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# The Dialectics of Auto- and Hetero- stereotypes in the Perception of German and Japanese Students

Jessica HASS<sup>\*1</sup>, Sylvia WAECHTER<sup>\*1</sup> and Margit KRAUSE-ONO<sup>\*2</sup>

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## Abstract

How do Japanese and German students perceive themselves and each other? How do auto- and hetero-stereotypes in the mutual perception relate to the construction of collective identity? These questions are investigated in the study at hand. In 29 qualitative, semi-standardized one-hour interviews, university students in Germany and Japan are asked about their self-perception and the perception of the respective other culture's members. Only by comparing the "self" (in-group) to the "other" (out-groups), can the "self" be recognized. Communities need to rely on stereotypes for the construction of a shared identity, because collectives like national cultures always present imagined communities (cf. Anderson 2006). The shared narrative is necessarily selective and based on the omission of that which would separate the community's members. That which unites the community is emphasized. The results of the interviews demonstrate the relativity of the mutual perception and help to understand the dialectics of auto- and hetero-stereotypes.

Keywords: auto-stereotype, hetero-stereotype, identity

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 1922, the journalist Walter Lippmann first used the term stereotype to approximate a concept in the social sciences. Before that, stereotype was well known and used in the printing industry where it referred to the printing plate which contained the cast page layout. This was a natural choice, given its Greek origin *στερεός* (*stereós*), meaning firm or solid, and *τύπος* (*typos*) meaning impression. Lippmann, however, defined stereotypes as:

“...an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world, to which our habits, our tastes, our capacities, our comforts and our hopes have adjusted themselves. They may not be a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted” (Lippmann 1997, 63).

Besides stereotype there are other terms such as cliché and prejudice which seem to refer to the very same concept as stereotype. While this can be granted for the term cliché, a near synonym for stereotype, prejudice and stereotype cannot be equaled that easily. Their relation is more complicated. Researchers Thomas (2006) and Fiske (1998), for example, define prejudice as a social attitude which displays or is made up of affective, cognitive and behavioral parts. Following this definition, as a stereotype comprises only the cognitive part, it is a sub form or special form of prejudice. Accordingly, stereotype refers to all the traits, features, attributes which are used to describe a social group.

There are researchers, such as Kleinsteuber (1991) and Bergmann (2005), who emphasize that stereotypes and prejudices display solely negative attitudes towards a group or an individual belonging to this group. Other authors, however, also add or include positive attitudes, e.g. Quasthoff (1973), Hahn (2002), and Thomas (2006). There is agreement though, that stereotypes are mental images. They represent a special kind of social attitude aimed at groups or persons who are members of a group. These images are therefore present in the cognitive part of prejudice.

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\*1 Berlin University of the Arts

\*2 College of Liberal Arts, Muroran Institute of Technology

They tend to be emotionally judgmental, positively or negatively. The characteristics attributed to a group, are simplifying and generalizing. To summarize, stereotypes that are shared within a society/group/culture, are rarely based on facts and detailed knowledge about the person or group in question, but are rather preconceived judgments. Stereotypes are constant and universal and therefore hard to change.

According to Manz (1968) there are at least two types of stereotypes: hetero-stereotypes referring to a group to which one does not belong (out-group), and auto-stereotypes which refer to a person's own group (in-group). A vital point is added by Bolten (2007), who stresses the importance of suspected hetero-stereotypes, which he calls meta-images: What individuals or groups suspect others think about them is related to their auto-perception as well as their hetero-perception. Human cognition, as well as social dynamics such as intergroup relations, is responsible for stereotypes being formed. Several theories have been developed to explain the origins of stereotypical thinking, both on the intrapersonal and the interpersonal level.

Human perception is highly selective in order to reduce information influx or at least to avoid information overflow. Therefore, what an observer sees depends on his or her habits of perception. Lippmann stipulates that "humans, in their role as observers, are selective and creative" (1997, 54) and hence dependent on their personal experience. "In order to get along with the chaos of the outer world when perceiving and cognitively processing it, they fall back upon the concepts predefined for them by their culture in stereotypical form" (Lippmann 1997, 59).

Anderson's schema theory (1977) based on Piaget (1936), sees human perception not just as a passive process; but rather as a filter mechanism which reduces complexity and making orientation possible. Bolten (2007) shows that newly perceived information is organized with the help of already existent schemata. This mechanism leads to ignoring or discarding information which cannot be sorted into a person's repertoire of schemata. Information directly contradicting these schemata is often perceived as a source of confusion and irritation (Festinger 1957 on cognitive dissonance). In this case, there are two possible outcomes: either, the contradictory information is classified as an exception to the rule (Maurer, Park & Rothbart 1995) which confirms and reinforces the original schema even further (Johnston & Hewstone 1992), or, more rarely, the schema will be reorganized. The latter outcome, however, requires not only a high amount of cognitive energy, but also causes disorientation. Therefore, humans unconsciously prefer information that is consistent with their world views. "[...] the need of economizing attention is so inevitable, that the abandonment of all stereotypes for a wholly innocent approach to experience would impoverish human life" (Lippmann 1997, 60). Thus, stereotypes incessantly reproduce themselves. For humans it is therefore close to impossible to free themselves from every stereotypical, generalizing or categorizing kind of perception.

There are various theories which attempt to elucidate the origins of prejudices and stereotypes. One of them, such as the theory of social learning (in accordance with Bandura and Walters, 1963) states that stereotypes and enculturation are linked; e.g. whenever observations of differences between social groups are made, influence will be exerted on members of the group by their peers. Most of our images and attitudes are formed during our socialization (Maletzke, 1996, 120). We all absorb various stereotypes and prejudices prevalent in the society in which we are raised. The sources or origins of this are mainly: family, school, peer-groups, church and also mass media. Via the latter we gain an important part or portion of our worldview(s), although this consists solely of secondary or better virtual experiences.

