

A Study on the Values of Japanese Junior and Senior High School Students in Comparison with the Values of German Students

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ドイツの生徒との比較による日本の中高生の価値観についての一考察

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Abstract : This paper is based on the results of a comparative study on the values of the youth in Japan and Germany. It examines the trends in values held by Japanese junior and senior high school students based on responses to surveys, addressing not only the their current set of values but also their perception of the values for adults in both countries. In comparing their responses with those of German students in relation to levels of satisfaction, views on religion, sense of identity, and where they feel “at home,” it is hoped that we will be able to discover the hitherto privately held values of Japanese youth in the senses following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

Key Words : sense of values, high school students, Japan, Germany

抄録 : 本稿はドイツ・ヴァインガルテン教育大学の L・クルド教授と共同で行った、日独の青少年の価値観に関する比較研究について、主として日本側の回答をまとめたものである。多くの先行研究では中高生たちの現状での価値観に注目するが多いが、本調査では現状だけでなく、中高生たちが思い描く身近な大人に対する価値観もあわせて調査した。このことで、自分の状況をより客観視することができると考える。同時に、様々な価値観の満足度や宗教観や自分の性格やくつろぎを感じる場所などを問い、その数値をドイツの数値と比較することで、われわれにとっては当たり前のこととして見えにくい日本の中高生の価値観について、特に 2011 年以降のいまの状況を示すことができた。

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1. Introduction

The current trend throughout the world is to emphasize diversity rather than seek a convergence of values. However, there is a need to think more seriously about whether or not to encourage more unanimity in regard to national values or whether to continue to encourage values oriented towards a more multinational and multicultural view.

Japanese young people today are confronted with a number of urgent issues: What should be their aims in life? What is normal? How should they think and feel about themselves? Yet the Japanese government is arguing for the “subjectization” of morality in order to encourage students with more proactive, so-called “objective” moral values. The subjectization of morality, which is to be made a compulsory subject within the Japanese education system, is not something new, but although it has long been a topic of discussion, it has not been taken very seriously.

Given this state of affairs in Japan, a relevant issue for discussion is, what are the values that today’s high school students take seriously? In consultation with Prof. Dr. Lothar Kuld, of the Pädagogischen Hochschule Weingarten, Germany, a comparative study was conducted in order to shed light on the values held by Japanese junior and senior high school students, through a comparison with their German counterparts.

Many similar surveys have been conducted to gain an understanding of the values of young people in Japan. For example, a now outdated survey entitled *The Japanese Youth in Comparison with the Youth of the World* (Director-General for Policies on Cohesive Society Cabinet Office, 2009) was conducted in November and December 2007. Since then, the occurrence of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in March 2011 has marked the beginning of a new sense for the Japanese people. This paper examines how the values held by Japanese youth have changed since this event, and offers a key to understanding what has previously been hidden from view.

2. Methodology of the Study

This study is based on a questionnaire completed by 133 students at junior and senior high schools in Germany and 265 students in Japan. As a first step, the second author, Prof. Dr. Kuld, conducted a survey in German schools based on a questionnaire developed by him. As a second step, significant values from the German and Japanese cultures were identified. As a third step, the questionnaire was translated into Japanese and verified as accurate by a third party. The language used in the questionnaire was simplified for use in the Japanese junior high school where teachers assisted with its distribution.

Questionnaires were distributed between November 2012 and January 2013 to students in Kyoto, Japan, within the following demographic profiles:

<i>Senior high school.</i>	Number surveyed: 192
	Age: 16 years (30.7%); 17 years (69.3%)
	Sex: Male (49.0%); Female (51.0%)

Junior high school.

Number surveyed: 73

Age: 13 (24.7%); 14 (75.3%)

Sex: Male (53.4%) ; Female (46.6%).

In this research, the data was treated as a whole entity in accordance with the form of aggregation used in German research protocols. Since the ratio of senior high school students to junior high school students was unbalanced, this aggregation was taken to indicate the trend as a whole.

3. Results and Analysis

Japanese students were asked five questions (A through E) in the questionnaire. The purpose of each question was given careful consideration before inclusion, as described below.

3.1 Question A

The purpose of Question A was to ascertain what values were important to the student and what values were not so important. In the questionnaire students were asked to consider 18 values and indicate the relative importance of each: *very important*, *important*, *not so much*, *not important*, or *I don't know*. Through their responses to Question A, Japanese students indicated their sense of what values were important for them personally.

