

## Interdisciplinary Japanese Studies On Site

*From Happiness to Risk*

### *New director at the DIJ*

After ten years, Florian Coulmas leaves the DIJ at the end of September. He is succeeded by Franz Waldenberger from the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, who joins the DIJ as its new director. With him, the DIJ starts a new research focus under the working title “Risk”.

### *Florian Coulmas*

#### **Research on demographic change and happiness in Japan**

Japan is in the middle of a major transformation that is affecting people’s lives in many ways: work, family, pensions, housing and infrastructure. Over the past ten years, the DIJ has tried to contribute to a better understanding of this process by setting up two research foci, “Challenges of Demographic Change” and “Happiness in Japan”. A recent incident in the Tokyo Prefectural Assembly demonstrated that, although other advanced countries are undergoing similar changes, Japan has its own problems and is compelled to find its own solutions.

In the incident mentioned above, a female member of the Assembly pleaded for greater budget assistance for child rearing to help raise the birth rate, prompting some of her male LDP colleagues to advise her to get married and bear children. In Japan, sexist heckling does not usually get front-page coverage, but this time it did because it touched a raw nerve. The government, aware that the shrinking labour force constitutes Japan’s Achilles heel, has proclaimed its intention to create a Japan where women can “shine”. However, exploiting the female “reserve army” in order to arrest or at least slow down the rapidly worsening old-age dependency rate will be difficult if women continue to feel discriminated against in the workplace – a tendency that bodes ill for the future well-being and happiness of the nation.

Directing, accompanying and observing research on population dynamics and happiness has been stimulating and instructive, for which I owe a debt of gratitude to the young scholars who have gravitated to the DIJ over the past decade. Those who worked on demographic change dealt with multiple topics ranging from low fertility and social policy, immigration and business opportunities in ageing societies, to increasing social disparities and life course changes. They each contributed the perspective of their own scientific discipline, accepting the difficult challenge of interdisciplinary research and turning it into advantage by listening to each other so that the complex issues at hand did not suffer from narrow assessment.

When the second research focus was launched in 2009, this approach continued, as some of the researchers probed the interaction between demographic change and collective well-being. This was quite original, for while social ageing had been on the horizon as a looming problem for some time, the nexus of demographics and well-being has gained a place in



### *Franz Waldenberger*

#### **Confronting risk – A research agenda for the next 5 years**

Japan remains a rewarding object of research for the social sciences and humanities. Just recently, the European Association for Japanese Studies conference held in Ljubljana showed this impressively, when 900 specialists from all over the world and across a large variety of academic disciplines presented and discussed their latest research findings on Japan. International decision-makers in business and politics have not always paid Japan the attention it deserves – not only as a market and as a partner, but also as a forerunner when it comes to confronting social and economic challenges. To mention just a few examples:

- Japan, the world’s richest economy in terms of net foreign assets, affords itself the most highly indebted government sector. How can this be explained? Will we see a fiscal collapse or is fiscal consolidation still possible?
- Japan has been experiencing 20 years of moderate deflation – an experience it does not share with any other industrialized economy. What are the causes of deflation and what are the consequences for economic activity? Will the monetary policy experiment undertaken by the Bank of Japan succeed?
- Demographic change has entered a second phase. Alongside the phenomenon of ageing, the country is now also facing a rapid and significant decline of its population. What implications will this have for the labour market, social security systems, social cohesion, regional development and the political system?
- Under the influence of demographic change, globalization and ensuing transformations of the employment system, the inequality in the distribution of income and wealth has steadily increased. How is Japan coping with the implied social challenges?
- The nuclear disaster in Fukushima forced Japan’s energy policy makers to undertake an unintended turnaround. How fast and to what extent will the country succeed in expanding the share of renewable energy? What new technological, economic and legal solutions will thereby be tested?
- Today, the Japanese and Asian neighbouring economies are closely interwoven. However, with regard to political relations some strong tensions remain. Can such a contradiction continue to exist or does it need to be resolved? What

## Demographic change and happiness (continued)



the public mind only since the rates of economic and population growth simultaneously fell to zero around 2005.