Another source or reason for stereotypical thinking can be found in the mechanisms of intergroup dynamics. No matter how small the traits or features on which membership in a group is based, they are sufficient to cause discrimination once they are identified as traits of an out-group. Tajfel (1982) found sufficient evidence for it in intergroup experiments. The moment it becomes possible to differentiate between in-group and out-group (social), the necessity is felt to distance and distinct one's own in-group from other groups perceived as out-groups. To do this seems to be important in order to form a positive and distinct social identity as has been shown by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986). Stereotypes and prejudices are mechanisms which serve to strengthen the ties within the in-group. In consequence they often lead to judgement of the behavior of out-group members as group-specific rather than as individual traits or personalities. In order to give a better overview of the different functions of stereotypes and prejudices, Thomas (2006) divided those into six groups:

(1) Orientation: In a complex social environment, stereotypes and prejudices enable one to navigate quickly. They help one categorize people and situations nearly instantly, while still remaining capable of acting and reacting quickly.

(2) Adjustment: Via prejudices and stereotypes it is possible to adjust quickly to new social environments with their prevalent values, attitudes and norms. Doing so results in social reward and a recognized status which minimizes social sanctions.

(3) Resistance: With the help of stereotypes and prejudices, feelings of guilt or inner conflict and self-critique can be refuted. By discriminating against and devaluing out-groups, a more positive self-perception or self-image can be gained. This social comparison combined with positive outcome satisfies a major human need.

(4) Self-expression: Stereotypes and prejudices offer the opportunity for self-expression within the in-group as long as the communicated prejudices, which are claimed to be objective knowledge, are shared by other in-group members and therefore deemed desirable.

(5) Identity: Prejudices and stereotypes reinforce the collective spirit of the in-group. By notably closing the group off

against the out-groups, they help define and strengthen an identity (see also Bolten 2007).

(6) Control/justification: Stereotypes and prejudices are used to regulate or control behaviour towards certain persons, contexts or objects. Furthermore, they serve as belated justification for one's behaviour when prejudiced or stereotypical social attitudes are adjusted to an already performed act or behaviour.

Regarding cultural stereotypes, it is necessary to understand the underlying idea or notion of culture. In 1843, Gustav Klemm (1843) published "Allgemeine Culturgeschichte der Menschheit" and defined culture for the first time in a broad sense. Since then innumerable definitions of culture have emerged. By 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn already assembled more than 150 different definitions and it did not stop then. In 1999, Bolten undertook to summarize the numerous definitions of the term culture into three theory groups, each focusing on a different perspective or outlook:

a. The material culture theory focuses on the entirety of artifacts of a society's effort. Monuments and memorials are artifacts, as well as factory buildings, and clothes, in fact, everything perceptible via the senses. Therefore, material culture is limited to the Perceptas (Bolten, 1999, 11).

b. The mentalist culture theory interprets culture in a purely immaterial way. Not the Perceptas but the Konzeptas are emphasized. These are the collectively shared values, attitudes and norms. They cannot be described directly, but have to be deduced from the observable reality (Bolten, 1999, 12).

c. The functionalist culture theory defines culture as an orientation system (Thomas 2005) which is necessary for the social practice of a society, organization or group and is closely related to the notion of normality. Specific everyday actions could not refer to unquestioned assumptions of normality if certain conventions of social actions did not exist (Bolten, 1999, 12).

As Bolten (1999) points out, there is however, a tendency toward an integrative view. Thus, culture is seen as an orientation system which can be described via the Perceptas and explained via the Konzeptas. The term culture may be applied to different levels of society. In this paper, the term refers to national culture. The concept of culture is not the same as the concept of nation as within a national culture one can find innumerable subcultures which are not necessarily of an ethnic nature. Culture though, can also extend beyond the political boundaries of a state. Culture, in the sense of national culture used here, is a convenient simplification.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

As the aim of this paper is to gain insight about the quality of stereotypes in the mutual and self-perception of Germans and Japanese, a qualitative approach with its open, exploratory nature has been adopted.

This study was carried out in 2015/2016. Its basis is 29 qualitative semi-structured and questionnaire-based in-depth interviews with university students from Japan and Germany. On average the interviews lasted one hour and all were recorded and transcribed afterwards. All quotations in this study were translated from the original German and Japanese interviews into English.

None of the participating students had spent more than four weeks in the opposite country. This limit was established to prevent any possible reflective altering of existing stereotypes which might happen during a longer stay or period of study in the other country. Such a case would become a potential source of distortion.

In the German group of interviewees, the female/male ratio was ten to four, whereas for the Japanese group the ratio was five to ten. The German students were between 18 and 31 years old, the Japanese between 19 and 24. The German participants were students at various universities in Berlin, while the Japanese were students at a national university in the north of Japan. The composition of the groups of interviewees might not be the most representative; however, important tendencies in their respective perceptions could nevertheless be detected.

### 2.1 Questionnaire

The interviews were conducted on the basis of a flexible questionnaire which comprised the following questions:

A) When you think of the country Japan/Germany or things Japanese/German what kind of associations come to your mind? Please name as many as possible (preferably nouns).

B) When you think of Japanese/German people, what characteristics come to your mind? Please name as many as possible (preferably adjectives).

C) When you think of Japanese/German people, what kind of actions do you associate with them or come to your mind? Please name as many actions as possible (preferably verbs).