The results to Question A (Table 1)

What is important for you?	very important	important	not so much	not important	I don't know
A1- to be engaged in an association	22.3	43.0	24.9	3.8	5.7
A2- to live within a religious community or church	2.3	9.1	37.4	41.9	9.1
A3- to be understood	37.0	47.9	12.1	1.5	1.1
A4- to enjoy life	79.6	17.7	1.9	0.4	0.0
A5- to earn money	41.5	47.9	7.9	1.1	1.1
A6- to be engaged in protection of the environment	19.2	54.3	21.5	1.1	3.4
A7- to speak with people	61.1	33.6	4.2	0.4	0.4
A8- to have many friends	49.8	31.7	16.6	1.5	0.0
A9- to have a strong family	55.8	32.8	7.9	1.9	1.1
A10- to be engaged with people who are much closer to me, that is to say, family or friends	60.4	33.2	6.0	0.0	0.0
A11- to be engaged with other people	45.3	40.8	11.7	1.1	0.8
A12- to find the meaning of life	35.1	33.2	23.4	4.2	3.8
A13- to change something in politics	11.3	31.7	35.8	10.6	10.2
A14- to live just as I am and as I like	52.8	36.2	8.3	0.8	1.5

A15- to have fun	77.7	20.0	1.9	0.0	0.0
A16- to have a good job	50.2	36.6	9.1	0.8	3.0
A17- to be ready to help the persons who are very close to me	34.3	50.2	10.6	1.1	3.4
A18- to be ready to help other people (who may not be as close)	26.4	49.1	17.7	1.5	4.9

(% , n=265)

Analysis of Question A

The “marking method” methodology was used for the analysis of the responses to Question A. To put it briefly, the percentage of *very important* answers was multiplied by five; *important* was multiplied by four; *not so much* by three; *not important* by two; and *I don't know* by one. The total was divided by 100. The responses indicated the following relative rankings of items at the top (most important) end, with four of the items related to “self” and five to “social values.”

The values related to self:

[A4] to enjoy life (4.75 points)

[A15] to have fun (4.74 points)

[A14] to live just as I am and as I like (4.37 points)

[A16] to have a good job (4.29 points)

The values related to social living:

[A7] to speak with people (4.54 points)

[A10] to be engaged with people who are closer to me (4.53 points)

[A9] to have a strong family (4.39 points)

[A8] to have many friends (4.29 points)

[A11] to be engaged with other people (4.28 points)

Most of the surveyed students ranked the above nine items as *very important* (level 5). Since the ranking was relatively high for all nine items, both personal and social, the exact correlation between these two types of items was not clear-cut.

On the other hand, responses to the following two items were rated relatively low.

[A2] to live within a religious community or church (2.53 points)

[A13] to change something in politics (3.22 points)

The responses of Japanese students to these questions about religion [A2]¹⁾ and politics [A13]²⁾ could be predicted from the referenced survey, and indicated a close-to-normal distribution in trend³⁾.

3.2 Question B

The purpose of Question B was to investigate what young people believed was important for adults. In the questionnaire students were provided with the same possible responses as in Question A: *very important*, *important*, *not so much*, *not important*, or *I don't know*. The results of Question B told us what high school students on the verge of their own entry into adulthood perceived to be important to adults.

The result of Question B (Table 2)

What do you believe is important for adults and for adulthood in the following areas?	very important	important	not so much	not important	I don't know
B1- to be engaged in an association	61.1	32.5	3.4	0.0	2.3
B2- to live within a religious community or church	7.5	19.2	38.5	26.8	7.2
B3- to be understood	45.7	38.1	12.8	0.4	2.3
B4- to enjoy life	37.0	40.4	19.6	1.1	1.1
B5- to earn money	76.6	19.6	2.3	0.0	0.8
B6- to be engaged in protection of the environment	21.9	36.6	28.7	9.1	3.0
B7- to speak with people	34.0	41.9	20.4	1.1	1.5
B8- to have many friends	26.4	36.6	32.5	2.3	1.5
B9- to have a strong family	55.1	31.3	10.9	0.4	1.5
B10- to be engaged with people who are much closer to me, that is to say, family or friends	47.9	34.3	14.7	1.5	0.8
B11- to be engaged with other people	33.2	40.8	20.4	2.6	2.3
B12- to find the meaning of life	31.3	32.8	23.4	7.5	4.2
B13- to change something in politics	23.8	37.0	20.8	12.8	4.5
B14- to live just as I am and as I like	25.7	32.5	28.3	10.2	2.6
B15- to have fun	34.7	47.5	14.7	1.1	1.1
B16- to have a good job	63.4	25.7	7.9	0.4	1.9
B17- to be ready to help the persons who are very close to me	35.1	44.5	14.7	1.5	3.4
B18- to be ready to help other people (who may not be as close)	25.7	41.9	21.5	6.8	3.4

(% , n=265)

Analysis of Question B

The same marking method was used again in question B, which sought responses covering six areas related to money, job, family, and so on. The responses were as follows:

[B5] to earn money (4.69 points)

[B1] to be engaged in an association (4.48 points)

[B16] to have a good job (4.46 points)

[B9] to have a strong family (4.36 points)

[B10] to be engaged with people who are closer to me (4.25 points)

[B3] to be understood (4.22 points)

Judging from the responses to Question B, young people in Japan want [B5] *to earn money*; [B1] *to be engaged in an association*; and [B16] *to have a good job* when they become adults. Items [B15] *to have fun* and [B4] *to enjoy life* both also attracted high scores in the survey. On the other hand, item [B2] *to live within a religious community or church* scored low (2.91 points). In this respect, the results were very similar to those obtained in

Question A.

