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Comparing Social Policies: The Long-term Care Insurance as a Case

Abstract

In the field of long-term care insurance looking at both Germany's and Japan's approach means not only to compare policies but to analyze processes of translation between political fields as Germany's system has obviously influenced Japan's decisions. On a regional level, the introduction of the long-term care insurance has led to anxieties as well as euphoria in Japan. While the insurance was welcomed as a step towards more regional political independence, local politics and specialists did not feel ready for some of the changes. One way to gain a better understanding of the new system was to learn more about the German system. As the example Fukuoka shows, bureaucracies and specialists with different backgrounds of knowledge did discuss the German example on different levels, which stipulated various processes of contextual translation that helped to develop approaches to specific problems. Gregory Kasza's concept of diffusion, which seeks to explain the similarities between different welfare states, including Japan, can therefore be extended to include the notion of translation.

Introduction

Since the second half of the last century, Japan has rapidly expanded economically. Today, despite two financial crises within two decades, the country remains one of the world's three most powerful economic powerhouses. This remarkable level of success has raised questions about the conditions that preceded it. Especially because Japan is an Asian country, making its classification as a "Western" nation seem odd, the country has been studied thoroughly. But as an outsider, Japan was always seen either as a blueprint for the modernization of non-Western countries or as an exception to be explained. Over the last two decades, a changing world has cooled discussion of Japan's special character, and other countries have entered the picture. China or India are now considered likely replacements for the struggling Japanese, but even as the phenomenon of Non-Western modernization has spread, the questions surrounding the conditions that lead to it remain.

Given this background, it is no surprise that scrutiny of Japan's success has long been built around a core of comparisons between that country and the West. After all, modernity has been seen as a realm of the West, and the success of Japan in achieving modernity as defined by economic growth, political integration and lifestyle changes did not lead to this idea being rethought but to Japan being classified as part of the Western world. Despite this inclusion, Japan's status has remained that of the "other", a situation that allowed for comparisons and a better understanding of the conditions preceding modernity. Other states, such as third world countries, could not have served as such interesting objects of comparison, as the extent to which they lag behind the West precludes their serving as alter-others.

The notion of “development” or “progress” invoked here is another part of the problem. Economic comparisons arguing in these terms have been formulated within the paradigm of modernity. One common topic of comparison has been Japanese social policy, which was often seen as lagging behind the western standard.¹ By keeping standards of social welfare deliberately low, it was argued, Japan was able to cut costs and gain an unfair market advantage. On the other hand, the strong involvement of companies in providing welfare was acknowledged and raised again questions as to whether the concept of “Japan Inc.” as a big family was the ideal model for success.

Comparisons of Japan’s and western social policies thus have some tradition, albeit to a limited extent. But this tradition has been riddled with theoretical problems and blind spots. Since the main objective was to point out the differences in systems and explain the consequences, a methodological nationalism was introduced to produce results.² Japan, and in reversal Western countries, were conceptualized as entities closed off from each other. Mutual learning or influence was considered only for limited historical time periods. For the Meiji Era as well as for US occupation after WWII, learning effects on the Japanese side were conceded, but often enough, culturalist arguments eradicated even these allusions to entanglements³ of knowledge.

¹ Terms such as “development”, “progress” or “lagging behind” are often used to imply a temporal lag between the West and Non-Western countries. Johannes Fabian (1983) has deconstructed this dichotomization along spatial and temporal categories in his book *Time and the other. How anthropology makes its object*.

² Cf. Beck, Ulrich and Edgar Grande (2006): *Cosmopolitan Europe*, 174.

³ Entanglement is a term introduced by Conrad and Shalini which expresses very well interdependences on political, social and semantical levels (Conrad, Sebastian and Randeria Shalini (2002): *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* [Beyond eurocentrism. Postcolonial perspectives in historical and cultural studies]).

However, comparisons of welfare systems that fail to acknowledge that systems learn from each other and are deeply entangled are no longer sustainable, especially in cases such as that of long-term care insurance in Japan. Introduced in 2000, it was strongly influenced by the German example, which was in turn derived partly from the example of the Dutch. Welfare systems are not stand-alone projects owing their shape only to the culture they are placed in. This entanglement of systems has to be described and analyzed theoretically. In the following I therefore want to employ data gathered in a fieldwork project during the first two years after the introduction of long-term care insurance to formulate ideas about how knowledge crossing the borders between welfare systems circulated in Japan. To do this, I will consider methodological nationalism in more detail, first concentrating mainly on Gøsta Esping-Andersen and his book about the “three worlds of welfare.”⁴ While this book is now nearly two decades old, it is still inspiring new culturalist theories related to the comparison of welfare systems in Japan. Gregory Kasza has written an excellent study of the development of Japanese welfare, which is based on the ideas presented by Esping-Anderson and refutes many culturalist arguments. But Kasza offers no convincing theory of how knowledge moves between systems.⁵ At this point, the observations of the previously mentioned fieldwork will be introduced to form a clear picture of translation as a major factor. Knowledge and its translation during the process of introducing the new insurance will be analyzed on multiple levels. Firstly, the insurance itself is a product of translational and relational processes. Additionally, the formation of regional and

⁴ See Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1991): *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*.

