



Symposium Report

What is the “local”? Rethinking the politics of subnational spaces in Japan



On October 18 – 20, a symposium organized by DIJ researchers Sonja Ganseforth and Hanno Jentsch discussed the question of what is the “local” in contemporary Japan. This question may appear trivial but it generates an array of problems differing from discipline and study subject.

How do administrative units relate to social belonging? Which frictions arise from diverging local political, economic or cultural boundaries? How do frictions influence local identity constructions and social belonging? Contributions from various disciplines such as geography, political science, sociology and anthropology discussed these questions and linked different conceptions of the “local” to concrete social, economic and political problems. Generous funding from the Toshiba Foundation and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Japan Office allowed the conveners to invite 25 junior and senior scholars from Japan, North America, Europe and Australia to the DIJ in Tokyo.

The focus was on contemporary Japan, which provides a particularly interesting case in this respect, not least due to the rapid demographic change and the massive reorganization of the local administrative landscape in the mid-2000s. The event also highlighted the relevance of these questions beyond the Japanese case. At the opening DIJ Forum, Carolyn Cartier (University of Technology, Sydney) elaborated on the social and spatial implications of the administrative reform process in China. The Chinese central state designates vast, largely rural areas as new “cities”, thus deliberately creating spaces for urban development and investment. DIJ director Franz Waldenberger introduced issues of local sustainability in Japanese regional development policies. In the Japanese case, too, the municipal mergers undertaken

during the last 20 years created large cities with predominantly rural character. In contrast to China, however, this happened against the background of rural demographic and economic shrinking.

The next two days saw intensive discussions in eight panels, each addressing a different dimension of the “local” in Japan. In his opening talk, William Kelly (Yale University) laid out the history of research on localities in Japan. Further anthropological presentations highlighted how questions of belonging, social welfare and happiness are being constantly renegotiated in the local sphere, for example in everyday encounters, with the arrival of newcomers or in the context of political reforms.

Different ascriptions of locality can also have concrete political and economic consequences. Several presentations illustrated how the designation of tourist destinations or the branding of local products contributes to the commodification of localities. Shifting local boundaries also have serious political implications, for example with respect to the access to fishing grounds or the local implementation of agricultural reforms. Large-scale municipal mergers in the mid-2000s have led inter alia to the fragmentation of local governance, such as in the case of insufficient public transportation in a merged city in western Japan. The boundaries of politically sponsored industrial clusters can have profound effects on the socio-economic development of designated spaces. Demographic shrinkage and low voter turnout have raised concerns over existing forms of democratic representation in municipalities throughout Japan, and the Japanese Hometown Tax Donation Program (*furusato nōzei*) lets localities compete over tax deductible donations, favoring those with the most attractive characteristics and appealing return gifts.

Lively discussions throughout the symposium underlined the significance and complexity of the seemingly trivial question of what is the “local”. Analyzing the (re)configuration and the frictions between ever-changing formal and informal, spatial and social boundaries on varying scales is a promising approach to advance the understanding of social, political and economic organization in and beyond Japan. Against this background, the final discussion focused on the plan to compile the results of the symposium in an edited volume. — S.G. & H.J.



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***Contemporary Japan*, the flagship journal of the DIJ, publishes peer-reviewed original research articles and book reviews on Japan from all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences twice per year.**

Started in 1990 as *Japanstudien*, it changed to its present name and format as an English-language international journal in 2010. With the aim to increase the visibility of research from non-English speaking countries, including Germany and Japan, the journal offers comprehensive language support for non-native English speakers. In 2017 *Contemporary Japan* partnered with Taylor & Francis. It is now subscribed to by over 4,460 institutions worldwide and achieves about 1500 article downloads per month. Supported by an Editorial Board composed of eminent scholars from around the world, *Contemporary Japan* was indexed in Scopus in 2018. The journal was already well-known in



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European circles, and now it is increasingly raising its profile across Asia and North America for its interdisciplinary breadth and scholarly rigor.

