

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group

September 30, 2015, 18:30

Adam Jambor, Heinrich-Heine-University, Düsseldorf



Why do the young stay?

‘Home-orientation‘ and Social Capital in Okinawa

Why do people leave their home region? Classic migration models in economics argue that differences between regional labor markets (e.g. wage gap) are the main cause for mobility. The continuing migration of young Japanese from rural to urban areas appears to confirm this view. Yet Okinawa as the poorest prefecture in Japan that suffers under a comparatively sluggish labor market, low income levels and an excess of job applicants does not confirm to this theory. On the contrary, young Okinawans increasingly tend to stay in their home region. Hence, in the case of Okinawa the question is not “Why do the young leave?” but rather “Why do the young stay?”. Often used rational choice models of migration clearly fail to explain this phenomenon. My presentation will argue that the answer instead lies in the often neglected influence of social capital on mobility decisions.

According to labor market researcher Nan Lin social capital is as “Investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace”, while political scientist Robert D. Putnam argues that there is a strong connection between high levels of social capital and high levels of trust. This paper will show that both perspectives on social capital can be used to explain the home-orientation of young Okinawans. Based on data from a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews with 3rd/4th year undergraduate students in Okinawa, I will show that Okinawa-born students put considerably more emphasis on social capital when considering a move to another prefecture than students from the Japanese mainland. This means, young Okinawans value their extensive social networks of family and friends more than the potential economic benefits of a move to a more prosperous prefecture.

Adam Jambor is a PhD candidate at Heinrich Heine University Duesseldorf and currently a fellowship holder at the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ). He holds a Master’s degree in Modern Japanese Studies. From 2014 to 2015 he was a visiting researcher at the University of the Ryukyus on a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by S. Heinrich, P. Holdgrün and D. Kremers.
All are welcome to attend, but registration (heinrich@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.
German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ)
Jōchi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioichō, Chiyoda-ku, Tōkyō 102-0094, Phone: 03-3222-5077

For a map please refer to www.dijtokyo.org