inhabitants who die per annum greatly exceeding the number of newborns in the village, the overall population continues to decline. The local middle school is attended by only 53 pupils. The town of Kamiyama is a conglomerate of five previously independent communities. For that reason, the community lacks a town centre and is spread out over a large area.

Traditional wooden houses and agricultural land dominate Kamiyama's scenery. The town is marked by closed-down shops, mostly absent public street lighting and non-existent public transportation.

Green Valley project initiatives

Pursuing its vision of a “global Kamiyama”, Green Valley tries to prevent a further decline in the community. On their website, they express their profound hope for the town to turn into an exciting, creative and “global” place by using the strength and knowledge of locals and visitors alike. In order to achieve its goal to revive the town, Green Valley has initiated different projects. For instance, the NPO launched the “Kamiyama Artist in Residence” programme, the road-cleaning project “Adopt-a-Highway Kamiyama” and the adult education

group “Kamiyama Juku”. Green Valley's major project, however, aims to encourage companies to build branch offices in Kamiyama. This project is directed in particular at large corporations that can temporarily transfer qualified staff to work in Kamiyama's so-called “Satellite Offices”. One of these has been completed already.

This particular project represents an innovative approach towards the revitalization of the community. At the same time, it constitutes an example of traditional Japanese regional and rural development policy, as it shows the remarkably close ties between the Liberal Democratic Party and the construction industry. The director of Green Valley is also the owner and managing director of the local construction firm. This company is responsible for all Green Valley related construction measures and is also Kamiyama's largest employer. Though this situation raises some questions about governance and democracy, it does have its obvious benefits for the town. One of the advantages for the community is the fact that it creates jobs and secures employment in one of Japan's least-favoured regions.

On the downside, however, the “Satellite Offices” have neither succeeded in creating more jobs for Kamiyama's inhabitants so far, nor do they generate revenues for the municipality, since the companies transferring workers to the offices do not pay local taxes. Nevertheless, the influx of employees from these offices to Kamiyama can stimulate private consumption, and thereby contribute to preventing the closures of even more shops.

Green Valley's projects in Kamiyama have reached a certain degree of prominence in the Japanese media. All in all, these projects can be considered as a unique and creative approach to tackling the challenges of demographic change. Yet, whether Green Valley's efforts to revitalize the community and to create a “global Kamiyama” will prove sustainable and thus could serve as a model project providing similar impulses for other regions, remains to be seen.



► Work in the Satellite Office.

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DIJ Visiting Scholar programme

The DIJ invites applications for its Visiting Scholar programme. The available slots for the current year have been filled, but submissions for 2014 are still being accepted. This programme is designed to promote intellectual exchange between scholars from around the globe and DIJ staff. It is directed at established scholars with a professional interest in Japan, regard-

less of their departmental affiliation. Preference will be given to applicants who are willing to collaborate with one of our current research projects in the area of demographic change or happiness research. Conditions and technical details of the programme can be found on the DIJ homepage. *F.C.*

[http://www.dijtokyo.org/
about_us/
visiting_scholar_
programme&lang=en](http://www.dijtokyo.org/about_us/visiting_scholar_programme&lang=en)

Workshop on social inequality in Japan

“Inequality in Post-Growth Japan: Transformation during Economic and Demographic Stagnation” was the topic of a two-day workshop for which experts on social inequality research from Japan, Germany, Switzerland, the UK and France gathered at the DIJ on March 18–19, 2013.

The workshop was organized by the DIJ in cooperation with David Chiavacci from the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, University of Zürich. As a preparatory meeting with ample room for discussion, it gathered the speakers invited to the annual conference of the German Association of Social Science Research on Japan (VSJF) to be held on November 22–24, 2013, at the Japanese-German Centre in Berlin (JDZB). The workshop focussed on five dimensions of social inequality particularly relevant in Japan: education, the labour market, the welfare state, urban–rural disparities and minorities.

Y. Sato (Tohoku University) started the workshop off by offering a theoretical framework. He spoke on the role that the inter-relations between institutions and actors play in the creation of social inequality.

As experts on unequal access to education, T. Kariya (University of Oxford), A. Okada (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) and J. Canstein (University of Halle) discussed structural changes in the secondary and tertiary educational sector and how these are reflected in public and political discourse.

S. Lechevalier (EHESS, Paris), K. Shire (University of Duisburg-Essen) and J. Imai (Hokkaido University) shed light on various aspects of increas-

ing inequality in the Japanese labour market. Their analysis centred on non-regular employment, on discrimination against women in the labour market, as well as on the changing role of labour unions.

S. Shirahase (University of Tokyo) and H. Conrad (University of Sheffield) took up similar topics regarding inequality in services provided by the welfare state. In particular, they focussed on the question of which disadvantaged groups are marginalized in public and political debates on welfare benefits. In Berlin, M. Estévez-Abe (Collegio Carlo Alberto, Torino) will join them with further input.

Whether social inequality is regionally stratified was discussed by V. Elis (University of Tübingen) and R. Lützelner (University of Bonn) in the panel on urban–rural disparities. P. Matanle (University of Sheffield) presented strategies that rural areas develop to cope with demographic change, pointing to the fact that the same structural changes can lead to different reactions on the side of the actors at the micro level.

