

(Part 2)

Formation and Change of Civil Society in Germany and Japan: Experiences from a German-Japanese Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Yuji Ishida

[1]

Let me begin my talk with an anecdote about how we came to apply for this challenging joint venture. It was in the autumn of 2004 when our colleagues at the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg organized a German-Japanese workshop for students from various disciplines. The background of the workshop was the increasing interest in the historical problems faced by Germany and Japan. The Japanese participants, most of whom were graduate students from the University of Tokyo, were deeply impressed by the open-minded discussion with German students and scholars, who took them on guided tours around historical sites like the former concentration camp of Buchenwald. These experiences made both sets of students realize the many issues they had in common. The students' experiences motivated us, professors in Halle and Tokyo, to resume contact with each other. Consequently, a second workshop was conducted in the summer of 2005 under the auspices of the German and European Center of the University of Tokyo, at the Hachioji Seminar House in Tokyo. The subject of the conference was "Overcoming the Past— A comparison of Germany and Japan after 1945." Over twenty-five graduate students and professors from Halle and Tokyo gathered for a week long conference with guests from various fields of the Japanese civil society.

[2]

Because of these positive experiences and the strong friendship we had developed with each other, we applied together for this joint venture. The concept of the joint graduate school seemed and still seems extremely promising to us because it can benefit our postgraduate students in many ways—it will not only give them financial assistance to study in Germany, but it will also result in the setting up of unprecedentedly instructive programs. Imagine how wonderful it would be if our PhD candidates got the opportunity to advance their individual researches under the common supervision of German and Japanese professors! Furthermore, we were and are firmly convinced of the prospects of the idea proposed by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) to integrate the graduate school programs into the forefront research project.

In order to promote intercultural understanding and to enhance competence in performing interdisciplinary research, we have established a group of twelve professors or academic advisors from the fields of history, philosophy, political science, sociology in Halle and Tokyo. Along with this group, we also have included German specialists on modern Japan and Japanese specialists on modern Germany.

[3]

“The formation and change of civil society in Germany and Japan” is an umbrella project with far reaching effects on the academia in both countries. It firmly merges with the joint graduate school. The enrolled PhD candidates on both sides are required to develop their academic interest and extend their horizons in accordance with this research project.

I will now explain the crux of our research project.

One of the most fundamental questions we are pursuing is how diverse and similar structures and operating patterns of civil society have emerged in Germany and Japan. We are using a comparative method and intend to clarify the specific formation process of the civil society in both countries since the late nineteenth century until today. The bringing together of Germany and Japan within the conceptual scheme of civil society promises new insights into the characteristics of the countries’ social developments in the twentieth century, since both countries, implicitly or explicitly, formulated “civil society” as a normative goal and developed it as social practice after 1945. Today, they feature amongst the most leading industrialized nations and possess a well-established and steady democratic system. However, civil society is grounded on different historical and sociocultural traditions and is shaped by different political and institutional environments.

In order to approach this key question and to determine the factors responsible for the common and different features of the two countries, we intend to focus on the following five sub-themes, under the guidance of professors from both universities:

1. Semantics and discourse analysis of cardinal concepts regarding civil society:
(Prof. Hettling, Prof. Bluhm, and Prof. Yamawaki)

Under this topic, the meaning of the main concepts, namely, “Bürger,” “Staatsbürger,” “Untertan,” “Volk,” and “Nation” will be examined in reference to Japanese concepts like *shimin*, *komin*, *shinmin*, *kokumin*, *minzoku*, *kokka*, etc.

The broad scope and diverse meanings of these concepts will also be systematically scrutinized.

2. Analysis of the changing relations between state and society:
(Prof. Mitani, Prof. Tonomura, and Prof. Hettling)

Here, we discuss the pivotal question, namely, the changing institutional and informal framework for negotiating processes in terms of the relations between the state and society. The development of the “public sphere” in Japan will be analyzed in reference to the German case. The Hegelian dichotomy will be reconsidered by conducting an enquiry into the extent to which the relations are antagonistic or harmonious.

