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Social Resources and Parental Well-being: A Comparison of Japanese and German Parental Ego-centric Networks

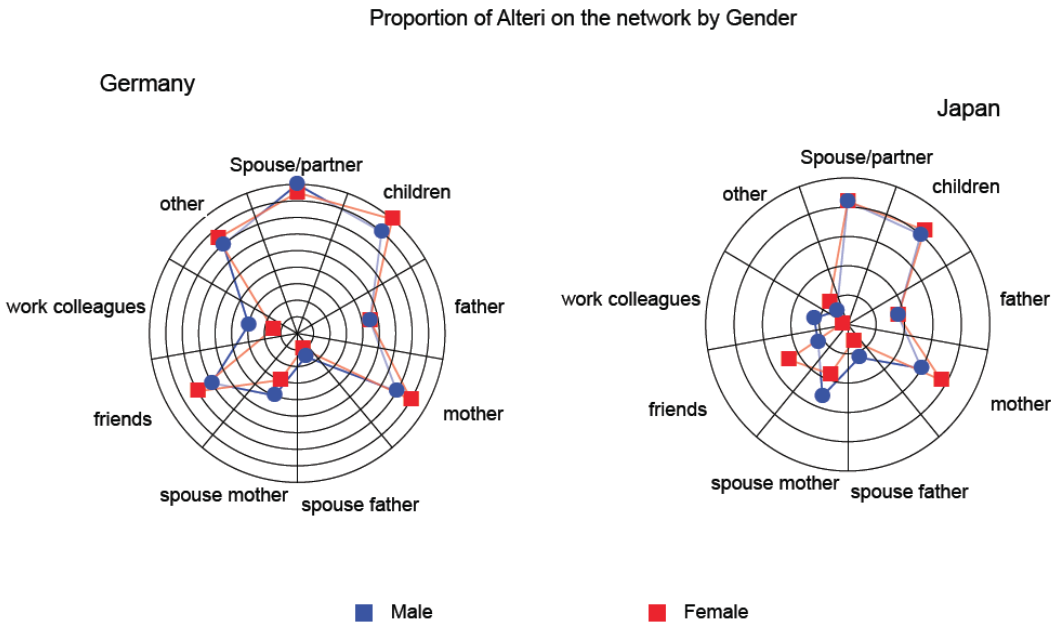
According to Amartya Sen's "capability approach", people's well-being depends on their opportunities for self-realization. These, in turn, are closely related to the social resources that are integrated into their network of social relations. The nature of these social resources (social capital) and their importance for well-being are closely related, in turn, to the culture in question and its traditions, and can vary accordingly from one society to another. Although certain structural similarities can be found between Japan and Germany, for example they are both ageing societies with comparatively low birth rates (Atoh 2008) and are both experiencing increasing job insecurity (Genda 2005), Japan's historical, cultural, and religious heritage differs significantly from that of post-industrial western societies like Germany. By comparing Germany and Japan, I would like to demonstrate in this presentation that Japan's historical, cultural, and religious heritage also results in a different cultural and historical significance being assigned to social relations and network structures. I will then analyze the extent to which integration into social relations influences the subjective well-being of mothers and fathers in Japan compared to their counterparts in Germany.

As part of a comparative study on parental well-being, the egocentric networks of a total of 2,153 mothers and 2,088 fathers with children under the age of six were surveyed in Japan (2012) and before that in Germany (2009). The questionnaire used in Japan was translated from German and structural and social differences were taken into account in the transfer and translation process. Six name generators were used, for which a maximum of three persons were named per generator. Nine different types of relations were recorded and the residential distance was recorded for some of them. Unfortunately, for reasons of time, it was not possible to survey more information.

Nevertheless, it is possible to extrapolate and analyze some information on the social relations and the resulting social resources of the parents in Germany and Japan from these data. In order to examine the significance of the surveyed social relations as a resource in relation to the subjective well-being of the parents, I draw on the concepts developed by James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu and Mark Granovetter.

Based on the answers provided to all of these questions, it is possible to construct the networks of the mothers and fathers in Germany and Japan at the time of the survey, that is in 2009 and 2012 respectively (Figure).

In Germany, we see that the social relationships of families are broadly based. In addition to relationships with partners, children and parents, they also include friends, colleagues and other people like distant relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances. No major gender-based differences emerge. These results tally with my earlier studies on family relationships in Germany (Hennig 2007, 2009).