Notwithstanding zero growth, Japan is today better educated, wealthier and older than a couple of generations ago – but not happier. Because utilitarianism teaches that wealthier equals happier, this has been called paradoxical. However, happiness research has shown, and the DIJ research focus lends support to the insight, that aggregate happiness involves a multiplicity of factors in addition to material well-being.

Happiness is not a given object waiting to be examined by available methods. Its components come to the fore during the course of investigation, guaranteeing that curiosity never wanes. The general question about Japan is why objective quality of life and subjective well-being are so discrepant. We have investigated issues such as parental well-being, weakening social ties in the family, community and work, precarization and feelings of disconnectedness, political

participation, social engagement, as well as the effects of natural disasters, among others. Results suggest that the question, “Why aren’t the Japanese happier in spite of growing wealth and increasing life expectancy?” may be misleading. “How come that, in spite of breathtaking growth over the past half century, the Japanese aren’t *unhappier*?” may be a better question, because it directs our attention to the costs of economic growth and social change.

Yet the Japanese government only seems to have one answer to the demographic challenge: stimulating growth, at all costs – by selling arms, exporting nuclear power plants, building casinos and letting women “shine”. Embracing casino capitalism involves many risks. Whether it will lead to greater happiness in the hyper-aged society remains to be seen. Studying the risks involved is, therefore, apt and timely. I am confident the diligent and competent DIJ research team will make this as rewarding an experience for the new director Franz Waldenberger as it was for me. *F.C.*

## Confronting risk (continued)



options are available? What will be the respective implications for political stability and economic development in the region?

One could easily extend the above list with topics including but not limited to health, education, entrepreneurship, civil society, IT security and environmental protection. No research focus is able to cover all these highly relevant issues in detail. Really one is spoilt for choice. By analysing demographic change, the DIJ is already covering an important topic. The research on happiness in Japan has contributed to a fundamental debate on welfare, which continues to be heavily discussed in many academic disciplines.

The research focus I envisage for the next five years under the working title “Risk – Attitudes, Behaviour, Discourses and Institutions” also relates to basic aspects of social well-being like the need for security, the unavoidable confrontation with change and the desire to challenge new things. How societies deal with the risks and opportunities

inherent in an uncertain future determines the sustainability of their social and economic institutions. Last but not least, the risk perspective should be able to stimulate promising research questions to guide analyses of the above listed challenges. Demographic change represents one area where the question of how risks are confronted – be it by individuals, companies or within the wider social, economic and political context – can fruitfully be applied. Additional areas will have to be decided over the next few months.

Research on Japan remains exciting and I am very excited to join the team at the DIJ in its efforts to exploit the implied potential for advancing our understanding of Japan to the benefit not only of the social sciences and humanities, but also of practitioners and the broader public. This will of course only be possible in cooperation with external partners. With this in mind, I would like to ask for your continuing support. *F.W.*

## Discussing well-being between promises and reality

**On July 29–30, the DIJ organized an international workshop titled “Improving the People’s Lot? Different conceptions of well-being between promises and reality”.**

For two days, 14 scholars in the fields of political science, political philosophy, economics, historical and religious studies gathered at the DIJ to discuss the prospect of improving the people’s well-being and happiness between promises and reality. Concepts of a happy life going beyond GDP growth rates are growing in importance, as evidenced by the establishment of government commissions in Japan, Germany and France. Against this backdrop, the two-day workshop examined concepts of happiness put forth by social and political actors, the reception of these concepts, as well as the effects of public policy on well-being. During the two-day workshop, which was supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), experts from Japan, the US and Germany examined the promises of happiness offered by political parties, ideologies, religions and pressure groups, discussed expectations from the electorate or supporters for these organizations, and evaluated the effects of public policy on well-being.