D) How do you imagine a typical Japanese / German? How is he/she as a specific person? Please describe that person. What is his/her name? What does he/she look like? Please describe, for example, his/her character traits, life, relationships, profession, leisure activities, values, ideas, conflict behaviour or any other aspect you would like to talk about.

Japanese students were first asked about their perception of Germany and Germans, while the German students were asked about their perception of Japan and Japanese. The interviews then continued with a repetition of all questions, now referring to the interviewees' own culture with a view to uncovering their self-perception.

In the questionnaire, the interviewees were first asked for nouns, adjectives and verbs, that is, open lexical categories that

encode meaning in various ways. By applying this multi-dimensional approach, it was possible for the interviewees to describe their perception using different linguistic (and potentially also mental) patterns. Thereby, more diverse kinds of answers were generated during the interviews. The last question requested the description of a stereotypical person thus enabling the students to gather their concepts into a more complex description. Asked to use their imaginations, further concepts which had not immediately come to their minds might be tapped. In total, the questionnaire was designed as an open and flexible tool; the order of the questions could be changed following an interviewee's flow of thoughts, while it was also always possible for the interviewer to add further questions if deemed necessary.

## 2.2 Interview Settings and Interview Technique

Although the interviews were based on a questionnaire, its structure did not ask for a rigid application. The interviewer had the option to dig deeper where necessary and to better follow the interviewee's train of thought. Therefore, each interview turned out to be quite different in length. The shortest interview took 35 minutes, while the longest one took 93 minutes. This variation in time is due to the different personalities and temperaments of the interviewees.

Directly before the start of each interview, interviewees were asked to answer as honestly and as directly as possible and to name positive aspects as well as negative traits of each culture. In order to reduce social desirability effects of the type discussed in the following section, the interviewer told the participants to not only talk about their own opinion about Germans and Japanese, but to additionally name stereotypes which they knew existed, even if they did not agree with them. Finally, the interviewees were informed that they would remain completely anonymous in any publication of this study's results.

## 2.3 Methodology critique

The kind of research carried out for this study is often seen as involving a high risk for social desirability effects (Crowne & Marlowe 1960; Bortz & Döring 1995). This means that the results might be distorted due to the interviewees' tendency to give perceived socially desirable answers. The possibility that the interviewees consider it socially undesirable to base their opinions on stereotypes or prejudices cannot be denied, since the everyday understanding of these concepts is partially determined by their normative, moral connotations (cf. Bergmann 2005, Bolten 2007). Of course, this only applies when prejudices are consciously exposed as such.

The face-to-face setting in which the interviews took place could also increase the above risk. To this end, all interviewees were encouraged to mention stereotypes that they knew existed in the public opinion, even if they distanced themselves from them, thus offering a way out of potential discrepancies between their thoughts and socially desirable behavior.

Finally, language itself represented a considerable challenge during the research. As mentioned above, the interview transcriptions were translated into English. Although the translation was kept as close as possible to the original, distortions are unavoidable, since language holds many culturally dependent connotations (see, for example, Koskensalo 2000, 181 ff.) and a 100% exact translation is impossible. Deciding among various possible translations for a word or an expression already constitutes an evaluation. There are also words for which no corresponding linguistically encoded concept exists in the other culture's lexicon and thus cannot be accurately translated.

# 3 SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEWS

As the following summarizing analysis of student perceptions is based on interview material of about 30 hours, it is not possible to be fully faithful to the complexity of the observed perceptions. It must also be stressed that the perceptions and stereotypes presented hereafter do not include any personal opinion of the authors of this paper about the German or Japanese culture. Moreover the authors distance themselves from the idea that cultures or nations, respectively, compose any kind of common national or cultural character. However, stereotypes as social constructs in discourse become a social reality of their own and are therefore worthy of investigation (cf. Milling 2010).

## 3.1 Japanese auto-stereotype

Asked for concepts that come to their mind when they think of their own country, most Japanese students first named gastronomic aspects such as Japanese food and sweets, then green and beautiful landscapes, Mount Fuji, cherry blossoms and four separate seasons were equally presented. According to the interviewees, harmony, peace and safety are strongly associated with Japan:

<1> *Japan is a country full of good things. There is nothing bad; a peaceful country or a country at peace.*  
(Interview-partner Japanese 12 = IPJ12)

<2> *And then peace, I mean peace where one lives. Things are very calm. I have never witnessed any criminal acts. One rarely hears about such things. In my neighbourhood I have never seen any criminal acts, well there was a fire once, but that's all. Normal daily life is very peaceful.* (IPJ14)

The people as well as the country's politics are perceived to be kind and mild on the one hand, while on the other hand

the students often emphasize problems of unassertiveness caused by the island's isolated political and geographic situation. Japan is seen as very well developed technologically and producing excellent electric appliances. Its culture is evaluated as unique, different and of strong originality. Japanese architecture comes to the interviewees' minds as well as manga and the Japanese language. Courtesy, manners and etiquette, along with traditions, martial arts, and kimonos as traditional Japanese dress are firmly related to the country. At the same time, the interviewed students claim a quick paradigm shift and conflict between the older and younger generations. Today's Japan therefore is not the typical traditional Japan of the past anymore:

<3> *Today's Japan and the Japan of former times are different... When I think of Japanese of the past, I find more typical Japanese. ... The Japanese of today do not have the original Japanese culture...* (IPJ6)

<4> *There is a huge gap between the moral concepts/ideals/values of the older generation and those of the younger generation... Since there is obviously a huge gap, one gets the impression that we are fast at changing our worldview, there is a fast paradigm shift.* (IPJ10)

Some interviewees mention World War II and the fact that Japan, as a country which lost the war, has not coped with it as equally well as Germany.

