

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

## DIJ Study Group



May 19, 2026, 6.30 pm (JST) / 11.30 am (CEST)

### **The Mind's Shield Against Physical Decline: The Role of Self-Transcendence in the Well-being Paradox of Aging**

Gan Deer, Osaka University

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This study explores how older adults maintain psychological well-being despite inevitable physical decline, a phenomenon often described as the “well-being paradox”. Drawing on Tornstam’s theory of gerotranscendence, we examine whether a shift toward a more transcendent worldview serves as a psychological buffer against age-related functional loss.

Using data from the SONIC (Septuagenarians, Octogenarians, Nonagenarians Investigation with Centenarians) study, which includes over 3,000 community-dwelling older adults across a 15-year longitudinal period, we conducted two complementary analyses. First, cluster analysis identified a distinct group of older adults who exhibit low physical function yet high psychological well-being. Second, using a bivariate latent change score model, we examined the longitudinal relationship between changes in physical function (Short Physical Performance Battery, SPPB) and psychological well-being, and tested the moderating role of self-transcendence.

The results show that self-transcendence significantly buffers the negative impact of physical decline on mental health, life satisfaction, and negative affect. However, it does not protect against the decline in positive affect. These findings suggest that aging well is not merely the preservation of function but involves a transformation in how individuals relate to their physical limitations.

**Gan Deer** is a doctoral researcher at Osaka University’s Graduate School of Human Sciences, specializing in clinical thanatology and geriatric behavioral science. Originally from Inner Mongolia, China, he earned his master’s degree from Kobe University and is currently based in Japan. His research examines psychological well-being in later life, with a particular focus on the oldest-old and centenarians. His work explores how meaning-making and resilience contribute to adaptive aging. Alongside his academic work, he is also a creative writer. Gan Deer has self-published a Japanese novel, *My Personal Myth: A Record of Loss and Rebirth* (私の個人神話—喪失と再生の記録—), which explores themes of existential crisis, loss, and personal transformation. He is open to collaborations and interdisciplinary exchanges across a wide range of academic and creative fields.

#### **About:**

The DIJ Study Group is a forum for scholars from all disciplines conducting research on contemporary or modern Japan. The event is open to all. This session is organized by Franz Waldenberger.

*This is a public event. Please be aware that audio-visual recordings may be made, stored, and published during and after the event.*

#### **Hybrid Event:**

**On-site participation:** please register via email to [forum@dijtokyo.org](mailto:forum@dijtokyo.org) until **May 18, 2026**.

**Online participation:** please register via our webpage.

#### **Venue:**

Online and DIJ Tokyo: <https://www.dijtokyo.org/access/>