⁵ Cf. Kasza, Gregory James (2006): *One world of welfare: Japan in comparative perspective*. *Cornell studies in political economy*.

local knowledge about the new system depended on translation. Yet, as I will try to show in the end, translations can fail and cause disturbance and ambiguities, which ultimately can be seen to be productive in forming knowledge, as well, and should not be seen as simple cases of misunderstanding.

Theories of Comparing Social Welfare

Comparing social policies has been a fruitful field of analysis in recent decades, but in my eyes it has some serious shortcomings. Especially in area studies such as East Asian Studies, or *Japanologie*, the even more limited German terminology, this sort of approach has often led to a kind of double self-exotification. Japan has so often been presented as a special case with special rules – even Esping-Andersen made this point⁶ – that it has led East-Asian Studies to use this special case as self-legitimatory repository for academic auto-exotification. In the end, container-like images of a closed culture with a depending social-system have been created.

This only mirrors the situation of the much broader stream of comparative analysis in Japan, which has shown the same strong tendency to define its case as special. Since Gøsta Esping-Andersen has been widely read the last decades in Japanese welfare studies, this tendency has gained even more ground. While many Japanese researchers have realized the problematic stance of *nihonjinron* (Japanese discourse) as a genre of auto-orientalism, the Scandinavian capacity gave new credibility for setting Japan's case apart.

⁶ Cf. Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1997): Hybrid or unique? The Japanese welfare state between Europe and America, 180f.

Esping-Andersen's groundbreaking works⁷ have certainly deepened the tendency toward Japanese auto-orientalism in welfare studies, not so much because he himself set up a theoretical framework furthering the container view, but because his theories can be easily misread. His book *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, published first in 1990, which can surely be called the bible of comparative welfare-state analysis, treats the national welfare regimes that are its objects as distinct entities not connected to each other for analytical reasons. To allow cross-sectional quantitative analysis, 18 countries are modelled as auto-genetic welfare regimes which can be clustered but do not relate to each other beyond that. Though three types of welfare-regimes – liberal, conservative and social-democratic – are analyzed in their genetic development since the mid-19th century, Esping-Andersen nowhere explains how countries within these regimes exchange information and come to resemble each other. Because the regimes cluster geographically or connect historically, the liberal centred in the Anglo-American sphere, the conservative in Central Europe and the social-democratic in Scandinavian countries, it seems implicitly obvious that there has been a regional consensus based on exchange of information. But this only deepens the danger of misinterpreting Esping-Andersen's comparison of welfare regimes. A geographically based categorization reminiscent of Huntington's⁸ rightfully much-criticized *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* comes to mind.

⁷ Cf. Esping-Andersen (1991), Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (Ed.) (1996): *Welfare states in transition. National adaptations in global economies* and Esping-Andersen (1997).

⁸ Cf. Huntington, Samuel P. (1996): *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*.

Japan is treated in passing by Esping-Andersen in the “Three worlds”. But the analysis is highly superficial even keeping in mind Esping-Andersen’s warning that he has to work with oversimplification in order to get the big picture.⁹ In the first part of *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, Japan is clustered mostly with countries like Germany, Italy, France or Finland, which are categorized as conservative and etatist.¹⁰ As a historical explanation, Catholicism is cited along with the fascist past of some of these countries.¹¹ While Japan’s case might be explained by the fascist argument, Catholicism is surely no reason for its welfare regime. In other words, Esping-Andersen ignores Japan to make a point for the rest of the cluster. Other parts of the book cut out Japan completely though it might have been an interesting case for comparison. When discussing full employment, which was only maintained in Scandinavian countries following the 1970s oil shocks, Japan would have been the obvious exception. Seven years after his initial treatment, Esping-Andersen took up the case of Japan more thoroughly in a paper claiming that the country should not be classified at all yet because “it is arguably the case that the Japanese welfare system is still in the process of evolution”.¹²

This conclusion was not very convincing and the lacuna in argumentation has thus incited Japanese researches to develop their own category for Japan and/or Asia generally within Esping-Andersen’s framework, an effort which in a sense resembles similar undertakings by their western colleagues.¹³ In applying geographical logic and us-

⁹ Cf. Esping-Anderson (1991), 2.

