

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

# DIJ Social Science Study Group



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*Tabea Bienek, Free University Berlin*

## ***Ikumen* Generation – Support Networks for Japanese Fathers**

The Japanese working environment continues to hinder men from getting positively involved in parenting. How is it then that fathers interested in parenting – so called *Ikumen* – are on the rise? In 2010 the word *Ikumen* was even selected for the Buzzword Awards's Top Ten. Has the paternal role undergone profound changes from a family sociological perspective?

The Work-Life Balance (WLB) politics of the early 2000s in Japan led to an intensified discussion on the compatibility of work and family life. Only in recent years have fathers become a target group of WLB measures, which can be especially observed in the Work-Life Balance Charter in 2007.

In the last few years, NPOs were formed to address the issue of acceptance for *Ikumen*. These NPOs are actively engaged in improving the paternal role by offering fathers information and support. In this talk I intend to present preliminary results of my fieldwork on the NPO "Fathering Japan". Through ethnographic research such as participant observation of NPO events, interviews with NPO staff and members I will explain how the NPO motivates potential participants. My research suggests that the NPO's network-forming character greatly supports active parenting and can lead to a change in father's behavior toward parenting. Despite these findings, a significant change in the paternal role of Japanese fathers cannot be identified yet.

**Tabea Bienek** studied Japanese studies at Free University (FU) Berlin, minoring in Sinology and German as a Foreign Language. Since 2011, she is a PhD student at FU Berlin doing research on WLB in connection with the changing paternal role in Japan. Tabea Bienek currently works as a lecturer at Chuo-University in Tokyo.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by P. Holdgrün, B. Holthus, C. Hommerich.  
All are welcome to attend, but registration ([holdgruen@dijtokyo.org](mailto:holdgruen@dijtokyo.org)) is appreciated.

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