Beginning in 2018 we will award the first biennial Contemporary Japan Best Paper Prize. This is a prize for the article by our Editorial Board selected from among all articles published in the prior two years. Its awarding will alternate with the VSJF Award. The inaugural winner for the 2018 Best Paper Prize is Dr. Anne-Lise Mithout, for her paper "Children with disabilities in the Japanese school system: a path toward social integration?", published in Volume 28 Issue 2. It is available for free access along with the two runners-up for one year on the CJ website. — I.G.

DIJ NIRA Workshop

Big Data – the new competitive paradigm. How well is Japan prepared?

Big data are at the heart of the digital revolution. In the digitalized and connected world data have become abundant. Rapidly developing tools to process, integrate and analyze large volumes of diverse datasets in ever faster and intelligent ways open up enormous potentials for research, private enterprises and public policy.

The Japanese government harbors high expectations that Japan's industry will play a leading role in advancing technological solutions and in exploiting the newly emerging business opportunities. The country's competitive edge in sensor technology and ICT hardware, its advanced telecommunication networks and the pressing needs created by the exposure to natural disasters and a fast ageing and declining population are expected to give Japan a lead. In a

workshop jointly organized by the DIJ and the Nippon Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) in collaboration with the Japan Forum for Innovation and Technology at UC San Diego and the Munich based Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition, experts from academia, business and government explored how Japan is building the infrastructures to efficiently and responsibly gather, integrate, analyze, use and trade data.

Internet platforms are an important source of big data. While the leading global platforms are headquartered in the US, Japan, too, hosts some strong players due to its large and advanced domestic market. Two of them presented their big data strategy at the workshop. Rakuten, Japan's leading e-commerce business, uses the huge volume of data generated by their customers to quickly capture new market developments, enhance user experience, and to offer tailor made product and service solutions. Bengo4.com, Japan's largest and fast-growing online legal consulting platform applies big data analytic tools to improve the matching of inquiries with existing legal databases and to automate parts of its consulting work. Its success



Participants at the joint *Big Data* workshop in November

is partly explained by the chronic lack of lawyers in Japan.

Beyond platforms, emerging market infrastructures are beginning to support the aggregation of big data across companies. They are provided by private companies, like EverySense, which offers a trading platform for providers and users of data. The Japanese government, too, is putting much effort in establishing an “Information Bank” with the goal to achieve “user-centric data utilization”. The workshop also discussed important regulatory questions rela-

ted to big data. The digitalization of financial services including the means and systems of payment require a fundamental overhaul of financial regulations. Other important issues relate to the delineation and protection of ownership rights, the right to access data and the control of possible anti-competitive effects. In conclusion, businesses, infrastructures and regulations in Japan are quickly evolving in reaction to and support of the potential uses of big data and the ensuing digital transformation. — F.W.

Event Information

Further information about the DIJ NIRA workshop and a detailed program are available on our website.

Visit here:

<https://dij.tokyo/big-data>

Festive event in Hotel New Otani 30 Years of the DIJ

Together with 170 guests, including high ranking representatives from academia, industry and government, DIJ celebrated its 30 year anniversary on 31 October.



Heinz Riesenhuber delivered the keynote at the DIJ's 30th anniversary

After welcome messages by Ingo Höllein, Counsellor for Science and Technology at the German Embassy in Tokyo, and Hans van Ess, President of the Max Weber Foundation, Franz Waldenberger, Director of the DIJ, used the opportunity to thank all supporters and friends of the institute for their valuable support over the past years. The keynote entitled “The future of society in the context of technological change” was delivered by the former Federal Minister of Research and Technology, Heinz Riesenhuber, who founded the DIJ during his term of office in 1988. A panel discussion including the speaker as well as Hans van Ess (MWS), Ulrike Schaeede (UC Berkeley, DIJ advisory board) and Yuri Okina (Chairperson of the Japan Research Institute) and moderated by Dietmar Harhoff (MPI Innovation and Competition, DIJ advisory board) concluded the official program. During the following buffet reception, participants were able to continue discussions and networking. Posters in the

reception hall informed the guests about the institute's ongoing research projects. The speeches and the special event booklet are available on the DIJ's website. — F.W.

Anniversary Website

Galleries, podcasts and program information are available online via our special anniversary site.



