

Wellness

"We Will Support You!" - Reducing Health Care Costs Through Behavioral Management in Japan

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The controversial debate over health care reform in the U.S. has highlighted two key dilemmas: the first is that we must ration care. The second dilemma is that such conversations prove to make Americans extremely nervous, precipitating discourses of excessive bureaucracy ("death panels") and even Nazism. This article explores the question of how the body, social values, and health are managed in social democracies where rationing is implemented on a daily basis. I explore a recent Japanese government incentive to curb obesity by taking citizens' waists measurements at yearly check-ups. As industrialized countries are becoming aware of rising health care costs, weight control is emerging as a major health care issue. The Japanese Ministry of Health has launched an initiative focusing on what they are calling "diseases of the lifestyle" (*seikatsu shūkanbyō*). Although the U.S. has few tools to regulate its citizens' behavior outside of "marketing," in Japan, where health care is regulated and subsidized by national and local government, where many companies still offer extensive social security benefits, and where education is nationally standardized, there are many avenues for control and modification of daily behavior.

"You have to have something to live for" - Personal Identity and Ikigai

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This paper examines the Japanese notion of ikigai (that what makes life worth living), while trying to rethink the apparent discrepancy between its two senses as communal commitment and as individual self-improvement (c.f. Mathews 1996:18). Even though ikigai usually reflects personal choice, it nevertheless involves others, effectively representing one's involvement in socially oriented activities (Traphagan 2004:69). Drawing on an analysis of locally available self-help books, public lectures, self-improvement classes (e.g. okeiko) and discussions with participants, the paper focuses on the interplay between the personal and communal aspects of this important concept, currently widely used in relation to the elderly. This leads to a consideration of the political context surrounding the use of ikigai, based on the case of public lectures organized by local governments within Osaka Prefecture.

Walking the Kumano Routes: Pilgrimage, Tourism or Wellness?

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The sacred sites and the pilgrimage routes connecting them in the Kii mountain range (Kii peninsula) were designated as World Heritage in 2004. To attract new categories of visitors, the prefecture of Wakayama issued tourist campaigns enhancing the several benefits of wellness one can find through a close relation to the sacred nature of Kumano. As Japanese population is

ageing, health related matters are becoming a main concern. Keeping a good health by walking seems to be a new tendency among leisure organisations. Walking inside the Japan of the past seems an activity which attracts new kinds of visitors to old familiar tourist spots. Walking has been part of the culture of travel (tabi no bunka) for hundred of years and today some parts of the historic network of routes belong to the category of cultural assets as in this case. So we may ask what the real concern with walking in Japanese culture is.