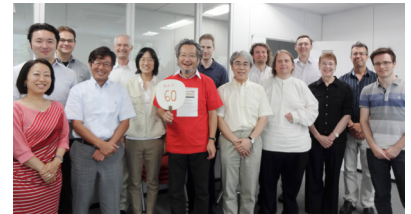
The workshop programme commenced with a presentation by Tatsuo Inoue (University of Tokyo), who defined the liberal concept of happiness as a quest for justice and contrasted it with communitarian and paternalist ideas. Helen Hardacre (Harvard University) then outlined key conceptions of a happy life throughout Shinto’s long history. The first panel was concluded by Torsten Weber (DIJ), who discussed the concept of smaller and greater happiness in pre-war Japan as propagated by progressive thinkers. The second session focused on the satisfaction of voters and support groups. Yutaka Tsujinaka (Tsukuba University) analysed satisfaction levels of social groups. Kenneth Mori McElwain (University of Michigan) discussed how independent voters evaluated the government’s performance. Rieko Kage (University of Tokyo) argued that life satisfaction was an important determinant of whether Japanese survey respondents harboured nationalistic sentiments. The first day was con-

cluded by Tim Tiefenbach (DIJ) with a presentation on the positive influences of political participation on levels of well-being.

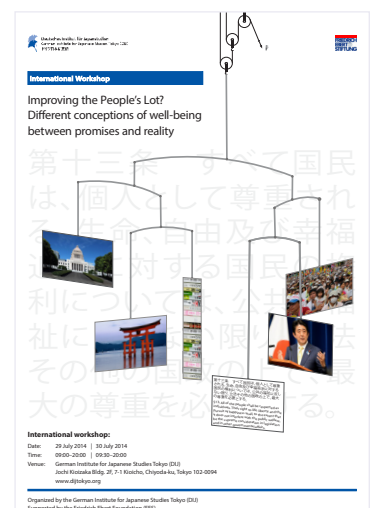
On the second day, Mari Miura (Sophia University) outlined the Japanese Trade Union Confederation’s (*Rengō*) insider-outsider dilemma in trying to achieve well-being for its membership under the Democratic Party government, which the unions had supported. Axel Klein (University of Duisburg-Essen) discussed how the Clean Government Party’s (*Kōmeitō*) promise of happiness has changed from the concept of a Buddhist democracy to that of a making life safer, cheaper and easier for the common people. Chris Winkler (DIJ) highlighted the shift towards post-materialist policy pledges in a comparative analysis of party manifestos in Japan and Europe.

In the fourth session, effects of public policy on well-being were evaluated. Takao Katsuragi (Gakushuin University), in his presentation on public philosophy, emphasized the importance of *glocalization* and mutual learning in the quest for happiness. Takayoshi Kusago (Kansai University) outlined citizen and expert participation in improving well-being on the local level by introducing initiatives in Tokyo’s Arakawa Ward and the city of Nagakute in Aichi Prefecture. Using cross-national data, Alexander Patek (Texas A&M University) gave evidence for the positive effects of the welfare state on citizens’ well-being. Benjamin Radcliff (University of Notre Dame) discussed how direct citizen involvement in political decision-making processes (direct democracy) effected well-being positively across American states.

The workshop concluded with a DIJ Forum open to the public and in a special format. Instead of a single lecture by one distinguished scholar, the event on July 30 was organized as a panel discussion, chaired by Axel Klein, in which Helen Hardacre, Benjamin Radcliff, Kenneth Mori McElwain and Takayoshi Kusago reflected on the results of the workshop. The DIJ would like to thank all participants for the interesting talks and thought-provoking discussions that made for an intellectually stimulating workshop.



► Workshop participants including a happy Professor Inoue on his 60th birthday.



► For further details, see: [http://www.dijtokyo.org/events/improving\\_the\\_peoples\\_lot\\_different\\_conceptions\\_of\\_well-being](http://www.dijtokyo.org/events/improving_the_peoples_lot_different_conceptions_of_well-being)

◀ **Dr. Chris Winkler**, head of the DIJ Social Science Section and organizer of the workshop, analyses how political parties have historically approached happiness. [winkler@dijtokyo.org](mailto:winkler@dijtokyo.org)

## Recent publications

### Florian Coulmas:

*Tokio. Vom Glück urbanen Lebens.*  
Munich: C.H.Beck.



### Hans-Joachim Bieber:

*SS und Samurai. Deutsch-japanische Kulturbeziehungen 1933–1945*  
(DIJ Monographs; 55).  
Munich: Iudicium.