¹⁰ See for example Esping-Anderson (1991), 52.

¹¹ Ibid., 53.

¹² Cf. Esping-Andersen (1997), 187.

¹³ Cf. Goodman, Roger and Ito Peng (1996): *The East Asian welfare states. Peripatetic learning, adaptive change and nation-building.*

ing Esping-Andersen's strong leaning toward historical-genetic analysis, Japan and/or Asia is constructed as its own, fourth world of welfare. The undertaking is lavishly funded by state agencies, which have long been on the side of auto-orientalism with regard to welfare. Furthermore, the Asian world of welfare is not only constructed around Esping-Andersen's logic but also built on Weberian theses. Popular readings of Weber have long used the nexus of religion and economy to claim that Japan constitutes a case of its own with a strong tradition of indigenous development of modern capitalism.¹⁴ In their analysis of welfare states, these readings ultimately arrive at conclusions stressing the Confucian or Buddhist influence in the east.¹⁵ Mixed with Esping-Andersen's worlds of welfare capitalism, the auto-orientalist cocktail tends to get theoretically poisonous as it nears itself to short-sighted categorizations of the world in Huntington-like style.

Of course, political decisions in the field of welfare are often made at a national level, and political discourses tend to legitimize themselves by means of culturalistic arguments. Therefore, political analysis and comparison have to deal with politicians' culturalistic arguments. The idea of a Japanese welfare society based on traditional family values, coined in the late 1970s, is but one example of this, and has been criticized and deconstructed quite convincingly a number of times.¹⁶ But one has to go further than that. As Gregory Kasza has

¹⁴ Cf. Bellah, Robert N. (1957): *Tokugawa religion. The values of pre-industrial Japan*.

¹⁵ Cf. Esping-Andersen (1997), 181 and Rieger, Elmar and Stephan Leibfried (2004): *Kultur versus Globalisierung. Sozialpolitische Theologie in Konfuzianismus und Christentum* [Culture versus globalisation. Socio-political theology in Confucianism and Christianity].

¹⁶ Cf. Campbell, John Creighton (1992): *How policies change. The Japanese government and the ageing society*, 220, and Takahashi, Mutsuko (1997): *The emergence of welfare society in Japan*, 142–166.

shown in 2006 in his excellent book *One world of welfare: Japan in comparative perspectives*, Japan is not an extraordinary case when compared to other nations of the so-called Western world. Hence, all claims that Japan's welfare is exceptional can ultimately be disregarded. Roger Goodman, Gordon White and Huck-ju Kwon have termed such theories "welfare-orientalism"¹⁷, linking them to Edward Said's description of orientalism¹⁸. In most areas where welfare states normally provide insurance, such as occupational accidents, health, or unemployment, Japan is average or has introduced some of the central elements of welfare rather earlier than later, considering its general economical development. Kasza refutes popular prejudices which present Japan as a late-comer in terms of developing a welfare state. He concludes:

We have established that Japan was early or average in the timing of all its first welfare policies [...] and that its welfare spending has not differed sharply from that of other countries at comparable levels of economical development and population age.¹⁹

He also discards culturalistic approaches as misleading when looking at the contents and semantics of Japanese welfare. Kasza thus strongly questions Esping-Andersen's models, leading to the question of why Japan has followed typical lines of development for its welfare-state. Esping-Andersen's answer comes down to pointing out structural similarities which have shaped overall spending for welfare, while political peculiarities account for differences resulting in the three (or four) worlds.

¹⁷ Cf. Goodman, Roger, Gordon White and Huck-ju Kwon (1998): *The East Asian welfare model. Welfare orientalism and the state. Vol. ESRC Pacific Asia programme*.

¹⁸ Cf. Said, Edward W. (1978): *Orientalism*.

¹⁹ Kasza (2006), 80.

Kasza is on the right track in his search for a different answer. As an explanation he offers the diffusion of ideas, by which countries learn from each other when developing welfare.²⁰ This is quite apparent when considering the history of Japan since the 1868 Meiji Restoration. At that time, foreign experts were called to help rebuild the country and local experts were sent into the West to study. But while the level of Kasza's analysis is highly impressive and hits the mark consistently, the concept of diffusion seems an oversimplification in explaining how notions of welfare were introduced in Japan, or how Japan has shared its own experiences with the rest of the world.