Source: Ravensburger Elternsurvey N=18468, own calculations

Source: DIJ Japan N=19206, own calculations

In Japan, it emerges that the social relationships are predominantly concentrated on close family relatives, i.e. partners, children, parents, and parents-in-law. In contrast to Germany, there are fewer friendship-based relationships and clear differences exist between the sexes in terms of friendships and contact with colleagues. Japanese women report almost twice as many relationships with friends than men, however they rarely have relationships with colleagues. Japanese men have the same proportion of relationships with friends as they do with colleagues. Contacts with other persons like distant relations, neighbors, and acquaintances are merely marginal.

These findings coincide with the descriptions available about Japan. Social life in the form of invitations to visit people in their homes and return are rare. Hence families have very little external social contact in general. (Neuss-Kaneko 1990:148) The responsibility for maintaining social relationships is split. Men maintain the relationships with work colleagues and women maintain those with relatives and their own circle of female friends. Irrespective of whether women are in employment or not, they do more in relation to child care, household chores, and school and neighborhood activities than men. The social

relationship networks of men are centered on their work. Women do more to maintain contact with neighbors, friends, and relatives (cf. Coulmas, 2007: 47ff).

Friendships in Japan are not clearly assigned to the 'private' or 'public' arenas. In the world of work, colleagues who joined a company or organization in the same year or completed their apprenticeships at the same time often become friends. Deep and lasting friendships arise in such circles of more or less equals. In most cases this also involves the acceptance of an existing hierarchy between friends.

The hierarchy is less important in the case of female friendships. Shared interests are the main factors here. The *shin-yū* relationships, which exist between intimately friendly persons who have no secrets from each other, arise here (cf. Reinhold, 1981). Married women in Japan also have dyadic relationships with their husbands, children and parents, however these relationships are associated with elements of obligation and control, which prevent the emergence of complete intimacy in many instances.

Such intimate circles of friends, the *shin-yū* groups, are horizontal and can be viewed *de facto* as egalitarian. They include women from very wide-ranging circles. A lack of hierarchical structure is a feature of the *shin-yū* groups. Thus they represent an important exception in the otherwise predominantly vertical organization of society in Japan.

The proverb "*on wo ukeru wa jiyū wo uru nari*", "accepting a good deed means to give away the freedom" (Thomas & Haschke 2007: 114) symbolically conveys the Japanese understanding of helpfulness. People in need can be sure of the support of neighbors, friends and relatives. However, at the same time, they are always aware this system obliges them to provide mutual support and help. From the Buddhist point of view, obligations are connections with others that make people unfree. This may explain the marginal nature of contact with other people like distant relatives, neighbors and acquaintances in Japan.

To examine the significance of social relationships as a resource for parental well-being, I also draw on concepts developed by Coleman, Bourdieu and Granovetter.

Families have at least three types of resources, or capital, that influence their well-being. Financial capital consists of monetary resources that can be used to purchase goods and services.

Human capital consists of abilities and skills that individuals have acquired as a means of adapting to their environment, and generally takes the form of school qualifications or diplomas. For Bourdieu (1983), the concept of human capital, which he called "cultural capital", does not merely encompass institutionalized cultural capital, such as school qualifications. Instead, Bourdieu viewed the possession of objectified cultural goods and abilities as embodied cultural capital.

The concept of social capital was introduced as a complement to the concept of human capital. Social capital is an individual resource, which arises from interpersonal relations and mainly takes effect in the formation of human capital (Coleman/ Hoffer 1987). According to Coleman, social relationships are particularly effective when they are connected via particularly short paths and the frequency of contact is particularly high, contacts are available for the greatest possible range of activities, and everyone is linked with everyone else. For Bourdieu, social relationships constitute above all resources "... which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group" (Bourdieu 1986). For Bourdieu, social capital is determined from the sum of the group or network size and volume of capital held by the group members.

According to Granovetter, social relationships are particularly efficient when they are weak, that is relationships that are maintained with a maximum number of dissimilar people. In Granovetter's view, this social capital accesses other potential areas of society and tends to involve less social control than in a network of "strong ties" as defined by Coleman.

I calculated a regression analysis on the influence of the three types of capital on the subjective well-being of men and women in Japan while controlling for gainful employment and the number of children in the household.

The dependent variable is subjective well-being, which was surveyed using a scale of 1 to 10.