### Carola Hommerich:

“Neue Risiken, neue Ungleichheiten. Wie gespalten ist Japans Gesellschaft?“, in R. Wördemann and K. Yamaguchi (eds) (2014), *Länderbericht Japan. Die Erarbeitung der Zukunft*, pp. 461–476.  
Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

### Contemporary Japan 26(2) Destination Japan: Population Aging and International Labor Migration



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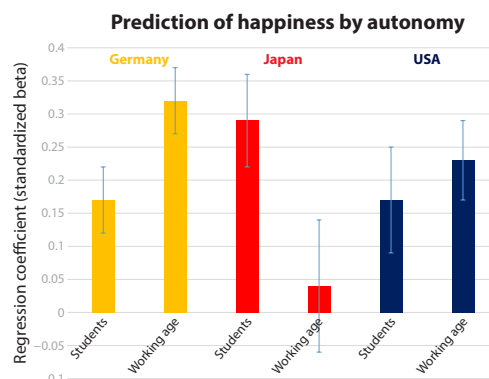
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## Are free minds happier?

A recent DIJ online survey (n=1418; April to August 2014) confirmed that, just like their German and US peers, Japanese students who emphasize autonomy tend to report higher levels of happiness. Only in Japan, however, this relationship was not also observed in a working-age sample. One possible interpretation is that Japanese students have become more open towards individualistic values, but the positive effects on happiness are lost upon entry into the workforce. Student life is often considered to be the final transitory stage before becoming a full-fledged member of society; in Japan, this appears to include a temporary refuge from collectivist norms. *T.S.*



Effects of relative deviance from the group mean (e.g. of German students) in autonomy on relative levels of reported personal happiness. Autonomy failed to predict happiness only among working-age Japanese (5% error margin).

## Catchword

### ウーマノミクス (*ūmanomikusu*)

“Womenomics” stands for the idea that increasing female labour market participation has a positive impact on economic growth. According to Goldman Sachs’ July 2014 “Womenomics 4.0” report, Japan can expect its GDP to grow by nearly 13 per cent if it closes its gender employment gap – an idea Goldman Sachs’ chief Japan equity strategist and “womenomics” mastermind Kathy Matsui has promoted since 1999. Prime Minister Abe, under pressure to revitalize Japan’s economy and to deal with the effects of demographic change, has taken up the cause saying that “Japan must become a place where women shine.” His agenda aims to raise the female workforce participation rate to 73 per cent and have 30 per cent of leadership positions filled by women by 2020. While publicity is assured, Abe has not been known as a promoter of female empowerment thus far and his goals are not new but adopt benchmarks of the national Basic Plans for Gender Equality of 2005 and 2010. Time will tell whether and how this programme will actually be implemented, or whether it is yet another paper tiger – like many other of Japan’s gender equality policies. *P.H.*

## Moving on

After seven years at the DIJ, senior research fellow and head of our Business & Economics Section Florian Kohlbacher accepted the call to Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) in China. Beginning on September 1, 2014, he took up his new post of associate professor in marketing at the International Business School Suzhou (IBSS). During his time at the DIJ, Kohlbacher’s research focused mainly on the analysis of challenges and opportunities associated with Japan’s demographic change from a business and management perspective. He has contributed immensely to the DIJ’s research output through numerous publications, lectures and the organization of international conferences, the most recent of which was a workshop on “Well-being in Ageing Societies: Perspectives from China, Germany and Japan” in Beijing, China.

A new addition to our team is Steffen Heinrich, who comes to the DIJ from the University of Duisburg-Essen. In his doctoral dissertation, he compared labour market reforms in Germany and Japan from 1990 to 2010. His new project focuses on the role of market regulation as a form of welfare policy that is becoming increasingly relevant. *C.H.*

**Picture credits:** Page 1 {DIJ team} Claus Harmer. Pages 1 and 2 {Coulmas} Florian Coulmas, {Waldenberger} Claus Harmer. Page 3 {Workshop photo} Marga Dinkel, {Poster} DIJ. Page 4 {chart} Tobias Söldner. **Author key:** *F.C.* – Florian Coulmas; *P.H.* – Phoebe Holdgrün; *C.H.* – Carola Hommerich; *T.S.* – Tobias Söldner; *F.W.* – Franz Waldenberger.

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