Instead of diffusion, translation is a more appropriate term for describing how ideas of welfare cross the borders of nation-states and influence each other. Translation is not only important on the level of national politics, but equally if not more significant at the level of bringing politics to life on the spot, that is in the case of care for old-aged people, care-homes, group-homes etc. In the following I would like to introduce some ethnographical examples, which serve to demonstrate how such processes of translation look on the ground, and how they influence both the implementation of political decisions and the understanding of such politics. We thereby leave the field of national politics, and the arguments will not directly refute Kasza but will hopefully convey an idea of how translational processes work in practice.

²⁰ Cf. Kasza (2006), 156–182.

Introducing Care for the Elderly and Political Translations

Long-term care insurance in Japan was introduced in 2000. It was and is seen as an important step in adapting to Japan's rapidly ageing society. Since other articles in this volume deal more in depth with these demographic changes, it will suffice here to point out only the most important indicators for this change. In 2000, elderly persons, those 65 or older, compromised 24.2 per cent of the Japanese population.²¹ Though this number is already impressive, the proportion of the elderly within the population will rise still further in coming decades. Demographic studies estimate that around 2050, numbers will rise to about 40 per cent.²² This rapid change demands political solutions. Easing the situation by increasing immigration seems an unlikely solution for various reasons. The UN report on replacement migration has calculated that Japan would be able to stabilize its age distribution of 2005 with 600.000 immigrants yearly.²³ But neither the general attitude towards migration nor the consequences for overall numbers of population make this approach likely. At the moment immigration is only promoted in order to bring staff for long-term care into the country.²⁴

²¹ Cf. MHW – Ministry of Health and Welfare (Ed.) (2000): *Kōseihakusho. Atarashii kōrei shazō o motomete – 21 seiki no kōreishakai o mukaeru* [Ministry of Health and Welfare. Searching for a new image of the elderly – welcoming the elderly society in the 21 century], 7. [http://www.wam.go.jp/wamapl/bb16GS70.nsf/0/49256fe9001adf9249256923000f6feb/\\$FILE/hakusyo12.pdf](http://www.wam.go.jp/wamapl/bb16GS70.nsf/0/49256fe9001adf9249256923000f6feb/$FILE/hakusyo12.pdf) (accessed 22 June 2010).

²² Cf. Atoh, Makoto (2008): Japan's population growth during the past 100 years, 19.

²³ Cf. UN – United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2000): *Replacement migration: is it a solution to declining and ageing populations*.

²⁴ Cf. Vogt, Gabriele (2006): Doors wide shut? The current discourse on labor migration to Japan.

In the context of long-term care insurance, one more point within the scenario of the ageing society is of interest. The regional distribution of elderly is highly distorted in Japan. While in absolute numbers, most elderly live in large cities in percentage the picture changes dramatically. Cities like Tokyo at the moment have roughly about 15 per cent elderly citizens. In contrast in small villages and towns in the countryside this number can be up to more than 40 per cent but rarely falls below 20–25 per cent. Due to the migration within the country during the decades following WWII, when young people were drawn to the vibrant cities for good jobs, regional patterns of ageing in Japan have been distorted strongly. The trend will reverse in the upcoming decades when major cities will catch up with the countryside. Until then the problems of the ageing society are mostly felt in places, which have been literally left behind in the years of the economical catch-up and which are now struggling with the sluggish economy more than anywhere else.²⁵

With no easy solutions at hand to change these demographic trends, Japanese politics began expanding care systems for the elderly in the early 1990s. As three-generation households, once celebrated as a Japanese solution for questions of welfare, were decreasing in numbers,²⁶ and many women resented the burden of caring for their parents or in-laws, professional care was to be expanded to fill the gap. But the so-called “golden plan” set up in 1989 proved insufficient.²⁷ Women were not substantially relieved, and continued to carry the main burden in caring for the elderly. *Kaigo-tsukare* (exhaustion through care) remained a widespread disease among caring women.

²⁵ Cf. Lützel, Ralph (2008): Regional demographics, 70.

²⁶ Cf. MHW (2000), 20.

²⁷ Cf. Peng, Ito (2008): Ageing and the social security system, 1038.

Kaigo-tsukare was even officially acknowledged as a disease. The only remedy Japanese families found was to hospitalize their elderly in high numbers. This avoided the social stigma of abandoning one's elders, but caused severe problems for the social system since these hospitals were an expensive and, at the same time, inefficient institution for providing such care. For example, Japan became the country with the highest per capita diaper consumption worldwide, as hospitals did not care to help the bedridden to the toilet.²⁸ Japanese politics started to look abroad for other solutions.

