

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



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Reproductive decision-making in Japan's low birth rate society: Education about family planning and fertility as a remedy?

Individual family planning is a central political and social concern in the context of Japan's low birth rate which ranks among the lowest in the world and which has been perceived as a major menace to its society since the 1990s. After a series of policy attempts to increase the number of births over the last 25 years, there is now a clear tendency in current policy debates to emphasize the connection between age and (female) fertility and the need for education about pregnancy and birth.

In this talk, I critically explore the contours of this current political discourse on family planning in which the need for more fertility-related public education in order to enable the individual to make informed decisions is emphasized. I will show that this political discourse is in fact intertwined with a discourse in popular media that targets mainly young women, and which similarly pushes the concept of life and family planning at an early stage and emphasizes the necessity of education about fertility, pregnancy and birth as well as a personal obligation for "maintaining" a fertile body.

The presentation will focus on the formation process of the discourse and the main actor groups (the government, the media and the pharmaceutical industry) involved in it, and will identify their respective agendas and strategies to influence individual reproductive behaviour.

Representative examples of the discourse in question will provide the material for an analysis of concrete contents, drawing from a variety of sources, including magazines or educational material for schools. The theoretical framework refers to work on representations of gender roles as well as on concepts of "autonomy", as a source of empowerment on one hand or as a neoliberal government technology on the other hand.

Isabel Fassbender is a MEXT doctoral candidate of the Graduate School of Global Studies at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. She holds a BA in Japanese Studies (major) and Economics from the University of Zurich and a MA in Area Studies from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Her research interests include gender, feminism, family, sexuality, bio-politics and politics of reproduction in Japan.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by S. Heinrich, P. Holdgrün and C. Hommerich.

All are welcome to attend, but registration (heinrich@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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