3. Analysis of the actors that constitute civil society:
(Prof. Foljanty and Prof. Kawakita)

Various activities carried out by many different agents of civil society and the social and historical background of their developments will be empirically investigated. Organizations like NPOs, NGOs, associations, and voluntary groups, will be focused on.

4. Civil society in transnational relations:
(Prof. Foljanty, Prof. Müller, and Prof. Ishida)

Under this sub-topic, the interdependencies between the development of civil society on the one hand and its relations with its neighbors on the other will be reflected upon. The changing formation of the civil society beyond national borders in Europe and East Asian will be contrastively analyzed.

5. Counter ideas and counter movements against civil society
(Prof. Ishida and Prof. Wagner)

Here, we will point out that the concept of the civil society has constantly been harshly attacked by opposing ideas and movements. Various kinds of counter drafts (both in the past and present) denying the values of civil society will be examined.

【4】

The enrolled graduate students work on a dissertation theme which relates to one or two of these sub-themes. So while they have their own interests, they are expected to link them to each other’s topics and to the broader academic discourse on civil society, one of the hottest topics in the field of humanities and social

sciences. This gives students opportunities to build a common understanding of the theoretical framework to which they can refer. The overlapping of theoretical and empirical approaches and the shared reference to the umbrella project guarantees a basis for peer discussions as well as for debates during the seminars and colloquia.

The training system of the joint graduate school contains not only regular courses and seminars, but also a six- or seven-day workshop with a symposium called “academy.” The academy will be organized twice a year. So far we have it has been organized four times: in October 2007 in Halle, in March 2008 in Tokyo, in October 2008 in Halle, and in March 2009 in Tokyo.

Let me cite an example from the most recent academy. The main topics were semantics and the relations between the state and the society. After an introductory lecture by Prof. Hettling, we set up six mixed working groups, followed by peer discussions using historical materials like excerpts from German and Japanese lexica of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the second half of the academy, we examined several texts from the historical constitutions of both countries.

During the course of the academy, some Japanese PhD candidates were given an opportunity to present their dissertation projects in German and some German candidates were given a chance to present their dissertations in Japanese. The professors were greatly impressed by the students’ fluency in the other language, and professors from both sides zealously gave the students instructive advice. Out of thirty dissertation projects by our candidates, I will present just five.

- Fritz Bauer and the liberalization of west German society
- German identity and the nationality law of 1913
- Holocaust survivors in post-war German society
- Historical problems and solidarity—Civil society network beyond national borders in the East Asian countries
- Engagement in local integration initiatives in Germany and Japan
- The postwar peace movements in Germany and Japan

【5】

Parallel to the graduate school programs, we are also advancing the umbrella project. The interim result has been already presented at an open symposia held

on the occasion of the academy. Having attracted considerable attention in the academia, our symposium now serves as a pivot of the research circle studying civil society. Now, we are preparing working papers in Halle and a four-volume series titled “New Perspective on Modern Germany.” Some of the dissertations of our postgraduates will be added to the publications.

I will now conclude the presentation.

Behind us, we have a year and a half of stimulating discussions, learnings from each other, improved mutual understanding and new accumulated experiences in co-teaching and co-supervision. We are now convinced that the joint graduate school will bear rich fruit in the very near future.

The expected contributions of the joint graduate school are as follows:

It will contribute to the internationalization of research on civil society, enable the systematic examination of the theoretical European concepts within a non-European case study, and provide the grounds to reconsider Japanese and German modern history.

As for the international research cooperation, it will help establish a new model of bi-national co-supervision and co-teaching system for the graduate schools in Germany and Japan.

For the postgraduates enrolled in the joint school, the joint school has developed attractive programs of matchless merits, since it offers the students a unique chance to do research in a demanding intercultural environment and to practice and enhance their intercultural communication abilities.

As supervisors, we regularly meet twice a year to practice co-teaching and co-supervision. Editing common teaching materials is also one of our shared tasks.

What lies before us?

Much work!

The most significant task will probably be to work on our universities to start a double degree for our doctoral students. This will take time. This year, we will start with a joint examination process with a mixed team of academic evaluators (Gutachtern).

Thank you for your attention!