

PARENTS IN TRANSITIONAL GERMANY AND JAPAN

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Many actors in media, as well as economists, sociologists, and psychologists interpret the coexistence of parents with their children in the same household as a traditional way of life, primarily when mothers mainly care for their children. Some call this concept of being “the old-fashioned family plan” (Angier 2013), others “traditional”, “warm” (Hochschild 1995). For many people, “traditional” sounds like a backward, outdated term no longer appropriate for modernity. Modern, on the other hand, are diverse family lifestyles, unmarried couples living together, same-sex couples living with children, single parents and extended family lifestyles in which several unrelated and unmarried adults live along children (patchwork).

If highly respected newspapers such as the *New York Times* or, in Germany, the *ZEIT* report in this way about forms of family life, this can be well understood, because these metropolitan newspapers and their editors report about their own life plans and the lifestyles of their environment, which they interpret as modern and future-oriented. However, when scientists such as Andrew Cherlin (2009) report on these types of familial life, they make two significant mistakes. Firstly, family historians are rarely acknowledged by the general public or by social scientists and economists; they have been pointing to the diversity of family lifestyles for decades and can also empirically show that the different lifestyles we are discussing today are to be found historically in similar forms and across very different countries (Coontz 1992, 2015). Secondly, they repeat the mistake of one of the most important sociologists and his disciples, namely Talcott Parsons and William J. Goode, by assuming that there is only one modernity and that the whole world follows this one universal modernity. For Parsons, this was represented in the neo-local core family because it functionally corresponded to the industrial society. In the neo-local nuclear family, the father safeguards the economic basis of the family and communicates social values to the family; the mother of the family ensures the care and function of the household. For Parsons, this family was the place of production of the personality of the members of the industrial society (Bertram 2010). But we know from the data of the American census (Hernandez and Myers 1993) that even at the time when Parsons (1955) described this family way of life as universal, the majority of

American children did not live this way, because at that time mothers in most families had to contribute to the family income.

In order not to make the same mistakes as the journalists of the *New York Times* or *ZEIT* in this comparison between Japanese and German families – to interpret their own forms of life as modern and not to take into account that the diversity of familial living arrangements is by no means an expression of modernity; and that we also do not assume that there can only be one path of development in today's societies – we have decided to compare the subjective perspective of the parents concerned, their satisfaction with numerous aspects of their lives, the objective living conditions of their families, and the family politics of both countries. We assume that the modern challenges in highly developed societies can have very different answers in the organization of private lifestyles and that there is a multifaceted or multidimensional modernity. In this modernity, with its diverse requirements in different regions, at different stages of their own development, in the various ways of organizing the life course, or in the structuring of partnerships, the subjective assessment of how well or problematic they deal with these requirements, is probably a better yardstick for comparing families in different contexts than establishing a hierarchical structure of “very modern” and “less modern” countries and families, as is customary in family sociology.

It is possible that the answer to specific challenges posed by highly developed societies, which work particularly well in one country, is hardly practical for another because the respective living conditions do not allow for this solution at all. This starts with simple things such as the spatial organization of countries. A mere comparison of the commuting times between work and residence using OECD data (2011) shows that in Japan commute time is almost twice as long as, for example, in Sweden. The reason for this is the entirely different settlement structure, which in Japan means that mainly the coasts are populated, with the consequence that workplace and dwelling are usually far away from each other in densely populated areas; on the other hand, in Sweden, with a somewhat thin settlement structure, workplaces are much closer to houses. When couples in Sweden decide to share childcare, it is much easier because of the shorter commute times than in a country where the average travel time per day is 60 minutes.

The assumption of a multifaceted modernity has the advantage that the developments in individual countries can no longer be interpreted as “better” or “worse,” but rather can be examined much more closely in order to see what possibilities exist in the respective country. This is important because many developments in the individual countries are very

different due to cultural traditions, economic opportunities, and political conditions. It is therefore exciting to see the differences between these countries and to analyze whether these differences in each nation promote or hurt parental well-being. This can then be taken as an indication for politicians to find solutions that have an obvious positive impact on the well-being of parents in other countries.

This opens up a different approach to political theory, which is also pursued in the comparative analyses of Japanese and German family policy. It is not about finding out who has done what better and where, but rather about finding out how to improve the well-being of parents by scientific knowledge in a step-by-step and quasi-experimental way. This is also an entirely new approach to family policy because it accepts that science and politics can be erroneous and that their own proposed measures must therefore also be checked against parents own evaluation of their well-being and their children's development. However, this perspective presupposes that the broad and rather fuzzy concept of parental well-being is defined clearly, especially in the empirical comparison of two countries, so that it does not become an empty formula. We tried to do this in the following chapters.

To explain in detail the notion of cultural diversity in the development of modern societies, the section entitled "A macro view on parents" presents changes in family life, in the development of human capital in these nations, and in the care of children by using Japanese and German official statistics. It becomes clear that Japanese and German society, unlike many other highly developed industrialized countries, have maintained industrial production and the organization of working life in the context of this production. It is important to take this into account due to the high division of labor and the organization of industrial production, which is usually very fixed in time, and which has considerable consequences also for the division of labor within families with children. For example, the income and earning opportunities of industrial workers, including the possibility for secure jobs, are structured in a completely different way than in many service sectors, which also maintain entirely different work time regimes.

