

Japan and research at the DIJ in times of COVID-19

The first infections in Japan became known as early as mid-January. Given the proximity and close ties to China, this was not surprising. However, it was more than astonishing that there was not immediately a dramatic increase in cases, as in South Korea. It also caused great uncertainty, because unlike South Korea, Japan deliberately refrained from extensive PCR tests.

In view of the heavy travel between China and Japan and the overcrowded commuter trains, especially in the Tokyo area, it was feared that the number of infections per capita was at least as high as in South Korea and thus ten times higher than the officially determined cases.

Reactions by the Japanese Government

On February 25, the Japanese government set up a "cluster" team consisting of virologists and epidemiologists from the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Tohoku University and Hokkaido University. This strategy worked until the infection pathways of most newly infected people were no longer traceable, which was soon the case. Nevertheless, anyone who would have suspected that Japan would now also rely on mass tests as demanded by the World Health Organization (WHO) was mistaken.

Initially, arguments circulated in the media that PCR tests in Japan could only be carried out in the presence of doctors, and that all infected persons, even those with no or only minor symptoms, had to be admitted to hospitals according to existing regulations – which would immediately exhaust their capacities. However, these fears were soon refuted by actual practice. Doctors were also able to make remote diagnoses, some prefectures organized "drive-through" tests on their own initiative. Those who tested positive without symptoms were asked to be quarantined at home, and for those with mild symptoms, rooms in business hotels were prepared in the meantime.

The fact that Japan is still only testing for indications is mainly due to a lack of testing capacity, which ultimately is due to the fact that the government is doing too little to increase the testing capacity or pursue other measures to take control of the situation. The situation is particularly delicate because, firstly, the government cannot impose legally binding curfews and business closures, but can only make more or less urgent appeals to the population and, secondly, although the country has the world's highest number of hospital beds per capita, it is worse off than Italy in terms of intensive care units.

So far, Japan has handled the pandemic extremely successfully in terms of its low mortality rate. Is this a result of coincidence or the system? This was the question addressed in our web forum¹ held on May 27 (see report, page 2), together with the German Centre for Research and Innovation Tokyo (DWIH Tokyo).

Consequences of the crisis for our research and events at the DIJ

The pandemic already affected the DIJ's event planning on February 14, when a workshop had to be held via video conference because the participants from China were unable to travel. Subsequently, business trips and events were cancelled, postponed or conducted virtually. The institute was closed in mid-March. On June 2, we resumed operations with restrictions: wearing masks, in compliance with social distancing rules, and without large meetings in rooms. In the meantime, we were able to gain a lot of experience with different video conferencing tools, which we will continue to use, not only for meetings but also for events.



One of the many virtual DIJ staff meetings

In view of our research program "Risks and Opportunities in Japan"², it is obvious that we should take a closer look at the Japanese approach to COVID-19. Already on April 23, we organized an international video conference together with NIRA on the economic consequences of the pandemic and national countermeasures. The results are summarized in a joint "Opinion Paper"³. On June 18, a video conference on the importance of statistics in the COVID-19 crisis was held together with the Maison franco-japonaise, with experts from Germany, France and Japan⁴. Like the web forum on May 27, this event was also broadcast live on YouTube, and the recording of the livestream can be accessed via our new DIJ YouTube channel⁵.

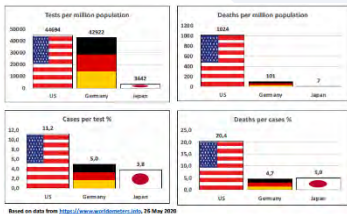
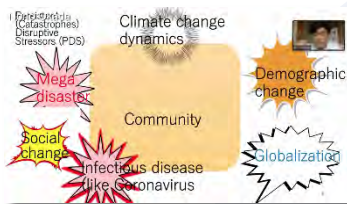
¹ [dij.tokyo/19risk](https://www.dij.tokyo/19risk)

² [dij.tokyo/risks](https://www.dij.tokyo/risks)

³ https://english.nira.or.jp/papers/opinion_paper/2020/05/coping-with-the-economic-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic--the-need-for-international-coordinat.html

⁴ [dij.tokyo/covid](https://www.dij.tokyo/covid)

⁵ [dij.tokyo/youtube](https://www.dij.tokyo/youtube)



Slides from the presentations by Norio Okada (above) and Franz Waldenberger (below)

More on the DIJ/DWIH Web-Forum, incl. links to the video (YouTube) and presentation slides:
 ▶ dij.tokyo/19risk

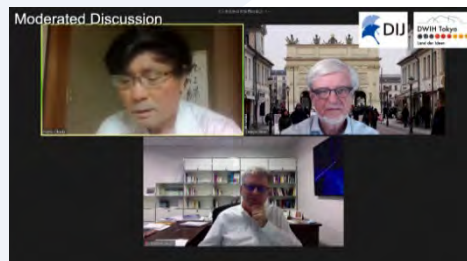
DIJ/DWIH Web-Forum on COVID-19 How have Japan and Germany dealt with the pandemic?

