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**German-Japanese Graduate Schools in Humanities: Experiences from a German-Japanese Graduate School on formation and change of civil society in Germany and Japan.**

We feel honored to have been invited here to present some experiences concerning the joint German-Japanese graduate school we have been working in with the support of DFG and JSPS since 2007.

We are convinced that joint graduate schools are the most effective means to promote German-Japanese cooperation in the fields of humanities and social sciences and this is why we warmly welcome the arrival of DFG in Japan. First of all let me make some general remarks concerning the tremendous surplus we gain as Germans when doing joint research projects in the humanities with Japan. Prof. Ishida will then continue by introducing to you some very concrete experiences from our joint graduate school on civil society in Germany and Japan.

In the field of humanities and social sciences many efforts have been made in the past to promote German-Japanese academic exchange by the support of partnership agreements between universities. These programs offer a strong incentive for young students in both countries to study in Japan resp. Germany. It can be considered to be the foundation for the rise of the next generation of German-Japanese

academic cooperation. In the field of graduate and post graduate studies, scholarships are available to promote individual research in Japan. However, the sustainability of individual exchange programs is not easy to evaluate. It is undeniable that on the individual level, to study abroad is (a necessary) part of the general qualification nowadays. Moreover, such programs offer a tremendous surplus for individual career-making.

But to improve the sustainability of German-Japanese cooperation for the future, we need an academic infrastructure for securing high quality research and it is our conviction that joint graduate schools have the capacity to provide us with a new quality of scientific cooperation and intellectual exchange.

I would like to draw your attention to three aspects of such a new quality:

First: Verifying theoretical approaches by extending the empirical basis

Second: Extending comparative research by bringing Japan into focus

Third: Improving scientific precision by semantic sensitivity

**First: Verifying theoretical approaches by extending the empirical basis**

Unlike in science, research in the humanities is deeply related to the cultural context of both the researcher and the research objective. We develop our research agenda in response to individual, national or

global debates, but in any case our research design, the empirical base we refer to, is strongly shaped by specific historical, political, and cultural contexts and their linguistic representations. This means that our basic theoretical assumptions are deeply related to time and context, and can not be considered to serve as a universal scientific tool. This implies that we are required to be aware of the so-called Eurocentrism in theory building. It has become the state of the art in humanities and in social sciences to take the western origins of the majority of leading theoretical approaches into consideration. It has become the academic standard to refrain from naive generalizations of de-facto European historical wisdom and of basic Western concepts. However, the extension of non-western references remains rather rare. Cooperation with Japanese researchers and the integration of the Japanese case offers opportunities for exploring the otherness in both empirical and theoretical perspective. It offers chances for controlling European concepts and theories and the refinement of theoretical knowledge. I give you one example from our graduate school: in Europe the rise of citizenship was closely connected with the right for political representation. In Japan since the 17<sup>th</sup> century the lowest strata of society, namely the merchants or shônin constituted a public sphere which became the core of a bourgeois culture. This example leads us to the problem whether or not we can employ the notion or civil society to Japan of late Tokugawa era. Like Ikegami we could employ westerns theories and then consequently deny the existence of a civil society in Japan. However we decided to move on to modifying

the theories. The example therefore demonstrates that extending the empirical basis offers opportunities not only to verify theories but to extend them.

## **Second: Enriching comparative research by bringing Japan into focus**

The refinement of research in the humanities and in social sciences by employing a comparative perspective may be called the state of the art today. However, extending comparative research to Japan has been rare until now. According to the German historian Osterhammel, Japan is the most attractive non-Western society for Germans to improve the level of comparative research. Both countries share some milestones in their modern history like the sprouts of democracy in the 1920s, self-isolation from the international community, defeat and revival under the allied umbrella and the rise as leading economic powers since then. At the same time, both countries belong to different cultural environments, namely the European world dominated by Christianity, and the tradition of Buddhism and Shintoism which has shaped Japanese society. Today Japan and Germany have plenty of fields of shared interest. During the “German year in Japan“ in 2005, environmental policies in both countries were on the agenda of scientific debate. Other fields of common interest in recent years have been the aging society or civil society, which we have taken up as our guiding theme. The similarities on the one side,