Interestingly, some Japanese participants mention a yearning to go abroad to countries overseas:

<5> *Japanese have a yearning/longing towards foreign countries overseas. Especially towards Europe and the States this feeling is strong.* (IPJ14)

The (stereo-) typical Japanese person in the students' eyes is clearly male. They describe some students, but mostly middle-aged to older men who work in offices in intellectual occupations and live alone or with their families. The typical Japanese is not very tall, slim, has black hair, a yellow skin tone and wears glasses. The Japanese are sober, serious and extremely hard-working. They work many extra-hours, often not coming home before 10 pm.

<6> *They work a lot of overtime. ... Even if they are tired, they will continue working hard nevertheless* (IPJ12)

<7> *...he leaves home in the morning and works until 22:00 or 23:00 and then goes home and does only necessary things, nothing more, and goes to bed.* (IPJ9)

Japanese prefer to work alone and concentrate hard. Besides being strictly punctual, conscientious and obedient, they carry out given tasks in a diligent, obstinate, meticulous way. They are modest and humble, appreciate cleanliness and dislike confusion. At the same time, according to the interviewees, Japanese are very kind and gentle, polite, meek, docile and mild-tempered, but many students also mention certain ambivalences.

<8> *...they are not sincere when they act kindly since they do so, for example, to protect themselves... so there is always a flipside to kindness/attentiveness...* (IPJ9)

Being mild and meek also brings with it a certain weakness and ambivalence.

<9> *Japan is very kind, mild and unassertive. ... In their thinking they ponder each and every step in deep detail, finally ending up thinking too much. Japanese are kind but weak.* (IPJ12)

Working so hard leads to being worn-out, tired and depressed:

<10> *He is rather thin and does not look healthy. ... He works so hard and for so many hours, he gets so tired and worn out that he just wants to rest and relax when he is home. He does not want to go anywhere. So in his private life he is isolated and alone.* (IPJ7)

According to the Japanese students, being reserved and shy represents another typical Japanese trait. Japanese are not very communicative; they have difficulty in expressing themselves and their opinions, especially as they shy away from standing out. Instead, they cultivate the ability to recognize fashion trends in order to always follow the mainstream.

<11> *People are very sensitive and susceptible about things which are in fashion or popular or things everybody talks about. ... Japanese like things that are in fashion or which are popular.* (IPJ14)

<12> *Just form a group and then adjust somehow in one way or another. Things which have become famous or are in fashion, people tend to flock there.* (IPJ3)

Japanese like to build or produce things, especially electrical appliances. During their free time they prefer to stay at home, relax and recover from their hard work. Moreover, Japanese enjoy television entertainment. However, the interviewees also name leisure activities related to going out, socializing and traveling to the countryside with the family.

According to the interviewees, Japanese people do not like to get involved in trouble. In a conflict, they prefer to show a cheerful face instead of admitting any kind of problem.

<13> *They don't say what is really up and rather keep a stiff upper lip.* (IPJ2)

People don't like to get involved in something which becomes complex or is a problem.

<14> *They don't want to get involved in things which are troublesome. ... He strives to live in peace and tries to avoid trouble or to raise any problems. ... If things are calm and he is left in peace, everything is fine.* (IPJ3)

<15> *They tend to stress the importance of (keeping the) atmosphere and group harmony and don't reveal their own feelings.* (IPJ9)

The Japanese tend to value the opinions of the people around them higher than their own preferences. The interviewees emphasize the Japanese group orientation and describe people who like to gather and move in groups and form queues.

<16> *They walk a lot and in groups. ... They like to do things in groups. Things they would never start to do*

*alone they will do in groups of many people. (IPJ5)*

*<17> Japanese like to queue or form a queue. Even if it means that they have to wait a long time. (IPJ3)*

Helping others, especially the family, represents an important value in Japanese society. One purpose of working hard is to earn money to support the family and to guarantee children a safe future. Nevertheless the participants of the study mention that, compared to Germany, the future is less important than the present. Although they desire more free time for leisure, fulfilling duties and accomplishing a lot of excellent work in their lives is obviously very important for Japanese people. As a high social status is claimed to be essential, a Japanese is

*<18> "...constantly afraid that he might not be able to meet the standard" (IPJ9).*

The highest aim of the Japanese's actions lies in living a harmonious, peaceful, safe and stable life.

### 3.2 German hetero-stereotype

Sausages, meat, tasty food and beer are very common associations with the country Germany in the Japanese participants' minds. Soccer and cars are present, as well. While many students name concepts connected to the country's history, such as Hitler, the Nazis, and World War II, as well as the division and reunification of the state, they admire how German society coped with its dark past and contrast it to their own country:

*<19> Also, concerning the war, how this was dealt with in Germany and how this is settled, is far more advanced than in Japan. (IPJ15)*

*<20> After the war, in Germany there was a real war-trial. In Japan, the trial about the war, there was no real repentance about what they had done and no image of how to rebuild the country. In Germany however, the society as a whole was involved to become a better country. In Japan, quite some people still believe the main or top criminals of war were not bad. There is a difference in awareness, although both countries have lost the war. (IPJ3)*

Germany's democracy is in part perceived as more advanced than democracy in Japan. Furthermore, the interviewees emphasize the country's close diplomatic relationships to its neighboring countries and its leading role in the European Union in terms of economy and technology. Wind power and the abandonment of nuclear energy represent equally strong mental associations. Additionally, cultural aspects like philosophy and the German language are mentioned. The interviewees compare German architecture with its lined up brick houses to the very different architecture in Japan. Furthermore they think of historic buildings such as Neuschwanstein. Finally, some students claim Germany to be a very popular place to go for exchange students.