Japan and Germany seem to have survived the worst phase of the pandemic for the time being. Both countries got off comparatively lightly in terms of the number of infected and dead, although their strategies for dealing with the crisis could hardly have been more opposite. In our web forum, Norio Okada and Ortwin Renn explained the different perceptions and measures in Germany and Japan.

For Ortwin Renn (Institute for Transformative Sustainability Research, IASS Potsdam), the task of explaining the German strategy, which was clearly communicated by the government, was much easier than for Norio Okada (Institute of Disaster Area Revitalization, Regrowth and Governance, Kwansai Gakuin University), who was faced with the challenge of deciphering the Japanese mystery.

Renn explained that the debate and political decisions in Germany are strongly characterized by the participation of scientists, in particular virologists. In addition, federalism ensured that the federal

states were able to take different measures and that the handling of the crisis in Germany could thus ultimately be regarded as particularly flexible. Nevertheless, it quickly became clear that some politicians were trying to capitalize on the pandemic.



Q&A session with Norio Okada, Ortwin Renn, and Franz Waldenberger (clockwise)

Okada stressed that a distinction must also be made between national, regional and local measures when considering Japan. He underlined the success of "smart governance", i.e. the participatory implementation of decisions that adaptively and responsively took into account regional and local specifics. Unlike Germany, however, Japan was not well prepared for a crisis of this magnitude, Okada added critically. Franz Waldenberger pointed out that, in addition to political factors, social and cultural factors must also be taken into account when explaining different risk management practices. — T.W.

New research project Digital transformation in Japan: discourse analysis based on the concept of data

Digital transformation is the term used to describe the changes in society, politics, business, and culture resulting from the rapid spread of information and communication technology. How these changes are interpreted and in particular how to deal with them is the subject of discursive negotiation processes.

In Japan, stakeholders from politics, finance and IT have introduced a system of state-approved "information banks" (*jōhō ginkō*) to create a data market. Using a conceptual history approach, this research project examines why this original model for regulating the use of data was adopted. How was the originally European concept of data received in Japan? How did the dominant translation

dēta develop in Japanese as a concept of its own? What specifics of data practices in Japan are formulated using the term *dēta*?

To examine how the concept *dēta* evolved, a text mining method is used: the so-called topic modeling method. The first corpus contains the relevant speech contributions in the Japanese Diet, whose minutes since 1947 are available in digital form. A second corpus, which covers another section of the discourse and thus enables triangulation, consists of articles from Japanese daily newspapers. Moreover, in order to better assess the decisions that have led to the data market in Japan being based on the information banks, expert interviews are conducted.

The study shows how conceptual history can be used for understanding national technology policy. Notably, since data has been central to knowledge production long before the advent of "Big Data", this project also highlights continuities in the concept in the midst of technological change. — H.K.

Harald Kümmerle

Japanologist and mathematician, he has been a senior research fellow at the DIJ since January 2020
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More on Harald Kümmerle (see also page 4):
 ▶ dij.tokyo/kuemmerle

More on the DIJ's new research focus Digital Transformation:
 ▶ dij.tokyo/dt

New book publication

Japan and the Olympic Games

What was supposed to be a glorious year for Japan, 2020 instead catapulted the world into a pandemic, sees the Olympic Games postponed and their future for Tokyo uncertain.

As of June, the world is in turmoil: the raging pandemic has sickened more than nine million people worldwide, killed nearly 500,000, and has seen many countries go into unprecedented lockdown, with the economic impact yet hard to grasp. And if that were not enough, the world is also seeing many social protests in the US, in Hong Kong, and elsewhere.

Yet 2020 was supposed to be different: The build-up to the Olympic Games *Tokyo 2020* has been many years in the making. It was to be the chance to reinvent Japan and to lure a new record number of tourists into the country.

Firsts in Olympic history

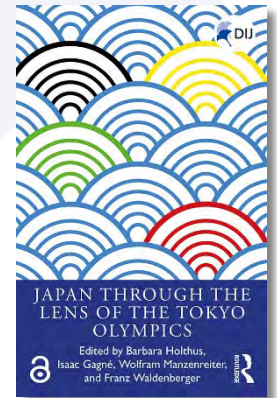
Tokyo had written Olympic history prior: the Tokyo Games of 1940 had to be cancelled, subsequently entitled the “Phantom Olympics”. *Tokyo 1964*, the first Olympics in Asia, catapulted Tokyo out of the postwar era. The pride over the success of the Games of 1964 was to be reignited for *Tokyo 2020*.

Olympic sponsors, the condom, sex, and fishing industries, social groups and organizations, institutions like education and media, as well as the anti-Olympic movement – and explain their expectations, desires, but also concerns vis-a-vis *Tokyo 2020*.