Visit here:

<https://dij.tokyo/30th>

30 years of Heisei Japan Outside and inside perspectives on an era coming to an end

Norio Kamijo, board member of the Japanese media agency Dentsu, and Franz Waldenberger, Director of the DIJ, discussed the legacy of the Heisei era at an evening event at Academy Hills, Roppongi on 14 November.

Heisei Japan is entering its 30th year in 2019. The era will end on 30 April 2019 when Emperor Akihito will officially step down. Both speakers also talked about Japan's changing role in the world as well as similarities and remaining differences with Germany. The seminar, which was organized on the initiative of Dentsu and on the occasion of the DIJ's own 30th year of history, attracted an audience of about 100, mainly Japanese participants. — F.W.



Several warm welcome messages and a panel discussion were part of the DIJ's anniversary event

Recent Publications



Schad-Seifert, Annette;
Kottmann, Nora (eds.)

Japan in der Krise. Soziale Herausforderungen und Bewältigungsstrategien

Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2019,
291 pages.

► ISBN: 978-3-658-23423-2

► <https://dij.tokyo/nl58pub>



Holthus, Barbara;
Bertram, Hans (eds.)

Parental well-being. Satisfaction with work, family life, and family policy in Germany and Japan

München, iudicium Verlag, 2018,
310 pages.

► ISBN: 978-3-86205-050-5

► <https://dij.tokyo/nl58pub2>

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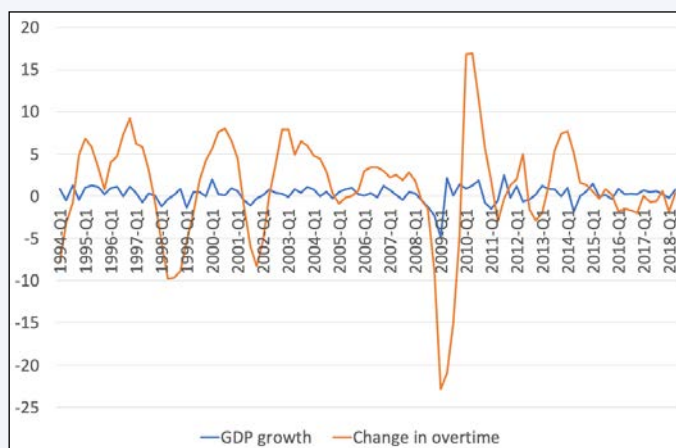


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Latest Statistics

Less overtime: Is Abe's "work-style reform" working?



Source: OECD (2018): Quarterly GDP and MHLW (2018): Monthly labour survey (毎月勤労統計調査). Percentage change to previous quarter. Overtime of full-time employees in firms with at least 30 employees.

Historically, changes in overtime respond to changes in economic growth rates. However, since 2016 the two diverge, with overtime almost continuously falling despite continuing GDP growth. Can this development be attributed to Abe's "work-style" reform, which targets excessive overtime? Even though the policy was announced in 2016, actual legal changes were not passed before 2018. Another factor could be that employers adjust work-styles to remain competitive in a tightening labour market. — S.H.

Staff News



Barbara Geilhorn is a senior researcher at the DIJ since October 2018. She held a JSPS postdoc at Waseda University and worked as a lecturer at the University of Manchester, at Free University Berlin and at the University of Trier. Barbara's research has focused on cultural representations of the Fukushima disaster, negotiations of gender and power in classical Japanese culture, and stagings of contemporary society in Japanese performance. Her recent project investigates how the multiple challenges faced by the Japanese regions are addressed in the arts.

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Nora Kottmann is a Senior Research Fellow at the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) since September 2018. From 2008 to 2018 she has been working at the Institute of Modern Japanese Studies at the University of Düsseldorf. She there received her PHD with a study on the meaning of marriage in times of declining marriage rates. Under the DIJ research program "Risks and Opportunities in Japan", she is currently working on her research project *(Re)Locating Intimacy – Spatial Perspectives on Personal Relationships in Contemporary Japan*. Main research interests include personal relationships, intimacy ('spaces of intimacy'), mobile and multi-local biographies/relationships, the Japanese foodscape in Dusseldorf, sociology of family, sociology of space, and methods in social science research on Japan.

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