*<21> Germany is about the place I want to go as an exchange student. (IPJ2)*

*<22> A fellow student, who had studied one year abroad, talked about the many foreign students in Germany and in other European countries, so there are exchanges and encounters. (IPJ6)*

The Japanese interviewees imagine the (stereo-) typical German person as clearly male. Only one participant describes a female representative. They describe university students and middle-aged craftsmen, who are often self-employed. Around half of the described persons are married and live with their families; the other half lives alone. According to the interviewees, Germans are typically tall with muscular stature and broad shoulders. Interestingly, some students mention that German noses are longer.

The Japanese interviewees describe Germans as truly kind, warm-hearted and broad-minded on the one hand, but also as egoistic and self-centered on the other. They are seen as very strict towards others and themselves. Moreover, the Japanese interviewees focus on the alleged straightforwardness of the Germans, not only in reference to their communication style, but also as to mental attitude. Germans are claimed to be very self-confident and to have strong and firm minds. At the same time they are hasty and quick-tempered. If they are determined to do something, they follow their plan and transform it into reality:

*<23> In general he focusses on one or very few things and puts all his energy into it/them. (IPJ2)*

*<24> ...then their energy and taking actions is amazing. (IPJ6)*

In conflicts, they express their opinions directly and frankly, even overriding others. Furthermore they often react angrily.

*<25> In debates or discussions he does not listen to what others have to say. He only expresses his own opinion in an overriding way. (IPJ12)*

Just like the Japanese see themselves, Germans are seen as sober and earnest, polite, tidy, organized, punctual, and to work accurately as well. However, while the Germans' attitude towards their work is passionate and they take work very seriously, they work far fewer hours than the Japanese.

*<26> He is serious about his work, his private life he wants to lead leisurely. He does not want to bring work into his private life. ... He goes to work at the same time and goes home at the same time. ... He works seriously during work-time. Once that is done, it is done and over. (IPJ2)*

Germans value their free time very highly and follow a daily routine coming home around the same time every day. When not working, they appreciate time spent outdoors, hiking in the mountains, having barbecues or going out with their family and friends. Playing and watching soccer represent equally strong associations, as well as listening to music and reading books.

The Japanese interviewees describe Germans as generally happy and cheerful persons, who are content with their lives. Close people like family and friends are very important to them, therefore they desire to get married and have a family themselves. In order to lead a leisurely life, it is important for them to succeed in having a secure job with a fixed income. At the same time, they highly value their professional careers. Some students mention that Germans work not only for their own sake, but also have in mind the greater good and their contribution to society.

<27> *...they are all aware that they are working for an industry within a state - a certain sense of belonging to a state, maybe; one can get the impression that they want the state, Germany, to have a certain powerful position in the world – powerful not in a bad sense.* (IPJ9)

Consequently, they feel responsible to protect and take care of youngsters as well as subordinates at the work place.

<28> *It seemed to me that they take care of those younger than themselves. ... At work he is severe, however, given his age, he holds a certain position and therefore he looks after his subordinates, supervises them rigorously, but also helps them to learn the ropes. He is probably a person who is really into education and educating: at home his children and at the workplace his subordinates.* (IPJ14)

According to the interviewees, in contrast to the Japanese, who tend to primarily live in the present, Germans tend to plan decades ahead.

### 3.3 German auto-stereotype

Besides the classic mental images of beer, sausages and soccer, when German interviewees think of their own country, geographical aspects quickly come to their minds: the Baltic and North Sea; various mountains and forests, beautiful and diverse landscapes are as present as big cities like Berlin, Hamburg or Munich; every region is claimed to have its own culture.

Germany's dark history, Hitler, the Holocaust and World War II, as well as the Berlin Wall and the reunification of East and West Germany are ascribed to the country as much as her current leading role in the European Union, the close relationship to other countries and the political values of democracy and freedom. Angela Merkel and federalism are often mentioned, as well. The suspected hetero-stereotype plays an important role in this context.

<29> *Many say: Okay, Hitler and war and World War II and somehow Holocaust and persecution of Jews and all that political stuff that happened here, but I don't have that in myself, that is why... this is what comes to other people's minds.* (Interview partner German 2 = IPG2)

<30> *This whole Nazi history. Kind of that Germans are still perceived as Nazis or so... abroad.* (IPG4)

<31> *A comprehension of democracy. An open social system. Freedom for the citizens. Equal opportunities.* (IPG3)

The country's economy is marked by big companies, the car industry, crafts and the quality brand: Made in Germany. Punctuality, cleanliness and order, as well as an exaggerated bureaucracy are equally important in the interviewees' imagination as ecological consciousness and a successful social welfare system.

The students experience a gap between narrow-minded attitudes, PEGIDA (civil movement: Patriot Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), the AfD (right-wing German party) and the hatred of strangers on the one hand, and liberal, open and broad-minded attitudes on the other hand. The capital Berlin is claimed to fulfill a special role and to be rather atypical with its welcoming openness.

<32> *As I live in Berlin, I think I have a different perception of Germany. So here in Berlin it's so multi-cultural and it is so... here I have the feeling it is totally open, everyone is welcome... and that's why it's somehow not really Germany. Well, I don't really have a definition for Germany, but I know it's different at my parents' or generally in the country.* (IPG2)

<33> *But I also think that Berlin is not really representative for the rest of Germany. I have the feeling that elsewhere it is more conservative than in Berlin.* (IPG6)

The typical German according to the German interviewees is torn apart between two extremes, as well. Naturally, all described images are complex and paradox in themselves, however, the German participants explicitly claim a polarization between the uneducated and intellectuals, the old and the young, people living in the east and in the west, the cities and the countryside, politically conservative/extreme-right and politically liberal attitudes.