In the second half of the 1990s, Germany's model for long-term care insurance was discussed as a solution suitable to Japan. In 2000, Japanese long-term care insurance was instituted, with strong echoes of the German model. Though the insurance systems resembled each other strongly, the model had not simply diffused from Europe to Asia but had been translated on various levels and thereby recontextualized. This was necessary not least because the discourse surrounding the introduction of long-term care insurance in Germany followed specific patterns which did not match the situation in Japan and stressed concepts which hitherto had played no role there. The two main rationales invoked in the political arena to introduce long-term care insurance in Germany were *Würde* (dignity) and *Gerechtigkeit* (justice).²⁹ Neither of these two terms is easily translated into Japanese, and the finer semantic nuances of the words are even not even easily translatable into

²⁸ Cf. Shimada, Shingo and Christian Tagsold (2006): *Alternde Gesellschaften im Vergleich. Solidarität und Pflege in Deutschland und Japan* [Ageing societies in comparison. Solidarity and care in Germany and Japan], 103f.

²⁹ Cf. Shimada, Shingo, Stefan Blüher, Manfred Stosberg and Christian Tagsold (2001): *Öffentlichkeit im Wandel. Die Einführung der Pflegeversicherung in Japan und in Deutschland* [Public sphere in transition. The introduction of the long-term care insurance in Germany and Japan], 145–148.

English, which seems much closer to German. Political uses of terms can lead to complex meanings. It is therefore not surprising that even though equivalents of both terms exist in Japanese, they have not been used as frequently as in Germany, and with different connotations. The technical application of long-term care insurance following the German model thus had to be recontextualized through semantically shifting translations.

Translations were not only necessary at the level of abstract concepts. Changes were made to adapt to the Japanese context at the level of concrete measures, as well. An example is the denial of cash benefits for caring family members in Japan, a key practice in Germany. In the German case, these transfers have often been used to organize additional care services at low cost by hiring Eastern European nurses at low wages. It was feared, by Japanese feminists in any case, that moral pressure would have caused this to simply prolong the “hell of caring,” as it was often called by overburdened female relatives in the 1990s.³⁰ At the same time, conservative politicians were opposed on the basis that it was seen as commoditizing family relations, as Esping-Andersen would have put it.³¹

There are many more examples of alterations in the general and special conditions of the long-term care insurance as it was adopted in Japan, and some will be treated in the following since they take us to different levels of translation. If these translations cannot be subsumed under the notion of diffusion, would it be possible to talk of adaption? Adaption covers only the more conscious alteration of concepts to the Japanese context. But many underlying German principles were not easy to understand from the Japanese perspective. Interpretation was

³⁰ Cf. Shimada, Tagsold (2006), 147ff.

³¹ Cf. Esping-Andersen (1991).

needed, constituting the basis for translation. Some meanings of the German long-term insurance passed more easily into the Japanese discourse than others.

Institutional Translations on the Regional Level

Following translations of long-term care insurance, we now move to the actual field of research. This field was situated in Fukuoka, the centre of the southern island Kyūshū. In a sense, Fukuoka was not the best spot to start research on long-term care insurance, as the city is relatively young. Because of that, Fukuoka has been the test case for new products or chain stores to Japan, and it emphasizes the disproportionate demographics of the city that Toys“R”Us was among the chains to open their first stores there. Nevertheless, Fukuoka proved to be an interesting field. As the capital of its prefecture, it is a hub for northern Kyūshū, making urban and rural comparisons easy.³²

As in most municipalities, the new insurance system was simultaneously the source of great euphoria and great anxiety. This was due to the fact that the insurance, in order to strengthen regionalization, made municipalities responsible for insuring their citizens, leading to the creation of new insurers. This was broadly welcomed, though it meant that rural villages with a much higher percentage of elderly people have to charge higher insurance fees from their citizens than demographically younger urban centres. Because regulations require identical benefits regardless of where one lives, charging higher fees and stipulating volunteerism are the only ways for rural municipalities to comply with the regulations without running deficits. Notwithstanding such budgetary problems, discourses of regionalization in the

³² Cf. Shimada, Tagsold (2006), 118ff.