Just like the well-being of all people in a given society, the well-being of parents is very much influenced by their satisfaction with the different areas of their lives, in addition to other, material aspects of their lives. Yet due to the fact that satisfaction is the subjective expression of the assessment of their living conditions, people can evaluate themselves as satisfied despite having few material goods, having little education, not having their own home, or not living in a stable partnership. Thus well-being does not only include this personal evaluation of one's own living

conditions, but also takes the objective factors such as the economic situation, the development of one's own human capital in the form of educational attainment, participation and integration in the working society, as well as one's own health and inclusion into one's own family, neighborhood, and local community into account. Overall life satisfaction can be divided into different fields, because individuals are also able to judge the different aspects of their situation in life very clearly, even in the case of mutual influences. In this way, you can be satisfied with your partnership or with your children, but at the same time you are very dissatisfied with your job; or you are satisfied with your health, but at the same time you consider your economic situation to be unsatisfactory.

The book is structured in a way that following this introduction, Matthias Huber provides a detailed description of the methodological strategies, successes, as well as challenges that were accompanied by such an undertaking of comparing parental well-being in Germany and Japan, from the survey construction to the empirical analyses. A larger overview of issues of demographic change, the development of human capital and understanding and values of care within families is the focus of the chapter by Hans Bertram, thus providing the necessary macro view and background to the focus on parental well-being.

Under the broader framework of parenting and childcare, three chapters deal with issues of class, attitudes, and values (Deuflhard), of child-rearing values (Takaoka and Sun), and fathering in particular (Olbrich). An international comparison of family and parental well-being cannot be made without examining in detail the values and attitudes of parents about their child's development. Carolin Deuflhard examines structural conditions of parental well-being to the extent to which parental values and the values and views in the world of work influence each other; she draws on Melvin Kohn's classical thesis, which empirically proved that parents' experience of life in the world of work had a considerable influence on their attitudes in the educational process.

Junko Takaoka and Yi Sun then compare the attitudes and values of the surveyed Japanese and German parents and check for similarities and deviations in great detail. Their study of ideals of good fathers and mothers and parent's overall life satisfaction is also closely connected to employment well-being. The third chapter in this section is by Sophie Olbrich, who compares fathers' "culture" and "conduct" in Japan and Germany because the father's position today not only reflects the role of the breadwinner but also articulates clear and unequivocal educational expectations from the father.

The next section of the book, entitled "Self, social relatedness, and social structures", features four articles. Here Marina Hennig investigates

parental well-being in Germany and Japan in regards to their social relationships. These include relationships with their own parents and support services in this private context, as well as support services and relationships with friends, neighbors, and others. In addition to the family's relationship with the social network in which they are embedded, parental well-being is decisively shaped by partner relationships, the organization of gender roles, and the ideologies and expectations of parents prevailing in the respective societies. Peter Fankhauser, Barbara Holthus, and Stefan Hundsdoerfer analyze this connection in their contribution, in particular focusing on issues of housework and childcare and their influence on partnership well-being.

Masumi Sugawara and Satoko Matsumoto try to elucidate the relationship between parental health, personality, and life satisfaction in a comparison between Germany and Japan. They clearly show with their data that the well-being of the parents also depends on specific personality structures and expectations of the living environment. In the fourth chapter of this section, Nobuko Nagase examines the professional work environment of German and Japanese parents and the effect of this work environment on the well-being of Japanese and German parents. Both in Japan and Germany, this has become a crucial issue for the well-being of families, because the integration of young mothers into the working world is much more advanced in both countries than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. Highly developed modern nations can no longer do without the human capital of young women if they want to maintain the economic level they have achieved. In addition, the educational campaigns and subsequent changes in the past decades have also led to a pronounced change in the way of life as a result of the new educational opportunities for young women and men.

The last section of the book, before being wrapped up by the conclusion, focusses on issues of family policy and family policy well-being. Hans Bertram and Barbara Holthus each describe the development of family policy in Germany and Japan. In the case of Germany it is interesting to note that since 2003, German family policy has been oriented towards the "Northern Europe model" and has been trying to both integrate the father's role more closely into the educational process and to connect the mother's role more closely with elements of the working world. German family policy differentiates between three aspects of modern society that are influenced by politics, namely the time structures in the family and work life, the infrastructure to support families, and, of course, the economic income situation of families. Barbara Holthus, focusing on family policy issues in Japan, starts with a brief overview of the development of family policy, its major challenges, as well as its main

deficiencies to date. This is then followed by highlighting the main findings from the analysis of the Japanese parents' satisfaction with family policies, an area that remains widely understudied within Japan, from the side of academia as well as policy makers.

In the concluding chapter of this book Hans Bertram uses the empirical results and the discussions of the preceding chapters to establish a connection between the diverse developments in Germany and Japan and the different family policies as well as the perspectives of children, mothers, and fathers in both societies, a complex issue in and of itself.

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Last but not least it should be noted that all remaining errors, that always occur in such an international comparison, first of all are the responsibility of the two editors.

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