<34> *And then I always have the feeling it's separated between two extremes: some are totally social, the others less, somehow... divided... and one half is like... arms open somehow... and the other half rather... we don't want strangers, well, closed, typically German.* (IPG2)

<35> *Democracy. But unfortunately currently also a lot of stupidity. ... In the sense of PEGIDA and xenophobia and so. ... If I put it simply: two classes. The intellectuals: very liberal, democratic, open, broad-minded, European and so. And then, unfortunately, a very big mass of uneducated people who are totally fearful because of their lack of education. Hostile to strangers. Over-conservative.* (IPG11)

The German participants imagine the typical German as clearly male and describe university students and youngsters in professional training, as well as middle-aged to older people who work as craftsmen, as teachers, in public service or as employees in offices. They are described as dark blond, tall, have broad shoulders and are either sporty and slim or fat

with a beer belly. According to the interviewees, the typical German is dressed rather decently at work and more relaxed at home. Furthermore functional clothes like hiking shoes or rain coats are claimed to be typical for Germans. The described Germans live either in big cities or in suburbs and small towns, and own the homes in which they live with their families. Small family houses seem to dominate the perception.

<36> *He definitely owns a house. But not paid off yet. A duplex. (IPG3)*

<37> *A family dog. A family house. (IPG5)*

Mostly, the interviewees perceive Germans as punctual, orderly, diligent and ambitious. Interestingly, they often distance themselves from these virtues:

<38> *That one is punctual. Although I wouldn't say this is always the case. Well, I am not that punctual. (IPG9)*

Moreover, the Germans are perceived to work efficiently. During their free time, the Germans allegedly like participating in sports such as soccer or biking. They enjoy spending time outdoors in nature and hiking. Spending time with family and friends at home or outside is important for them. Gardening, putting up garden dwarfs and barbecuing represent preferred activities as well:

<39> *And a garden, which he takes care of during the weekends with his wife. That seems typically German to me. (IPG5)*

Watching soccer with friends represents another dominant leisure activity in the interviewees' perception. According to the interviewees, they appreciate the emotional group dynamics brought about by soccer, particularly in a big stadium during a live game.

<40> *Well, I think he likes such group dynamics a lot. What I said before: Watching soccer... that he goes to special games and totally celebrates... and he totally enjoys it and loves this whole atmosphere. (IPG2)*

Finally, traveling is perceived as very important. Germans like to travel a lot and families go on journeys at least once a year.

The typical Germans appear to be of two types: reserved, introverted, serious and unrelaxed; contrasted with relaxed, kind and hospitable, open, warm, broad-minded and social. While the first type is also described as petty, unhappy with his own life, permanently complaining and sticking to rules to an exaggerated extent, the latter is perceived as cheerful, humorous, uncomplicated and happy with his private and professional life.

<41> *A totally cheerful personality, seems charming to many people, well ... who simply laugh with her. She is funny, relaxed, doesn't have a hard time getting to know other people. (IPG14)*

Germans tend to either confront problems directly and openly or to avoid conflicts completely. Some become angry easily; others stay calm and focus on the solution of a problem. Germans are claimed to be easily offended, but to give in quickly.

<42> *I would say... in each case rather emotional. And let's his anger out. Sulks a little, maybe. But he calms down again, too. (IPG1)*

The unhappy type of German is also very conservative, materialistic and drives a car which serves as a status symbol.

<43> *Germans define themselves depending on the car they drive. (IPG7)*

Safety and financial stability are said to be very important:

<44> *Well, some sort of safety... to have a fixed job... and a household... and somehow... I bet... or I suppose or imagine him to have all kinds of possible insurances. Whatever can be insured is insured. (IPG2)*

The happy German type, on the other hand, is politically liberal or leads an alternative lifestyle. He stands up for his own convictions, does volunteer work, e.g. to support refugees. He tends to be a vegetarian and tries to protect the environment.

<45> *Well, I also connect an ecological consciousness with the Germans. Not so common still, though. And somehow vegetarianism. (IPG10)*

Family is very important for both types. Young people want to have a family in the future, even if for the time being they have difficulties deciding on or finding a partner. They spend a lot of their time together with their families; having breakfast together, going on trips or helping the children with their homework, for example.

<46> *Maybe once in a while activities with his kids... like going to the zoo or so. (IPG10)*

However, a distinction is made between families with a warm and close relationship between parents and children on the one hand and parents who are not seriously interested in their children except for the fact that they expect them to succeed at school or university.

<47> *They get along well. And they are proud of her, because she did so well at university, in spite of working. (IPG14)*

<48> *Then he has two kids, who go to school. But he isn't really interested in them. (IPG2)*

<49> *He would also try to get his children to the Gymnasium (academic high school) and to get good marks at school. I'd say, that's important to him. (IPG10)*

Overall the unhappy type is, in variations, described more frequently than the happy German and therefore is supposedly more dominant in the participants' perception.

### 3.4 Japanese hetero-stereotype

Contrasts also mark the German participants' perception of Japan and the Japanese, although the polarization between different poles is not as dominant as in their auto-perception. Asked for their mental associations with the country Japan, besides gastronomic aspects like sushi, rice and fish, the German interviewees mostly emphasize the alleged stress and hectic life in big cities like Tokyo, which they imagine to be crowded, overpopulated and marked by huge skyscrapers. They think of smog and the lack of blue sky. On the other hand, beautiful landscapes with green, calm and idyllic forests, rice fields and mountains, the sea, gardens and cherry blossoms come to their minds as well.

