

German-Japanese Society for Social Sciences (GJSSS) and the German JSPS Club

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Mutual membership with JSPS Club

First of all, we express our best congratulations for the 20th anniversary of the German JSPS Club.

In the decades 1970 and 1980 the interest in the Japanese society, culture, and economy has been growing. On this basis, the German-Japanese Society for Social Sciences, GJSSS (Deutsch-Japanische Gesellschaft für Sozialwissenschaften) has been founded in 1989 in Tokyo, thus being just five years older than the German JSPS Alumni Association, the JSPS Club. In some aspects, the GJSSS can be seen as the sister organization of the JSPS Club. Both institutions aim to strengthen the scientific exchange between Japan and Germany. Similar to the JSPS Club, the specialty of the GJSSS meetings is that scholars from Japan and Germany come together for exchanging their experience, memories, ongoing research, and discussing a specific topic of mutual interest during the bi-annual meetings. The specialty of the JSPS Club rather is that its members consist of alumni, sharing the experience of having been invited to a research visit in Japan or Germany. A difference is that the JSPS Club consists of members from all disciplines, while members of the GJSSS usually represent the social sciences in a broader sense, including sociology, psychology, economy, philosophy, geography, law and the like; thus the major focus is on social science problems. In the GJSSS, natural science and medical science is not represented while scholars from these disciplines constitute the majority of members in the JSPS Club and also in the German Humboldt Society.

We owe the development of the GJSSS indirectly to a small German foundation, the Werner Reimers Stiftung in Bad Homburg.

The founder, Werner Reimers, was born in Yokohama. For most of his young adulthood – during the First World War until about 1920 – he has been living in Japan. Later, as successful entrepreneur, he has initiated the foundation of the Werner Reimers Stiftung (WRS). His aim was to strengthen studies in human science focusing on Japan and East Asia. This general goal has been the motivation for the scientific board of the WRS in the beginning of 1980 to establish a research group on social, human, and cultural aspects of Japan. This research group consisted of an equal number of Japanese and German scholars. The general topic was to study socialization in Japan and Germany as key issue for the development in both cultures.

A series of colloquia were conducted taking turns in Japan and in Germany. In the end, in 1989, some members decided to continue this fruitful exchange under a more sustainable perspective. An independent scientific society was established where a similar number of German and Japanese scientists wanted to come together for mutual exchange. The respective meetings were organized by also taking turns in Japan and in Germany.

Since 1989, 12 meetings took place (the 13th is planned for 2015). These meetings, each with a different thematic focus, have been organized and attended by German and Japanese members. In the context of the GJSSS joint research topics were pursued by Japanese and by German scholars in social sciences. These topics were based on the observation of phenomena and problems of socio-cultural changes in both countries and their respective East Asian and European contexts. The analysis of these problems has usually underlined theoretical and methodological deficits of the respective disciplines. These were fruitfully taken up in constructive discussions which have usually ended with interesting results. This can be seen in the publications and proceedings from the meetings (for example, Kornadt & Trommsdorff, 1993; Kusune, Nishijima, & Adachi, 2007; Teichler & Trommsdorff, 2002) (see reviews by Kornadt, 2015; Trommsdorff, 2014: www.psychologie.uni-konstanz.de/trommsdorff/deutsch-japanische-gesellschaft-fuer-sozialwissenschaften-gjsss/). These meetings and the respective publications document the successful cooperation and scientific exchange of the Japanese and German scholars.

In regard to the anniversary of the JSPS Club, the important function of the JSPS for our society, the GJSSS, has to be mentioned. Presumably, the GJSSS could not have come into existence without the JSPS previously supporting various members. For example, the organizer of the above mentioned Reimers-Colloquia could refer to his early research experience in Japan based on a JSPS fellowship. He then became one of the founding members of the GJSSS. Other founding members were Japanese colleagues who had been invited to German universities several times due to support by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation also became founding members of the GJSSS. In the following years, German members of the GJSSS were supported by the JSPS as fellows at Japanese universities. Also, Japanese members were invited for fellowships at German universities, supported by various German institutions. Several funding agencies and activities of the JSPS, of the JSPS Club as well as of other Japanese and German institutions have contributed to this fruitful exchange between Japanese and German members of the GJSSS (e.g., governmental programs, exchange programs between Japanese and German universities, programs of the AvH Foundation, the DFG, the DAAD, the Volkswagen Foundation, the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo). Accordingly, a long-lasting cooperation between German and Japanese scholars was possible contributing to the productive development of the GJSSS which recently has become an organizational member and cooperating partner of the JSPS Club.

Japanese and German scholars could extend their scientific and cultural experiences in the respective other country. For social scientists such expansion of experience in the respective other culture is of special importance. For this discipline, topics, research questions, methods, and interpretation of data are often biased from an ethnocentric perspective. Without a solid understanding of the culture-specific characteristics (in the respective other culture, and also in the own culture, Japan or Germany) it is hardly possible to achieve valid knowledge about the conditions of social, cultural, economic and psychological phenomenon in Germany and Japan. These important preconditions can be built up through scientific exchange, by research visits in the respec-

tive other country, and moreover, through a long lasting effort to include the perspective of the respectively other culture. Here, the fellows and the activities of the JSPS Club are of major importance since they allow former fellows to meet regularly, and to exchange their experience and research in Japan beyond their own disciplinary boundaries.

The significant success of the JSPS Club's activities during the last two decades is demonstrated by a very special achievement: The general goal of trans-disciplinary research can and has become a motivating scientific reality.

During the last two decades, a fruitful cooperation between the JSPS Club and the GJSSS has been initiated increasing the number of members in social and human science in the JSPS Club. This should contribute to foster the German-Japanese scientific exchange and a deeper understanding of the Japanese society and culture.

Such goals are even more important at present since in the moment, the interest in Japan has been decreasing while at the same time it has been increasing for China. This can be seen in the decrease of Japan study institutes and their integration in East-Asian Centers. However, this change in interests has given way to a more pronounced acknowledgment of the wider regional contexts: Japan as part of the east Asian region, and Germany as part of Europe.

Therefore, of special interest are presently phenomena and questions which are of increasing relevance in the Asian and European context, e.g., demographic changes; unforeseen risks and crises in social, ecological, and political domains; relevance of trust as condition for the functioning of institutions and interpersonal relations; conditions and cultural meaning of quality of life in changing societies.

The JSPS Club and the GJSSS have initiated several activities for dealing with such questions in order to allow for a better understanding of the shared problems in the Asian and in the European contexts, and to allow for developing strategies for reasonable solutions of these problems.

We are wishing the JSPS Club further success and support in the pursuit of these goals hoping for further cooperation with the JSPS Club.

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