The responses to [B1] *to be engaged in an association* and [B14] *to live just as I am and as I like* were notable. There was apparently a significant difference in the thinking behind the responses to Question A, versus the responses to Question B. The point total of [A14] *to live just as I am and as I like* minus the total of [B14] was 0.704. Apparently students aspired to live their lives in an individualistic way, but at the same time, they seemed to realize that it was unlikely they would be able to live like this as adults. Since the point total of [A1] *to be engaged in an association* minus [B1] is -0.765, the difference between these two questions also stands out, and seems to indicate that the students were aware of the values and priorities, expected of them as future employees within an organization such as a company.

The differences among three items-[A9] minus [B9], [A3] minus [B3], and [A17] minus [B17]-totaled only 0.031, 0.054 and 0.057, respectively, indicating that students realized that their current values were unlikely to change very much in the future.

3.3 Question C

In Question C, students were asked to rate their degrees of satisfaction with certain aspects of their lives on a scale ranging from 5, indicating *I'm extraordinary satisfied*, to 0, indicating *I'm not at all satisfied*,

The result of Question C (Table 3)

There are things in life of which I can say, "Yes, I'm contented and satisfied with this." Please mark the degree of your satisfaction:	5	4	3	2	1	0
C1- my relations to other people	18.1	47.2	26.8	4.9	1.5	1.5
C2- my living conditions	17.0	39.6	30.9	8.7	2.6	1.1
C3- the possibility to live life in my own way	19.2	36.2	29.4	11.7	2.3	1.1
C4- the opportunity for zest of life	40.8	29.1	20.8	6.8	1.9	0.8
C5- social gathering	11.3	32.5	40.0	9.8	3.8	2.3
C6- the money which I have at my disposal	20.0	25.3	32.1	12.8	6.0	3.8
C7- the religious activities in my neighborhood	9.1	9.8	41.9	18.5	4.5	6.8
C8- the love of my parents	36.2	34.0	21.1	6.4	0.8	1.1
C9- the opportunities to participate in sports	31.7	26.8	20.8	13.6	3.4	3.8
C10- the prospects for finding a good job	6.4	16.6	35.5	25.3	9.8	6.4
C11- the prospects for attaining educational opportunities	12.8	22.6	34.3	18.1	7.5	4.2

(%, n=265)

Analysis of Question C

The marking method outlined above was again adopted in Question C. The following two items scored the highest:

[C4] the opportunity for zest of life (4.99 points)

[C8] the love of my parents (4.94 points)

Most students expressed a high degree of satisfaction with respect to all of the items in Question C except [C10]⁴⁾ and [C7]⁵⁾. The ratings in response to the items [C4][C8][C9], remained high with most students selecting 5, *I'm extraordinary satisfied*, or 4, *satisfied*. There appear to be no biases in the other items, which appeared to be normally distributed.

3.4 Question D

In Question D we asked students to assess their own characters: *What is your self-evaluation? Please mark where applicable*. They were presented with a set of six choices, with rating 5 indicating *totally agree* and 0 indicating *do not at all agree*.

The result of Question D (Table 4)

What is your self-evaluation in the following areas? Please indicate the opinion that you feel best describes your thinking.	5	4	3	2	1	0
D1- I quickly understand what is going on	9.1	23.4	44.2	17.4	3.8	2.3
D2- I am content with my physical appearance	13.2	24.5	34.7	15.1	8.3	4.2
D3- I am patient	17.4	30.9	29.1	13.2	6.4	3.0
D4- I am persevering	13.2	26.8	30.9	18.5	5.7	4.9
D5- I get along well with others	6.0	28.7	43.4	12.8	4.5	4.2
D6- I am sporty	36.2	25.3	18.1	9.8	5.3	5.3

(%, n=265)

Analysis of Question D

The same marking method was adopted in Question D. Since all the responses to this question scored highly, no significant correlation among the six items could be detected. Most students assigned a rating of 5 or 4 for [D6]. There was no discernible bias in the other items [D1] - [D5]; the responses indicated a relatively normal distribution.