<50> *Somehow I always connect stress with Japan, I must say. ... And well, big cities, many people, restlessness... somehow the effect seems still very hectic. I believe, the language seems hectic and very high pitched. And... sometimes I also think that they are like small ants, working a lot. (IPG2)*

<51> *Japan... my image is divided... on the one hand because of Tokyo, a huge city... well, I associate trouble... many colors... and very technical. And at the same time this other image, the country, actually very idyllic regarding the landscape and very careful, concentrated and selected. On the one hand this focus on technology... overkill because of the big city, but also calm. (IPG6)*

Historical aspects like the dropping of atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and World War II seem to be very present in the interviewees' perception. Particularly the catastrophe of Fukushima is of utmost importance, as it is often one of the first associations named. Earthquakes and natural disasters are said to be very common on the islands, as much as nuclear energy is perceived to be very important.

<52> *And at once Fukushima is in my head somehow. That I thought, when this happened... I had the feeling... wow... the whole of Japan is not there anymore. And that's why it seems totally strange to me that everything is open again and over or so. Although the radiation is still there and poisons the sea. (IPG4)*

The country Japan is perceived to be technologically highly developed, just like Germany. In contrast to that, old traditions like the Samurai culture, Buddhism and temples are emphasized, too. The traditional kimono is contrasted with the modern, colorful, hip and even crazy dressing style, which is seen as a reference to manga culture. Besides manga and anime, the interviewees strongly associate arts and handicrafts in general with Japan. Japanese literature and the Japanese language with its artful script seem to be present in their minds. Some interviewees state that Japan composes a wholly different culture than Europe.

<53> *For me, Japan is the culture which is most different from Western culture. (IPG7)*

When asked for the (stereo-) typical Japanese person, interestingly this imaginative person is clearly younger and more feminine than the German auto-stereotype. The German students often talk about university students, teenagers and even children, which might be connected with the small, slim and slender physical appearance they describe. Older persons are mostly office employees, whose work is either connected with technology or with art and design. Accordingly, an elegant fashion style is associated with the physical appearance. Men in suits and girls in school uniforms mark the German interviewees' image of the Japanese.

<54> *I always have that image of them looking all the same. I always see men in suits and children in school uniforms. (IPG7)*

The typical Japanese person according to the German interviewees lives with his or her family in a very small apartment in a huge skyscraper in Tokyo. Younger people tend to be singles, older people tend to be married and have children. The Japanese are typically perceived as very friendly and hospitable, polite and open, but mostly as very reserved and controlled. As they do not want to offend anyone, they do not honestly express what they think or feel.

<55> *They would never show their feelings or emotions publicly, I think. (IPG7)*

When they have to deal with a problem or conflict, they tend to avoid confrontation and prefer to endure the conflict silently, particularly when authorities are involved.

<56> *She moves back to her room and is totally calm and doesn't say anything and simply endures it. (IPG2)*

With a peer, in contrast, a confrontation is possible; however, in this case, the Japanese strive for balance and compromise as well.

<57> *I would say, well, I believe he searches for communication in each case. And... stays faithful to his opinion. ... but is also willing to compromise and would take himself back. (IPG1)*

When Germans think of the Japanese, they think of intelligent and educated people who are extremely diligent, hard-working and disciplined. Due to their high ambitions, they study a lot. On the other hand they are also seen as humorous, funny and social people, who like to go out and spend time with friends. The Germans also perceive them as nerdy, crazy and garish, wearing crazy and colorful dresses and hairstyle and going to hip manga events.

<58> *A little crazy maybe sometimes. When I think of such manga events or so, one always hears of extremes. Or I think... concerts are always big and crazy and everyone dresses in a certain style. (IPG10)*

The Japanese are perceived as very creative. According to the Germans, besides technological devices, they also have a high affinity for music, as lots of them start to play a musical instrument at a very young age.

<59> *I would say that they are often very talented in terms of music or in learning an instrument. Classical instruments or music. Violin. Piano. (IPG9)*

They prefer creative leisure activities such as handicrafts, drawing manga or photography. Reading and watching films is allegedly typical as well. All in all, though, the Japanese suffer from a lack of free time for leisure and would like to have more opportunities to travel the world.

<60> *I imagine someone who doesn't have much free time. Someone who works a lot. (IPG10)*

In Japan, according to the interviewees, diligence, decency and modesty are highly appraised values. While status in society is said to be very important, the Japanese are claimed to support idealistic rather than materialistic values. Family plays a highly important role. Having a healthy family is suspected to be a status symbol. For this reason, young people wish to have their own future families. The relationship between parents and children is claimed to be very respectful. Bringing honor to the family and supporting them, even financially, is obligatory. At the same time, parents behave very strictly towards their children, who have to learn a lot in order to be successful at school. The husband and father goes to work and represents the head of family, while the wife and mother takes care of the children and household.

<61> *That they have high demands in terms of success. There is kind of a lot of pressure... also that this pressure comes from the families. Well, I think the parents want her to be successful and there is definitely pressure. (IPG2)*

<62> *At home, they are very strict. The children have to be successful at school, learn the whole day, in order to gain honour for the family. The wife is not allowed to work, because the husband is the one who works. He loves and takes care of his children, but he is also severe. There is a hierarchy, the children have to obey the parents, no discussion allowed. (IPG14)*

Some interviewees indicate a generational conflict between the traditional values and role models of the parents and the more modern values of younger Japanese.