The Coleman social capital stands for the strong connections and is the sum of the product of the indicators: accessibility, density, multiplexity and complexity for each alter across all of the survey participant's alteri. The frequency of contact was not recorded and cannot, therefore, be taken into account.

The sum of all of the survey participant's alteri forms the scope or size of the network.

The Index for Qualitative Variation (IQV) is a central element for social capital according to Granovetter. The IQV is based on the heterogeneity of a network, i.e. the qualitative distribution is measured here through the different categories in a nominally scaled variable. The index of the qualitative variables varies between 0 and 1. For the Granovetter capital, the qualitative variation of the network members was weighted with the network size.

The concepts of human and economic capital were developed following Bourdieu. Human capital concerns the latest professional position of the survey participants and their educational attainment, and economic capital is their last year's income and existing assets.

To take the differences between the countries into account, the canonical scaling method used by Guttman was applied.

If we take a look at the results of the regression analysis for the types of capital, a very different picture emerges for men and women. Neither employment nor the number of children in the household have any significant effects on subjective well-being, hence they are omitted from the presentation.

Response Overall Life Satisfaction

Parameter estimates

	Japanese male	Japanese female	German male	German female
Term	Prob> t	Prob> t	Prob> t	Prob> t
Intercept	<.0001*	<.0001*	<.0001*	<.0001*
Economic capital	0.0014*	0.1903	<.0001*	<.0001*
Human capital	0.0002*	0.0012*	<.0001*	0.0002*
Granovetter social capital	0.3208	0.4535	0.0011*	0.8768
Coleman social capital	0.6070	<.0001*	0,1236	0.0017*
RSquare	0.0247	0.0349	0.0780	0.0665
Mean of response	5.87	5.64	7.56	7.33
Observations	1031	1102	976	1013

The mean values for subjective well-being in Japan are considerably lower than those obtained for Germany. What is involved here, however, is not a lower level of satisfaction, as assumed by some researchers; it is related instead to the fact that the concept of well-being in Japanese culture is based on the achievement of a moderate level of satisfaction and not a maximum level as is the case in Germany. Uchida et.al. (2015) point out that the idea that life is an up and down process is prevalent in Japan, hence an ideal level of 100 percent would not be considered realistic: instead the ideal is located at 75 percent. In other words the equivalent for a scale of 10 in Japan would be 7-8. If the achievable moderate scale level of 75 percent for the Japanese is assumed, there is little difference between the subjective well-being of the Japanese and German mothers and fathers. Whereas subjective well-being among Japanese men increases with higher economic capital and high cultural capital, for the women it increases with Coleman social capital. In other words, while integration into social relations has no influence on subjective well-being for men in Japan, involvement in close relations is a crucial factor for well-being in women. It should be noted that the relations involved here are mainly intimate ones. Subjective well-being is even higher in women with

greater cultural capital. In Germany too, integration into strong relations has a positive influence on the subjective well-being in women, albeit not as strong as in Japan. Among the German women, the level of subjective well-being is mainly related to economic and cultural capital and is strengthened by the integration into strong family relations. Fathers in Germany present a similar picture to those in Japan; here too economic and cultural capital influence subjective well-being. To this is added, however, the weak ties which also contribute to greater subjective well-being as demonstrated by the Granovetter capital. The results would initially suggest that in addition to all of the historical, cultural and religious differences between Germany and Japan, similarities also exist in terms of the factors that influence social relations, which are based on various role requirements and values and norms for men and women, arising from the two societies' industrial legacy. Hence, with regard to the influence of the types of capital on subjective well-being, the similarities between the sexes appear to be more dominant than those between the cultures. This explanation is only partly applicable, however, as social relations are understood in a different way in Japan to Germany. Japan is not only an industrialized society but also a collective society, in which social relations are based on mutual dependencies and are normative; in other words the values associated with interpersonal relations are deeply rooted in Japanese culture. Individualism is viewed as the opposite of a harmonious relationship and is equated with egotism and social isolation. People withdraw from others to be independent. Hence, developing and maintaining relations results in a deterioration in subjective well-being according to Uchida, et.al. (2015) and not to an improvement as is the case in Germany. To conclude, this study shows that social relations have a different meaning for the subjective well-being of Japanese and German parents. As a result, something that is accepted as universal can actually have very different cultural meanings and consequences in relation to subjective well-being.

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