1990s had prepared the ground for such a political move.³³ The obvious incompetence with which the central government had reacted to the great earthquake in Kōbe in 1995, is an excellent example of the sort of phenomenon that had given this discussion momentum.³⁴

Despite the general approval the new policy met with, most municipalities were only halfway prepared to accept their new responsibilities and use their newly gained freedom to enhance civil society. As one of the biggest cities in Japan with a well functioning municipal bureaucracy, Fukuoka was surely better off than many of the smaller cities and villages in the same prefecture in northern Kyūshū. Many of these smaller municipalities formed a common association comprising nearly all potential insurers in this area. The mayor of one of the small villages that opted out of this association explained in an interview that the association, in his opinion, was formed out of unwillingness to tackle problems at the local level using one's own creativity and power. Indeed, the staff of the association admitted that distribution of information about the new situation was one of the major problems. All in all, along with the opportunities of self-responsibility, uncertainty was widespread. The association somehow contradicted the aim of regionalization, since it elevated the problem again to a more general level. It was only in northern Kyūshū that an association of such a size was formed. Nevertheless it was seen as a possible model for other small municipalities in Japan.³⁵

Owners of retirement homes and nursing homes also made great efforts to bring more sense into the new rules. Though the new insur-

³³ Cf. Shimada, Tagsold (2006), 118ff.

³⁴ Cf. Matsushita, Takeshi (1996): *Nihon no jiji bunken* [Japans current decentralisation], 19f.

³⁵ Cf. Shimada, Tagsold (2006), 125ff.

ance was set up to foster caring for the elderly at home by bringing in help from outside, it had the adverse effect of pushing more elderly into nursing homes. Under the old system, nursing homes had a bad reputation for caring only for those elderly who had been virtually abandoned by their families. Now the status of nursing homes was to change, and along with this the expectations to the owners. With the stress on efficiency and cost-cutting through the implementation of a market for care, the rules of the game also changed dramatically for owners. New companies and non-profit organizations also started to push into this market. Just like the region's municipalities, care providers in homes felt that they needed more information on how to provide the best possible care within the bounds of a market.³⁶

One way to successfully cope with the new situation was to look at foreign examples. Germany was the obvious example in this case, as it had served as the role model for the new Japanese system. In doing so, however, the different actors trying to make sense of the new situation used their own understanding of the underlying problems and also their own ideas of welfare in general to interpret the German example. As there was an urgent need for information, it is not surprising that translation took place not only at the national but also at the regional level. Local policy makers had often been sent to Germany for a few days to question their counterparts, but this approach was marred by serious shortcomings. Not trained in German and as interested in sightseeing as in gathering information, Fukuoka's bureaucrats somehow seem always to have taken their fact finding missions to Baden-Baden. The city must have been a rather influential hub for information about long-term care insurance at that time. Surely it could not

³⁶ Cf. Shimada, Tagsold (2006), 132ff.

have been the case that all the tours were heading for this town because of its status as a famous hot springs for the well-off. Even if conducted most thoroughly, such tours could offer only very superficial information and at the same time were a tool for team-building and recreation of the bureaucrats involved.

So other means had to be found to gather information from the outside. A circle of influential owners of homes for senior citizens and nursing homes organized monthly meetings for themselves and invited politicians and decision-makers as well, though these surely were a minority. One reason could have been the entrance fees for those meetings, about 20,000 Yen for a scientific presentation at a central hotel in Fukuoka with a dinner afterwards at a restaurant for informal exchange. A head of a private university from Kansai spoke twice within a few months at those meetings on long-term care insurance in Europe as a sociologist. His analysis of the situation, which mostly emphasized the fact that the first such insurance system was set up in the Netherlands and not in Germany, was warmly welcomed in Fukuoka's circles. I interviewed this professor later and told him about my own research and that I wanted to compare the German and Japanese long-term care insurance systems. He very self-confidently assured me that I should not bother too much, as he had already done all this exhaustingly. Additionally he gave me a copy of his paper dealing with long-term care insurance in Germany and Japan. It turned out that he had gone twice to Europe for about one week to assemble material and interview specialists in the field. The technical details of his interpretations were all in all correct, but his conclusions regarding the reasons for Germany's introduction of such policies sounded more like an answer to the riddles of Japan's opaque and irrational politics than a fair and well-founded account of higher and lesser aims. Since

it was based on a single interview with a local bureaucrat somewhere in the north of Germany, one could not expect much more.

One should not be misguided at this point. This example is only partly a critique of the practice of writing scientific articles and giving presentations based on a rather shallow foundation of data. Much more important is the fact that the German model influenced not only decision-makers at the top level, but also helped local agents to understand the new situation. It is true that some misunderstanding and superficial interpretation was involved, but we all know that not all our work is based as much on data at times as we would like it to be. This case rather shows that scientific authority, an undefined situation and the translational process together help to form new knowledge. Speaking simply of the diffusion of ideas, as Kasza does, would be somewhat misleading. The processes of knowledge formation are much more complicated.