but contrasts concerning the cultural and religious frame on the other, offer exciting fields of comparative research for all fields of humanities and social sciences. In our graduate school Germans and Japanese work together from history and social sciences with the focus on either Japan or Germany. This means that Germans work on Germany, but on Japan as well and vice versa. This comparative constellation offers the extension of perspectives by contrasting the German analysis of German and Japanese society with the Japanese view and vice versa. By this comparison becomes more complex, but more qualified by combining the various perspectives.

I come to the third aspect of academic surplus by German-Japanese graduate schools.

### **Third: Improving scientific precision by semantic sensitivity**

Unlike in science where the lingua franca is English, in humanities language matters. There are fields of research and approaches which may be sufficiently explored by mixed German- Japanese research teams using English only. Short-term get-togethers at conferences, for instance, which serve information exchange, definitely should rely on English as the common language. However, when it comes to medium to long term cooperation, language becomes crucial not only for managing daily issues, but for the quality of scientific cooperation as well. To give you one example, in our case a key term is the Japanese term “shimin“. “Shimin” is to be translated into English as “citizen“. However, the English term “citizen“ has the connotation of

“kokumin” or “Staatsbürger“ in German. It does not have the connotation of being well-educated and economically well off like the German “Bürger“. Moreover, it excludes the German notion of “Bürgerlichkeit“ which is historically deeply intertwined with civil society or “bürgerliche Gesellschaft“ which refers to culture and lifestyle. So whereas we distinguish in German between “bürgerliche Gesellschaft“ and “Bürgergesellschaft“, English lack such a differentiation. What makes the story even more complicated is that many key words from humanities and social studies originally do not exist in Japanese, but were introduced as direct translations from Germany, France or Great Britain and the respective scientific fields like law, history, philosophy. To reflect the historical context of European key terms and the process of adaptation and assimilation into the Japanese context is crucial for the precise clarification of what we are discussing and working on.

As long as international comparison means to describe the other society, cooperation may work in English and may offer some insights concerning the other country. However, when it comes to analyzing differences, language matters. To give you one example: since 1998 the term “civil society” is used in Japan to describe the flourishing of NPOs. Until then the term was not used even though since the 1960ies the society experienced a well- established middle class life style, social movements and local citizens engagement. This means that we deal with phenomena, but do not find terms to describe them,

we have to deal with the same institutions, but different functions, and we have to deal with different basic concepts, but similar terms.

The semantic of key terms is deeply related to theory-building. Joint research offers the opportunity to develop semantic precision. Using the language of the country we are working on, besides English, is not only a requirement for a serious analysis but corresponds to the recent requirements in historical and social scientific research of extending Western concepts by contrasting them with Non-Western societies.

In our graduate school we have therefore decided to accept English as a door-opener, but work on language proficiency as part of the scientific qualification at the school. This means that we invite speakers who are able to communicate only in English, but in the day to day research process we offer language courses and language practice both in Japanese and in German in order to deepen the semantic sensitivity.

We are convinced that this qualification makes our students unique and guarantees them to be taken seriously in the academic community. I am sure that for many of you adding German and Japanese to English is not acceptable. However, to learn Japanese is not harder for Germans than to learn German for Japanese. A globalised world does not automatically imply to reduce our scientific communication to English, but to extend our proficiency to other languages like Japanese.

To conclude: verifying of theoretical foundations, extension of knowledge by comparison and improvement of scientific quality by semantic precision are the most far-reaching new opportunities to produce a new scientific quality in the humanities and in social sciences by joint graduate schools. Graduate schools integrate training in intercultural joint research and serves as a training ground for international cooperation.

We will illustrate this very optimistic view by some insights into our experiences.

**Formation and Change of Civil Society in Germany and Japan:  
Experiences from a German-Japanese Graduate School in the  
Humanities (Teil Ishida):**