The Japanese students tended to perceive themselves as “sporty” and “patient.” German students assigned a high rating for [D1], in contrast to the Japanese students.

3.5 Question E

The purpose of Question E was to identify the areas of life in which Japanese and German students felt “at home.” The questionnaire explained that “The following list presents different areas of life. In which area would you say, *There I am at home somehow, and my opinions and personal interests are accepted?* ” A rating of 5 indicated *Here I feel at home and my opinions and personal interests are accepted*. A rating of 1 indicated *Here I do not feel at home at all, but feel lonely, even homeless*. And a rating of 0 indicated *I have no response to this situation; it does not concern me*.

The result of Question E (Table 5)

The following list presents different areas of life. In which area would you say: “There I am at home somehow, and my opinions and personal interests are accepted.”	5	4	3	2	1	0
E1- in my family	42.6	19.6	17.0	9.4	7.9	3.4
E2- in the circle of my friends	29.4	32.1	19.6	10.6	6.0	2.3
E3- in the association or club I am connected with	18.9	30.2	24.5	13.6	7.5	5.3
E4- at school	11.3	36.6	30.9	10.9	7.5	2.6
E5- when I am with my teachers	5.7	21.9	27.5	19.6	18.1	7.2

(% , n=265)

Analysis of Question E

The Japanese and German students’ responses to Question E were almost identical. The highest rating was assigned for [E1] in both Japan and Germany, and the rating assigned for [E5] was the lowest in both countries.

While there were statistically significant correlations between [E1] and [A9], [E1] and [A10], [E1] and [C8], [E1] and [E2], it was difficult to identify a causal relationship between these items.

4. Conclusion

In a short study such as this, it is only possible to provide a general sketch of the values of Japanese junior and senior high school students as compared to their German counterparts.

For example, in Question [A2], a Japanese student may be unable to imagine him- or herself living “*within a religious community or church*.” As a result, we will need to make some modifications to the questions during translation in order to reflect the cultural differences between Germany and Japan. We are planning to develop further cross-cultural studies in the future with this in mind.

Acknowledgments

I benefited greatly from attending a symposium⁶⁾ on cross-cultural evaluations held on March 4, 2013. I also owe much to discussions and correspondence with Prof. Dr. Kuld on the values of young people in Japan and Germany. There is a need for further investigation, and more comparative studies are planned to achieve a greater understanding of the aspirations and values of the youth of both our countries.

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Notes

- 1) In *the Japanese Youth in Comparison with the Youth of the World*, Part 2, Outline of the Survey Results VII: Outlook on Life (4), View on religion (1), (Table 7-4-1-1), comparing the five countries, Japan, South Korea, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and France, the percentage of those giving 'Agree' to the question "Do you think that religion provides emotional support and a guide to attitude and behavior in the course of daily life?" was the highest in the U.S.A., at 80.5%. The order of the other countries was South Korea (62.9%), the U.K. (52.4%), Japan (40.8%), and France (40.7%).
- 2) Of five countries, the percentage of youth indicating an interest in politics was highest in Japan in *the Japanese Youth in Comparison with the Youth of the World*, Part 2, Outline of the Survey Results V: Nation and society (1), View on your nation (3), Interest in politics (Table 5-1-3-1). It is possible to derive two hypotheses from this finding: first, that there was an decrease in interest in politics among Japanese young people due to the change of government in Japan in 2009; and second, that the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 resulted in Japanese youth becoming more keen on stabilization in society and less keen to 'change something' in politics.
- 3) This trend exists not only in Japan; it is very similar to the one that emerged in the survey of German students. The German [A2] result was 2.86 points, and the German [A13] result was 2.80 points. These results were the lowest in point values of the 18 questions and were the only responses to the 18 questions in the 2-point range. The German [A13] result was much lower than that of Japanese students.
- 4) As space is limited, only a brief discussion of these can be given in this paper. When [C10] *the prospects for finding a good job* (3.65 points) was analyzed in detail, it was found that junior high school students' point total was 4.33, and senior high school students' point total was 3.89. These point totals became lower as grade levels at school increased, suggesting that Japanese students grow more concerned about their future as they approach graduation. In addition, with respect to job prospects, the German [C10] response of 5.23 points was their third-highest rating, in contrast to the lower Japanese score. These results suggested that Japanese students were reacting to the current economic conditions in their country. This difference between the two countries' students is significant.
- 5) German students' responses to [C7] *the religious activities in my neighborhood* was rated at 4.38 points, which was higher than the rating given by Japanese students. Interestingly, this item had the lowest point rating in the German questionnaire results of Question C.
- 6) *The Symposium on the Topics of Education in Germany and Japan* was held at Kyoto University of Education on March 4, 2013.

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