T. Kibe (ICU), G. Liu-Farrer (Waseda University) and D. Chiavacci analysed the different situations of various migrant groups in Japan. In this context, distinctive characteristics of the Japanese concept of a multicultural society (*tabunka kyōsei shakai*) were pointed out.

The results of the very lively and fruitful discussions will be presented in Berlin in November of this year.

Two days of in-depth
discussion on Japanese
inequality debates

◀ **Dr. Carola Hommerich**, sociologist at the DIJ and organizer of the workshop. She works on social inequality, status anxiety, social cohesion and happiness in Japan.
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Current events

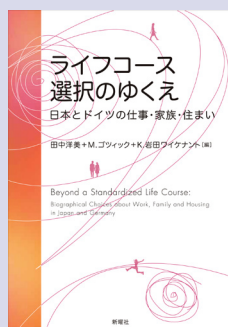
Exhibition: *Ideas 2020 – A Tour of Tomorrow's World* with a contribution by the DIJ on “demographic change”. (Travelling exhibition, 2013–2014). Organizer: Helmholtz Association. www.ideen2020.de/en

Forthcoming events

Symposium: Civil Society, Political Participation and Happiness (Werner Reimers Foundation, Bad Homburg, V/23–25/2013). Organizer: DIJ (partial funding by DFG).

Recently published

Hiromi Tanaka, Maren Godzik, Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (eds.): *Raifu kōsu sentaku no yukue. Nihon to Doitsu no shigoto, kazoku, sumai* [Beyond a standardized life course. Biographical choices about work, family and housing in Japan and Germany]. Tokyo: Shinyōsha, 2013.



International Journal of Well-being 2(4). Special issue: Happiness: Does Culture Matter? Issue editors: Carola Hommerich, Susanne Klien. IJW: 2012 (ISSN 1179-8602).

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For a printed copy, please contact: dinkel@diptokyo.org

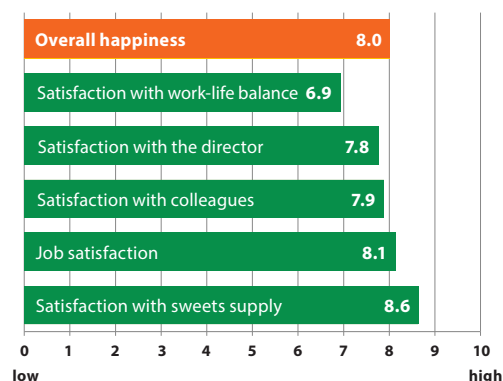
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Sweet and happy DIJ

With happiness being one of the research foci of the DIJ for the past five years, it was time to find out about the well-being of its own staff. The results of our survey show an average happiness score of 8.0 (on a scale from 0 to 10). This means that the DIJ employees are happier on average than the Japanese population (6.4 points in 2012). Overall, the male employees proved significantly more satisfied with their work and colleagues, and slightly more satisfied in most other categories.

There was no gender difference, however, regarding the satisfaction with the supply of sweets customarily served at DIJ staff meetings. This category showed the highest levels of satisfac-



tion out of all questions asked. Unfortunately, this has no significant impact on overall happiness. Satisfaction with colleagues and the director, however, do show a high positive correlation with general happiness levels. *B.H./C.H.*

Read for you

TOKORO Isao (2012): *Kōshitsu tenpan to josei miyake. Naze kōzoku joshi no miyake ga hitsuyōka* [Imperial House Law and female branches of the Imperial Family. Why are female branches necessary?]. Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 256 pages, 2,415 yen (ISBN 978-4-585-23015-1).

Tokoro, a historian, discusses the debate on the liberation of the succession to the imperial throne. In 2011, the Imperial Household Agency informed then Prime Minister Noda about the need to revise the Imperial House Law in order to reduce the burden on the ageing Emperor and Empress. With only three princes in the Imperial Family, it was suggested that those princesses who are willing to support the Emperor should be able to keep their imperial status even after getting married. As this could lead to the establishment of female branches within the Imperial Family, however, a revision of the Imperial House Law would be inevitable. Tokoro advises the careful consideration of all possible options. *J.A.*

Catchword

アベノミックス (*abenomikkusu*)

“Abenomics” is a portmanteau of “Abe” and “economics” and refers to the economic policies proclaimed by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe. It is an allusion to Reaganomics, the economic policies promoted by U.S. President Ronald Reagan during the 1980s. Abenomics consists of the three so-called arrows of monetary policy in the form of aggressive monetary easing, fiscal policy through substantial fiscal spending, and economic growth strategies to encourage private investment.

At the same time, Abenomics is a play on words as it can also be read as “Abe’s mix” (*Abe no mikkusu*). The mixture is viewed rather critically by experts around the globe, though. Sharp tongues even interpret ABE as an acronym for “asset bubble economy” and warn against another speculative bubble with severe consequences for Japan’s economy. *F.K.*

Picture credits: Page 1: {expert talk} Barbara Holthus. Page 2: {convenience store} Carolin Fleischer, {Satellite Office} Carolin Fleischer. Page 4: {chart} Carola Hommerich.

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