Broken Chains of Translation

Knowledge of Western models was also discussed by experts in the field themselves on different occasions. As the experts search actively for information, they not only rely on others but sometimes visit Europe themselves too. The information gathered there, or more indirectly through books, the internet and by listening to presentations, is redistributed. But this knowledge serves not only to discuss better service. It is also important in terms of status and distinction. One example was a congress of grassroots elderly-care homes in Kumamoto involving hundreds of specialists from all over the North of Kyūshū. This congress took place on a weekend in summer and lasted a whole day. Since most of the attendants were very actively involved in their own grassroots projects, discussions were quite lively and

sometimes heated. Some of the presentations and arguments brought forth at this congress help to understand how knowledge is used strategically. At the same time, we change levels of knowledge production. This time, it was not so much knowledge of systems to be traded, but rather principal matters and to a certain degree stereotypes, which help to define unclear situations by means of simplification.

The first speaker of the congress introduced himself with a telling line: “While most here champion the Swedish model, I am very much in favour of the Danish model of welfare. But we can discuss this later.” Sweden has often been cited in Japanese discourses of welfare,³⁷ and most of the time quite outside of a general political context, as an example for welfare policy. Esping-Andersen’s (1991) markedly political discussions of the Swedish welfare model as the paradigmatic example of a system driven by social democracy have not been absorbed in general discussion. Despite the fact that Sweden has undergone major changes and has mostly discarded the model it stood for in the second half of the 20th century in favour of a more neo-liberalist strategy, most discussions in Japan would still assume that the Scandinavian welfare is heaven.³⁸ At the congress all listeners had an idea of what Sweden stood for, although this might have been highly stereotypical. Most of the listeners would also favour the Swedish model as a best-practice example which should be adhered to as closely as possible in Japan, as well. In contrast to Sweden, the Danish welfare system is nearly unknown in Japan and even if it had been, it would still have been questionable what Japan could learn from it. But the remark made by this speaker was not so much about the pros and cons of specific welfare systems but seemed to be made for reasons of

³⁷ Cf. Shimada, Tagsold (2006), 91.

³⁸ Ibid.

personal distinction. By invoking a rather exotic welfare model, at least from the Japanese point of view, the speaker made clear that he was a real expert with insights not shared by the majority. His self-positioning was not questioned since his offer to compare Sweden vs. Denmark later did not lead into a discussion. The topic was dropped after the initial statement by the congress.

The Swedish example was later used by another speaker in a rather peculiar way and caused much discussion. This ardent supporter and operator of small care units showed a short video to the audience, which he had shot himself. A Swedish and a Japanese nurse cared for an elderly male, who had more or less lost awareness. The Japanese nurse cared for him using child-talk, explaining most of her acts directly but getting no reaction. The man underwent all provisions deemed necessary by the nurse without betraying any feeling. For the audience, the scene was well-known from their own experience. In stark contrast, the Swedish nurse sang to the man and tried to stimulate his awareness by hugging him. And indeed, he reacted to her although he had mostly ignored her Japanese colleague, prompting the speaker to praise Swedish techniques of nursing. He stressed that Sweden was not only a role model for the general governance of welfare but succeeded in detail, as well. Japanese nurses, he argued, should be trained in the techniques of her Swedish colleagues shown in the video.

Nevertheless the general reaction in the audience was disapproving. Too obviously the elderly had reacted to the Swedish nurse and her care not because of her technique, but because she was blonde and foreign, while the Japanese nurse was simply the same person he saw every day. Change of daily care routines coupled with sensations on a different level made the man react. His facial expression showed sur-

prise but it was not easy to guess whether he liked the way the Swedish nurse cared for him or not. In other words, the speaker's attempt to translate knowledge from a European context failed as it seemed ill-conceived for the audience. The problems were not touched upon in detail in the following discussion. But the reaction of the audience had been clear when the speaker presented his theories. Non-verbal and verbal reactions showed astonishment and all of the members of audience I interviewed later disapproved openly. Clearly not all translational processes help to define the situation and some are rejected.

This example shows that chains of translation, as Bruno Latour would call them, can be broken if some link of the chain is not convincing. In complex translations, it is normally not one simple term, phrase or technique that is to be translated. Rather facts, meanings and words are linked to each other in a chain. One referent is the next one's reference. Chains of translation can be surprisingly long and remain convincing. The start of the chain and its outcome make sense, because every single relation of reference to referent forming the links of the chain seems to be logical and inevitable.³⁹ In the example of the Swedish nurse, a sense of human dignity was involved as elderly persons should not be treated like children but instead should feel human affection when taken care of. Human dignity was translated into forms of behaviour by the Swedish caring nurse. This was understood by her patient. Further, this had to be re-translated into an understanding of human dignity by the Japanese audience. However, some of the intervening steps of translation did not seem to make sense. The old man's understanding was not based on the special form of human warmth he was offered. Rather, it was the novelty of the whole situation that im-

³⁹ Cf. Latour, Bruno (1999): *Pandora's hope. Essays on the reality of science studies*.

pressed him so deeply. A young blonde Swedish nurse took care of him instead of a middle aged Japanese one. Additionally, his daily routine was interrupted. By invoking the Swedish model using a Swedish nurse, the presenter had hoped to back up his general point easily, because Sweden has mostly been thought of as a kind of welfare paradise in Japan, but Sweden could not cover up his weak chain of translation.

