

# German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

## DIJ Social Science Study Group

### Public Lecture



March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019, 18:30h

### **Autonomy, Belonging and Long-Distance Relationships in Europe and Japan**

Markus Klingel, Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences

Individualization and mobility increasingly define romantic relationships. 'Despatialization' and internationalization of work and education have intensified tensions between occupation and relationships. Therefore, as couples negotiate and coordinate their lives, flexibility and agency become more necessary to sustain relationships. Decisions along the life course demand privileging either individual autonomy or dyadic belonging. As all options likely imply trade-offs, actors will try to balance autonomy and belonging. This is for example the case in long-distance relationships (LDR), which can be seen as 'solutions' to systemic challenges, that, however, cause new challenges. Against this background, my talk asks how long-distance couples 'manage' distance, belonging and their life courses.

I will present results from interviews with 9 long-distance couples in Europe (age 25-44; distance 3-8 hours, relationship duration 1-10 years). Couples show emotional flexibilization and competent distance management. Relationships are individualized and yet committed. Despite strain, the need for autonomy makes distance seem 'natural'. Agency is required to 'achieve to be together'. Egalitarian relationships are desired. However, no-sacrifice solutions seem unlikely. 'Solutions' of distance are often replaced by 'solutions' of commuting, that, however, cause new problems. Integrating autonomy and belonging in these complex relationships is not a temporary problem, but a life course challenge.

Further, I will relate my study to *tanshin funin* as one example of LDR in Japan. For these company 'bachelor husbands', distance results mainly from company needs and is embedded in a family setting based on gendered division of labor. This relationship form likely relates to a different understanding of autonomy, belonging and distance. Investigating these differences serves as the starting point for a theoretical outlook on the dynamics of relationships between autonomy and belonging.

**Markus Klingel** is a PhD candidate in sociology at the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences, Germany (working title: Negotiating the Life Course – Individualization, Agency and Dyadic Life Course Decisions). He studied psychology (minors: anthropology, linguistics) at Humboldt University of Berlin. He is currently a visiting research fellow at the University of Tokyo.

#### **About:**

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for scholars conducting research on contemporary Japan. Meetings are held once a month and are open to speakers from all disciplines of the social sciences. The event is open to all. Registration is not necessary but appreciated, online at [www.dijtokyo.org](http://www.dijtokyo.org) or via [kottmann@dijtokyo.org](mailto:kottmann@dijtokyo.org).

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