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### Autism in the Workplace

#### How the Diagnosis of a Developmental Disorder Affects Employment Situations in Japan

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The spread of information on developmental disorders, mainly Autism Spectrum Disorder and ADHD, as well as changes in disability employment legislation have led to an increased number of diagnoses and a heightened interest in the subject of employment for individuals on the spectrum both in Japan and in the international context. Little research exists, however, on the perspective of employees on the spectrum, their actual employment situation, the opportunities and hurdles they face, and their coping strategies.

Japanese companies and employment facilities use the designation of disability to create employment structures that often differ from general employment structures in regards to work content, remuneration, or career opportunities. Based on preliminary findings from six months of participant observation in privately organized gathering spaces for persons with developmental disabilities and qualitative interviews with the participants in those spaces, this study reveals how individuals on the spectrum make use of the employment structures provided for them, or eschew them to find different ways of employment.

While many respondents react sensibly to interpersonal tensions in the workplace, the experiences of some respondents suggest that integration in a general work environment is possible. Yet, an established system for disability work in the company appears less important than individual support from supervisors and the feeling that being open about one's disability does not prove to be a disadvantage. Furthermore, the gathering spaces serve as a place of information exchange and allow the participants to discuss their issues with an openness that is rarely possible outside those spaces.

**Charlotte Schaefer** is a PhD student at the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Heidelberg with a background of Japanese Studies, Social Studies, and Conference Interpreting. She is researching the workplace integration of persons on the spectrum of developmental disabilities in Japan at the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context". She currently holds a PhD fellowship at the German Institute for Japanese Studies.

#### 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, at [jentzsch@dijtokyo.org](mailto:jentzsch@dijtokyo.org).

#### Venue:

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