This is only a very simple example of a chain of translation. Clearly enough, when much more complex terms like *Würde* (dignity), *Solidarität* (solidarity), and other concepts that were often invoked in the German context of long term care insurance were to be translated into Japanese, the concepts transformed within the chain of translation. They did not simply diffuse to Japan but got interpreted and twisted. The Japanese discourse did not take up many of these basic concepts. Nevertheless, the impression of a successful translation prevailed. While the Japanese system of long-term care insurance had different aims, it was conceived as quite similar to the German one.⁴⁰ Diffusion took place only at the surface, yet looking closer at the introduction of the long-term care insurance in Germany and Japan, we can see why it is more accurate to talk of translation.

It is important to stress that this not a critique of misunderstandings on the Japanese side and problematic translations. The point to be made with such an analysis is that processes of translation have to involve interpretations. Even in the German discourse, dignity and solidarity are not terms with fixed meanings. In discussions, politicians, experts and citizens use these terms differently and have their own interpretations of what is meant.⁴¹ When translated, the picture

⁴⁰ Cf. Shimada, Tagsold (2006), 27f.

⁴¹ Cf. Shimada *et. al* (2001), 145.

gets more complicated, as terms, meanings and context are recontextualized. By talking of diffusion we would easily tend to ignore this. Just comparing national social politics would be even worse, as it would cut out the ongoing exchange of knowledge by translation, bringing us back to simple exotification.

Translation, Interpretation, Understanding

In the age of globalization, welfare systems are still mostly structured nationally. Moving from Japan to Germany or vice versa for work involves uncertainties about welfare entitlements. Entitlements acquired in one country are not transferred to another, even within political contexts such as the European Union. Public political discussions also often revolve around cultural traits or national specifics as reasons for reshaping welfare systems. Finally, welfare systems have often been described as evolving on paths. Decisions once made heavily influence future developments of the system. Because of all these reasons, a methodological nationalism in welfare research seems to be well founded. Systems are best explained by their own logic when adhering to methodological nationalism.

While this is surely not completely wrong and can help to explain partly why Germany's long-term care insurance is structured as it is, methodological nationalism has its blind spots and weaknesses. Explaining welfare systems as completely autonomous entities not related to each other is especially misleading. It is a first step to acknowledge that the development of a welfare system such as Japan's is not completely atypical. Gregory Kasza has convincingly shown that Japan is rather a textbook case for introducing different branches

of social insurance.⁴² But this point could still be supported in line with methodological nationalism. Esping-Andersen discusses the structuralist argument of welfare development. The structuralists assume that necessities of emerging capitalism drive the development of welfare and that because of this, modern welfare states resemble each other.⁴³ Kasza proves that structuralist assumptions are valid for Japan but goes beyond this argument when introducing diffusion of knowledge as another factor.⁴⁴

Welfare systems do learn from each other. This learning is often difficult to discern. Experts travelling to other countries or meeting each other at congresses and forums do not take part often in public discussions. Their views inform politicians and media but the source of expertise is often opaque to the outside. But the examples from fieldwork have shown that knowledge about other welfare systems is used on all levels. Laws are read, systems analyzed and practice discussed in order to understand better how long-term care in Japan can be improved. These processes of knowledge transfer rely on translation and interpretation. Sometimes these translations seem to be problematic or even wrong. But instead of insisting on philological equivalence, something never to be achieved fully anyway, the relevance for actors is much more interesting in our context.

Understanding these processes of translation and interpretation helps to understand why methodological nationalism is wrong. Even if welfare systems are governed at a national level, they are interdependent with regard to their information. Welfare evolves in accordance with structural necessities, with national paths but also with shared

⁴² Cf. Kasza (2006).

⁴³ Cf. Esping-Andersen (1991), 13f.

⁴⁴ Cf. Kasza (2006), 197f.

knowledge about solutions. The Japanese long-term care insurance is an excellent example to prove this. It cannot be understood on the basis of Japanese cultural traits or the development of the Japanese welfare-system alone but only when taking into account that there is a constant flow of information to and from Japan.

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