Written by scholars from and cooperation partners of the DIJ, this volume assembles 34 easily accessible chapters and spotlights covering all relevant aspects of society, economics, culture, and politics, including technology, food, media, security, work, city planning, history, cinema, linguistics, volunteering, disability, architecture, advertising, and – of course – sports!

Impact of the postponement

Irrespective of the Olympics’ postponement or its potential cancellation, which by now has turned into a campaign issue for the July 5 Tokyo gubernatorial election, the dreams of thousands of eager athletes to compete in 2020, of 110,000 volunteers to aid in the event, and of spectators and sponsors are already shattered. If and how they can be salvaged remains an open question and the unpredictability of the pandemic makes it a logistical nightmare.



Japan Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics, edited by Barbara Holthus, Isaac Gagné, Wolfram Manzenreiter, Franz Waldenberger (Routledge 2020)

Link to free download of the book (open access):

▶ bit.ly/3cNz2VU

More on this research and publication project:

▶ dij.tokyo/t2020



Sustainability, diversity, enthusiasm, and protest: the many facets of Tokyo 2020

The publication *Japan Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics* explains the multifaceted impact the Games already have had on Tokyo and Japan, and on its citizens, businesses, and its self-identity. The chapters explore the many stakeholders involved, including the government, the advertising giant Dentsu,

Hosting the Tokyo 2020 Olympics has become a marathon not only for the world’s largest sports mega event but also for becoming a global symbol of having overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. With thirteen months to go, all bets are off. — *B.H.*

Barbara Holthus

Sociologist and lead editor of this book, she has been deputy director of the DIJ since 2018
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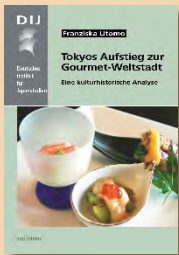
New Publications

Contemporary Japan
Vol. 32 (1), Routledge,
ISSN: 1869-2729 (print),
ISSN: 1869-2737 (online)



Franziska Utomo
Tokyos Aufstieg zur
Gourmetweltstadt

DIJ Monographs, vol. 63
Ludicium 2019,
ISBN 978-3-86205-051-2



Hans-Joachim Bieber (ed.)
Dietrich Seckel: Berichte
aus Japan

DIJ Monographs, vol. 64
Ludicium 2020,
ISBN 978-3-86205-052-9



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Award

Harald Kümmerle receives Dissertation Award

Harald Kümmerle, senior research fellow at the DIJ since January this year within the new research focus Digital Transformation (see also page 2), has been awarded the Johannes-Zilkens Dissertation Award 2020. With this award, the German Academic Scholarship Foundation annually honors an outstanding dissertation in the humanities and social sciences. The Zilkens Dissertation Award is endowed with 5,000 Euros.



Harald Kümmerle's dissertation on the "Institutionalization of Mathematics as a Science in Meiji- and Taishō-Era Japan", which he defended in January 2019 at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, creates an impressive bridge between mathematics, Japanese studies and the social sciences in the eyes of the interdisciplinary jury. It provided "important impulses for the further development of Japanology and, beyond that, for understanding the development of science hubs and the organization of knowledge transfer". We congratulate our new colleague on this special award! — *T.W.*

<https://www.studienstiftung.de/aktuelles/artikel/studienstiftung-vergibt-promotionspreise-2020-arbeiten-aus-der-chemie-und-japanologie-ausgezeichnet/>
(in German only)

Staff News



Hanno Jentzsch was a senior research fellow at the DIJ from October 2016 to March 2020. During this time, he worked on the political economy of rural revitalization projects within the DIJ's research focus "The Future of Local Communities in Japan" and was involved in several publication projects, including a monograph on institutional change in the Japanese agricultural sector (*Harvesting State Support*, forthcoming). On April 1, 2020, he joined the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna as assistant professor.

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Aya Adachi (Ruhr University Bochum/University of Duisburg-Essen) was a doctoral fellow at the DIJ from March to May and conducted research for her doctoral thesis "Linking Differences in Preferential Trade Agreements to Domestic Structures: The Cases of Japan and the People's Republic of China". In her project she compares Chinese and Japanese Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) and their implications for regional economic governance in East Asia.

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Yosuke Buchmeier (LMU Munich) has been a doctoral fellow at the DIJ since March. In his research project "Shaping Public Discourse in Japan – The Construction of Reality on NHK Television News", he analyzes journalistic representations of socio-political issues using an integrative content analysis of television news reporting. He focuses on questions of agenda-setting and framing.

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Torsten Weber has been responsible for public relations and science communication at the DIJ since February 2020. Prior to this, he had been working since 2013 as a senior research fellow in research projects on Japanese discourses on happiness and the politics of history in East Asia. In 2018, he won a national grant from the German Research Foundation (DFG) for a research project on John Rabe's Nanjing war diaries.

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