<63> *Conflicts between her and the family, due to tradition. She wants women to have a better position, that's why she is partially opposed to the traditional image. Still, she tries to integrate it into her daily life. ... She gets along well with her parents, but there is conflict in that the parents' attitude is more traditional and sometimes complications arise. (IPG6).*

#### 4 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

As a prelude to the then following discussion of findings, we would like to stress the following points: our everyday understanding shows a tendency to claim that stereotypes are based on some sort of truth or reality. However, it is not truth, or its lack, that makes a stereotype what it is, but rather its emotional content and its a priori character. Stereotypes as social constructs contain more information about the identity of those voicing them than about the out-group. As Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner put it: "Each opinion we voice regarding explicit culture usually says more about where we come from than about the community we are judging" (1997, 21). All in all, our perception depends on the knowledge contained in our already existing schemata, and the stereotypes we accept constitute a mirror for our own experience and our own worldviews (cf. Bolten 2007, 128). Therefore, it seems more appropriate to compare a culture's auto-stereotypes with the same culture's concept of others.

A considerable part of the interviews gives evidence for the relativity of the auto- and hetero-perception. Frequently, the interviewees actively establish an explicit reference between Germany and Japan, for example the different handling of the two countries' role in World War II. More often, however, the reference is of an implicit or even subconscious quality: The classic German stereotype of being hard-working (e.g. Haß 2013) experiences a shift of emphasis from a Japanese perspective. The Japanese interviewees, who perceive their own culture's members as extremely hard-working to the point of exhaustion, describe Germans as taking their work seriously and working accurately, but not as long and hard as the Japanese.

Seen from a Japanese perspective, Germans with their direct communication style may not be concerned with self-protection, but at the same time they do not shy away from harming the communication partner's face. In this sense they may be perceived as open and their kindness as "*true kindness*" (IPJ9), but equally as egoistic and self-centered.

The weakness and lack of assertiveness, which the Japanese interviewees attribute to their own culture, are contrasted with the strong-minded and self-confident Germans, who always follow their own plans. At the same time, differently from themselves, Germans are seen as not taking other people's opinions or feelings under consideration.

Contrary to most of the Japanese interviewees, the Germans compare themselves less explicitly with the Japanese. However, as mentioned above, the typical Japanese in their eyes is clearly younger and more feminine than the typical German. This could represent a subconscious comparison. Furthermore, the Japanese as allegedly very idealistic are seen contrasted with the clearly materialistic Germans, a phenomenon, which could be observed in earlier studies comparing German and Spanish stereotypes, as well (Haß 2013).

The German interviewees show a strong fixation on contrasts within their own country. In the process of describing their perception of the Japanese, they focus on contrasts as well, e.g. between the generations, between traditional and more modern values. The older, conservative and unhappy German represents a stereotype also observed in earlier studies (Haß 2013). The birth of another, younger and more open type could be due to different reasons:

In previous studies a lack of identification with the described German auto-stereotype could be detected. Insofar, this auto-stereotype may in fact represent the sub-type (cf. also Johnston & Hewstone 1992) of an old German person, a hetero-stereotype to the young interviewees. Possibly, students now identify more strongly with their country or the polarization between social classes has become so overwhelming in the current discourse that the necessity of this second sub-type arose.

Again, the relativity of images may represent another conceivable explanation. In contrast to the allegedly open, passionate and cheerful Spaniard (Haß 2013) the serious and miserable German may seem obvious to the interviewees. They ascribe very conservative values to the Japanese though, who are additionally regarded as calm and introverted. These character traits are also held to be true for the unhappy German type. However, the need to draw a contrast may have led to the younger sub-type.

Japanese, however, do not see as strong a contrast within their own culture or between the generations. In total they see themselves as rather docile and meek which translates into kindness on the outside. In actual fact, however, this is often a technique to avoid confrontation and conflicts. Besides their actual physical appearance, this might also be one of the reasons why Japanese are seen as younger or more female by the Germans.

It should also be noted, that among both groups of students meta-stereotypes are frequently discernible in the interviews. The interviewees often explicitly characterize stereotypes as suspected exterior perspective.

## 5 CONCLUSION

As reflected by Social Identity Theory, it is evident that stereotypes are closely related to the concept of collective identity. As soon as group identity exceeds a pure sense of belonging to a group and develops the need for self-definition, stereotypes are necessarily involved. Imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) consist of so many individuals that it becomes impossible for its members to know each other personally. Therefore, these communities cannot define themselves without drastically reducing complexity. In his classic work, Anderson (2006) describes how national identity is constructed. A common narrative, as well as heroes, symbols and myths are created by emphasizing aspects of a country's history that have a uniting rather than separating effect.

Moreover, it is unavoidable that identity is constructed based on the "other". Without out-groups, no in-group exists. Only by defining "who we are not" can we define who we are (or want to be) (Hahn 2000, 15). Furthermore, identity, whether individual or collective, is not a fixed concept. Instead, depending on the momentary group of reference, auto-perception experiences a slight shift. Attributions to the in-group influence stereotypes about out-groups, as stereotypes are always ethnocentric images (Yu 2006, 116).

Thus, it can be stated that auto-stereotypes influence hetero-stereotypes just as hetero-stereotypes have a repercussion on auto-stereotypes. Moreover, meta-stereotypes, i.e. suspected hetero-stereotypes have to be put into the equation, as well. What one suspects others think about him or herself, constitutes and is influenced by one's own self-perception (also Bolten 2007, 123). At the same time this meta-stereotype also influences our hetero-stereotypes of the respective other group and vice versa. The present study has shown this mechanism and it would be interesting to broaden its scope and take other regions of each country into consideration as well. Furthermore, researching and comparing in detail the daily routine in elementary schools or analyzing typical text-book material might help to discover some of the sources and methods of how images and stereotypes (auto as well as hetero ones) are construed.

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