

## Trust and Mistrust in Contemporary Japan

VSJF Annual Conference 2014, Japanese-German Center Berlin, 21.–23. November 2014

The 2014 annual conference of the German Association for Social Science Research on Japan (VSJF) was dedicated to the topic of “Trust and Mistrust in Contemporary Japan”. The conference was organized by Dr. Kerstin Lukner (University of Duisburg-Essen) and Dr. Alexandra Sakaki (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik) and was supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), the Robert Bosch Stiftung, and the German-Japanese Center Berlin (JDZB).

Trust has become a keyword in many public debates and academic discourses. Most social scientists agree that trust plays a key role in long-term social relations, fostering cooperation and thereby contributing to the development of a prosperous society. As the basis of social relations, trust is fragile and must thus continuously be built and rebuilt.

In the case of Japan, the fragility of trust became particularly evident following the March 11, 2011, triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami, nuclear meltdown), when the public’s trust in government institutions dropped dramatically due to what was perceived as poor crisis management. But even before the disaster, numerous studies found that the level of trust Japanese show towards other people and society is rather low when compared to other countries. The goal of the VSJF Annual Conference 2014 was thus to assess the role trust plays in Japanese society today, taking a cross-disciplinary approach. In four sequential panels, international experts on Japan from various disciplines, including sociology, political science, and economics, discussed recent developments in relation to the notion of trust. Speakers included renowned international scholars such as Daniel Aldrich, Thomas Berger and Yuji Genda as well as young German academics like Steffen Heinrich and Carola Hommerich.

Renowned trust scholar and keynote speaker Toshio Yamagishi opened the conference with general reflections on the role of trust in Japanese society. He explained how the preference for strong relational ties in Japanese collectivist society affects the ability to develop general trust. Whereas a preference for weak relational ties forces society to develop general trust as a bridging basis for social interaction, in societies with strong relational ties this bridging function gets replaced by a bonding one, building on assurance instead of trust. In the latter case, people feel assured and see risks controlled when interacting within the known and long-lasting networks. However, this naturally entails a low level of general trust or even mistrust towards the external unknown and explains the high sensitivity of Japanese society to change, meaning instability, uncertainty and therefore high risk.

Building on this conceptual basis, conference speakers presented illuminating empirical findings, providing insights into the role trust plays in Japanese society. A lasting impression from all presentations is that indeed Japanese society, politics and economics are overall characterized by mistrust today – mistrust among members of society, between voters and government, among political elites and among neighboring countries. While some speakers concentrated more on the reasons for deteriorating trust, others elaborated on the consequences of this development.

In terms of the former, Gabriele Vogt for example cautioned that the central government’s failing approaches to integrate migrants into public and political life are one source of mistrust within an increasingly multicultural society. Based on election data, Ellis Krauss, Kuniaki Nemoto and Robert Pekkanen argued that political trust in Japan was negatively affected by the government performance of the Democratic Party of Japan from 2009 to 2012 as well as a perceived lack of political influence among Japanese voters. As another example, Cornelia Reiher showed how current and past mismanagement of food safety regulators re-

sulted in an exceptionally low level of consumers' trust in these governmental institutions. To sum up, these presentations showed how societal developments such as migration, as well as dwindling assurance due to bad performance, mismanagement or controversial behavior lead to an increasing trust challenge for Japanese society.

The consequences of deteriorating trust were the other main focus of presentations. For example, Jeffrey Broadbent concluded that in the Japanese labor policy field, the vertical structure of closed groupism with vertical social control and low level of generalized trust as core elements results in the rejection of innovation. Consistently, all three speakers of the third panel on economic developments – Franz Waldenberger, Saori Katada, and Richard Katz – revealed high economic costs as a consequence of the low levels of trust. For instance, corporations that stick to a well-established stakeholder system of long-term relations lack the ability to fully trust actors outside this system. This comes at the expense of innovation aimed at internationalization, growth and legal adjustment. In their presentation on the nuclear energy sector, Alexandra Sakaki and Kerstin Lukner showed that even though the government took far reaching reforms in terms of oversight institutions and safety standards after the Fukushima catastrophe, once public trust has been lost, it proves hard to be reestablished, therefore placing a long-lasting obstacle to government action.

In sum, it became clear that trust has an enabling nature, whereas mistrust places high obstacles to cope with changes and challenges to actors at the societal, economic, political or individual level. This fits Yamagishi's depiction of general trust as encouraging risk taking and thus opening up new opportunities for action.

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## Exploring Culture and Behavior by Economic and Psychological Experiments

Association for Cross-Cultural Experimental Economic Research (ACCER), IN-EAST Institute of East Asian Studies, University of Duisburg-Essen, 25.–26. November 2014

The 5th ACCER workshop on “Exploring Culture and Behavior by Economic and Psychological Experiments” was hosted by the DFG Research Training Group 1613 “Risk and East Asia” and the IN-EAST School of Advanced Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen.

While experimental methods are well-established in the fields of social and cultural psychology for several decades already, experimental economic research only recently integrated as a distinguished discipline. As only few behavioral economists engage in cross-cultural comparisons of decision making processes so far, the ACCER workshop series represents a unique platform for an interdisciplinary exchange of knowledge and cooperation.

The workshop consisted of two keynote lectures, nine contributed paper presentations and eight poster presentations. The first keynote lecture was given by Professor Toshio Yamagishi (Hitotsubashi University, Japan) under the title “Cultural Differences in Beliefs and Preferences.” He introduced the concept of so-called behavioral default strategies that are automatically used in order to adapt to rules and norms that exist in our social environment. During his lecture, Professor Yamagishi presented the results from a number of his publications that impressively demonstrate the importance of cultural differences not only in behavior, but especially in the beliefs and preferences that are responsible for our actions. The second keynote lecture was given by Professor Simon Gächter (University of Nottingham, UK) on “The Rule of Law and Efficient Cooperation across Cultures.” As one of the most renowned ex-