

## Getting away with sleep—social and cultural aspects of dozing in parliament

Steger, Brigitte, author

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### Abstrak

Starting from a series of articles on dozing parliamentarians in the Japanese weekly *Shkan Hseki*, this paper elaborates on sleep—or more precisely, *inemuri* (napping; literally ‘to be asleep while present’)—during public, observable working situations. First, work ethics and the meanings of diligence are discussed by analysing sleeping behaviour and the reasons provided for it. They reveal that one's commitment to a job in general is judged by the time and effort spent on it rather than by the efficiency and concentration with which it is pursued. *Inemuri* can be interpreted as the result of exhaustion from devotion to work and sacrificed nocturnal sleep and thus even as a subtle method of showing commitment to work. Secondly, the conceptual meaning of *inemuri* and its social significance is deduced from its literal meaning. As long as it does not endanger the social situation at hand, *inemuri* is culturally accepted as a subordinate involvement or an away (Erving Goffman) in Japanese society. The degree of acceptance, however, is influenced by the power relations between the persons involved since those relations largely determine who defines the situation as one where sleeping is or is not acceptable.