The time exhibition (toki no tenrankai) in Tokyo and the promotion of efficient time use in Japan in the 1920s

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While postwar Japan is internationally recognized as a paragon of punctuality and efficient time use, Japanese society was generally regarded as lacking in time discipline until the 1920s/30s. When the Ministry of Education (Monbushō) held a time exhibition (toki no tenrankai) in Tokyo in 1920, this marked the beginning of a nationwide campaign to promote efficient time use in order to increase Japan’s economic strength. Supported by both state and society actors, the campaign aimed at introducing modern time discipline into people’s private and social life.

Recently, Japanese historians have begun to examine the transition to efficient, time-saving behaviour which is considered a crucial feature of everyday life in industrial societies. The key issues in this new area of research at the intersection of social, economic and technological history are to define the period of this transition and to identify its causes.

In my talk, I will address the question how the time exhibition and the subsequent time campaign contributed to disseminating modern time discipline among the population in the 1920s/30s.

Dr Katja Schmidtpott is temporary lecturer in Japanese History at FAMES. She is specializing in the social and economic history of modern Japan and is currently working on a book about the transformation of temporal behaviour in Japan in the course of the 20th century. From 2006 until 2012, Dr Schmidtpott was Professor of Japanese History and Society at the Center of Japanese Studies at the University of Marburg. Research stays in Japan include Ochanomizu Women’s University, Keio University and Osaka City University. In 2012, she was elected co-president of the German Association of Japanese Studies (GJF). Dr Schmidtpott has been teaching in Japanese Studies at the universities of Bochum, Marburg, Leipzig, Frankfurt and at Cologne Business School since 1997.