

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)  
**DIJ Social Science Study Group**



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***How to analyze the distribution of risks?  
Social inequality theory re-visited***

This presentation aims at making a contribution to social inequality theory by proposing a theoretical model for understanding the logic of distribution of risks from a sociological perspective. It will thereby re-address long lasting theoretical disputes between individualization and class approaches to show how these approaches can be combined for a comprehensive analysis of the distribution of risks.

My conception of a theoretical framework for analyzing risk and social inequality is based on Ulrich Beck's book "risk society" (1986), in which he suggested the "distribution of risks" as a new paradigm of social inequality. Beck argued that individual decisions are becoming increasingly relevant for the analysis of distribution of risks instead of traditional sociological concepts of inequality such as class. This differentiation between "class" and "individualization" can also be described as a differentiation between "being" (economic social structure) and "consciousness" (conscious individual decisions). This presentation will argue that in order to frame the logic of the distribution of risks theoretically in a meaningful way, it is necessary to reconceptualise the relationship between economic social structure and individual decisions in social inequality theory.

For this purpose I propose the concept of "riskability" which captures both dimensions, individualization as well as class. "Riskability" I define as the ability to transform "danger" or "fatal loss" into "risk" or "optional loss". This ability, however, does not only depend on economic structure, but also on cognition, that is, what individuals actually recognize as potential loss.

**Kenji Kawabata**, sociologist, graduated from the University of Tokyo with a Master of Sociology and, currently, is a PhD candidate at the University of Tokyo. In his PhD project he develops a conceptual and theoretical framework for the analysis of risk and social inequality. He is also a Part-time Lecturer at Reitaku University.

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

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