

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)



DIJ History & Humanities Study Group

Wednesday, 27 January 2010, 18:30

Elke Hayashi, Sophia University

Moments of Misunderstanding: Intercultural Approaches to Nonverbal Behavior in Japan

The traditional way of learning a language is to learn its grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation rules. In real-life linguistic interaction, however, there are many nonverbal clues to communication that need to be taken into account as well. This is particularly true in the case of Japan, where such non-verbal clues are commonly considered to be of essential importance in everyday interaction.

In my presentation I will work with the concept of “cultural osmosis,” referring to exchanges of cultural properties such as food or architecture. I show how these objects may lead to misunderstandings in intercultural settings, in that remaining differences between the original item and the imported one will not be recognizable anymore. Furthermore, I will argue that nonverbal communication in Japan is to a great extent motivated by common Japanese thinking concerning (unwritten) law contexts, relating to a general understanding of publicity and privacy.

My argument is based on two smaller empirical studies on Japanese knowledge of Western nonverbal behavior and a collection of moments of misunderstanding between Japanese and Westerners from non-fiction literature.

Elke HAYASHI is lecturer in German at Sophia University, Tokyo. She studied Economics and Translation in Bochum and Bonn. Her research interests include Cultural Studies, Comparative Linguistics and Japanese Studies.

The presentation will be given in English. Everybody is welcome to attend. Registration is appreciated (backhaus@dijtokyo.org).

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)
Jochi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0094
Phone: 03-3222-5077
Fax: 03-3222-5420
www.dijtokyo.org