

A Forum for Japanese Career Women

What does it mean to be a „Japanese career woman“? This was the question guiding the two presentations of the DIJ Forum on 22 March 2017. The event featured a presentation of the interview-based research results of Prof. Markus Pudelko, followed by comments from women’s leadership advocate Noelle Takahashi.

Markus Pudelko, professor of international business at the University of Tübingen and an expert for cross-cultural management, argued in his talk that career-oriented women in Japan are often confronted with a variety of obstacles and even paradoxes. While Japan has shown its readiness to innovate in various societal spheres, the country has to date remained rather traditional when it comes to gender roles. Though women in Japan perform well in university education, female representation in management position is low on an international level. Drawing on his interview research, Prof. Pudelko stated that while climbing the career ladder, many Japanese women experience a lack of support from their partners at home but also a lack of trust from within the company. As a result, many women opt for a “career light” consisting of parental leave upon pregnancy, typically marking a crucial break in the career path. Prof. Pudelko followed that considering the recent attempts by the Japanese government to foster female representation on the management level, support for career-oriented women in Japan is still scarce. Following up, Noelle Takahashi controversially argued that in order to support women on their way to the top, they should not be treated in the same way as men, but differently instead. Since women would tend to be shier and take criticism more to heart than men, mentors and superiors should focus on pointing out women professionals’ strong points rather than their weaknesses. Takahashi also noted how important mentors can be in supporting the career paths especially of women. Intense discussions continued between the two presenters and the audience over drinks and snacks.

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