

National Approaches to Systemic Risk - Germany and Japan under the COVID-19 Crisis

Welcome and Introduction

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Hello and welcome to our first web-seminar jointly organized by the German Center for Research and Innovation in Tokyo (DWIH) and the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) Tokyo.

A positive side-effect of extra-ordinary situations like the present pandemic is that they make us try out new things. In German and in English we have an expression for this – make a virtue of necessity. This online format of our traditional DIJ forum is a solution born out of necessity. And we will turn it into a virtue by using it, at least partly, even after we are back to normal, because it allows us to reach out to a much wider audience.

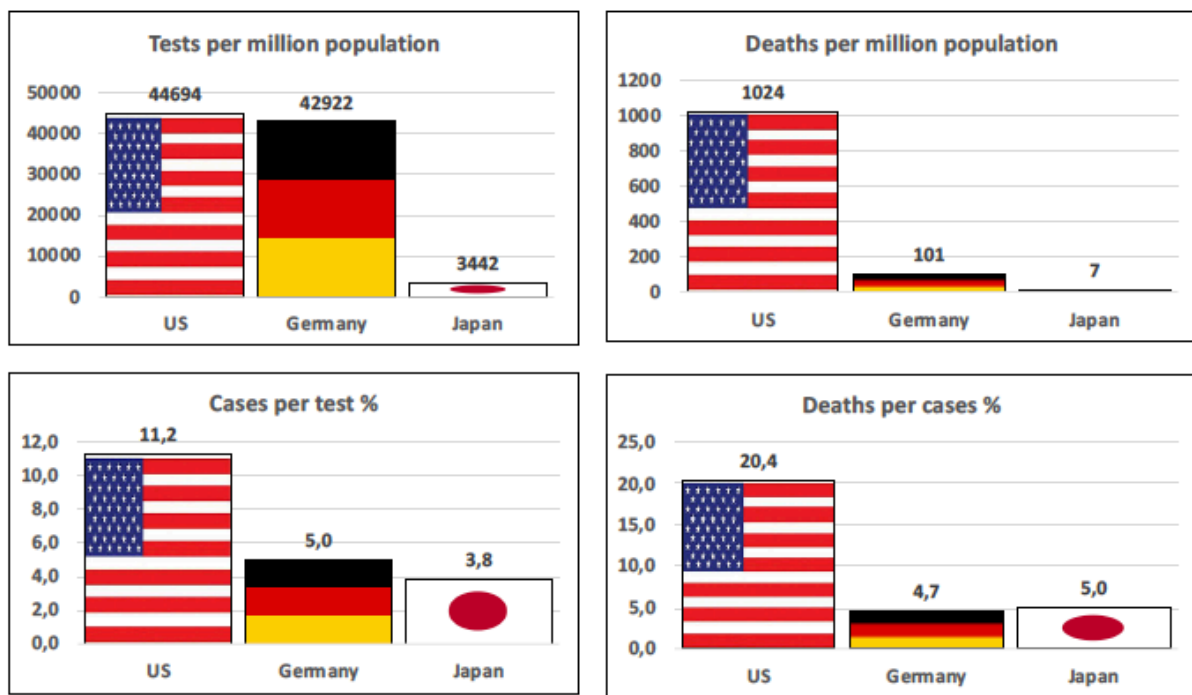
The COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on all aspects of our lives, most of us have probably not experienced before. It is of course not the first time, that mankind is confronting a pandemic. Human history has been shaped by pandemics of various kinds be it plague, cholera, flu or HIV/AIDS. Such pandemics present the downside to dense human settlements combined with mobility and trade. They are one of the hidden risks of globalization. It is incredible how a virus one of the most tiny and simple organisms can threaten what seems to be the most complex and intelligent organism, namely human society.

Of course, history does not fully repeat itself and this time is different too. Today's pandemic occurs under a very different circumstances in terms of political, economic and technological regimes. Also, our knowledge about pandemic risk and its management is far

more advanced. The question is, whether this has been helpful in containing the present crisis. And this leads us to our topic today.

Our seminar today looks at how Japan and Germany have so far been coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. I say so far, because I feel that we are still somehow in the middle of it, although at least in Germany and Japan the worst seems to have been overcome.

Comparing the two countries is not just something we as a German research institute located in Tokyo would do anyway. No, the two-country comparison promises to be especially instructive, because both countries have been pursuing quite different strategies, for example with regard to testing, but have been similarly successful in term of containing the pandemic and limiting the number of deaths (see next figure).



Based on data from <https://www.worldometers.info>, 26 May 2020

Of course, this observation is very superficial, but at least it should make us curious and interested in learning more about how both countries could achieve the same goal by taking such seemingly different or even opposite routes.

I am very happy that our two speakers today are best qualified to help us better understand the different approaches Germany and Japan have so far pursued in fighting the COVID-19

pandemic. Professor Ortwin Renn, scientific director at the institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) Potsdam, and Professor Norio Okada, Prof. em. of Kyoto University and former head of Kyoto University's Disaster Prevention Research Institute, are both experts in the field of risk governance, a research topic which they both approach from a sociological perspective.

Today's media are full with statements by virologists and epidemiologists. Their knowledge about the virus, how it spreads and how it can be contained, and how it hopefully can be treated is of course extremely important. But it does not explain how countries like Italy, Spain or cities like New York, to name just a few, could experience such extreme hardships, while other countries like Germany and Japan have been able to avoid similar scenarios. It could of course just have been luck. But is much more likely that political, social and cultural factors are playing a bigger role here. So, the sociological perspective on the governance of risk, which our two speakers apply in their research, seems to be highly appropriate.