

Very Low Fertility in Japan and Value Change Hypotheses

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Abstract Fertility in Japan dropped below replacement level in the middle of the 1970s and declined further since the middle of the 1980s, having reached the total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.42 in 1995. There is much evidence to show that such fertility decline occurred directly as the result of the rise in the proportion never married and the rise in the age at marriage and age at childbearing. In this article the author tries to examine whether value change hypotheses as proposed for explaining below replacement fertility in the West are applicable to the fertility decline in Japan. According to various nationally representative time-series and comparable attitudinal surveys which have been undertaken in the post-war period by various institutes, there has hardly been any dramatic change in attitude toward religion and only a moderate change from social conformism toward individualistic attitude over the last 40 years. In contrast, there has been a tremendous attitudinal change related to women's social and family roles, in such areas as premarital sex, divorce, gender-role division, and the care of elderly parents, especially since the middle of the 1980s. All these survey results suggest that the rapid rise in the proportion never married in Japan in this latest decade can be related to the change in the value system regarding women's social and familial role and status, a change toward the valuation of a gender equal society, rather than to secular individuation or the end of a child-centered society.

1. Factors behind Fertility Decline below the Replacement Level

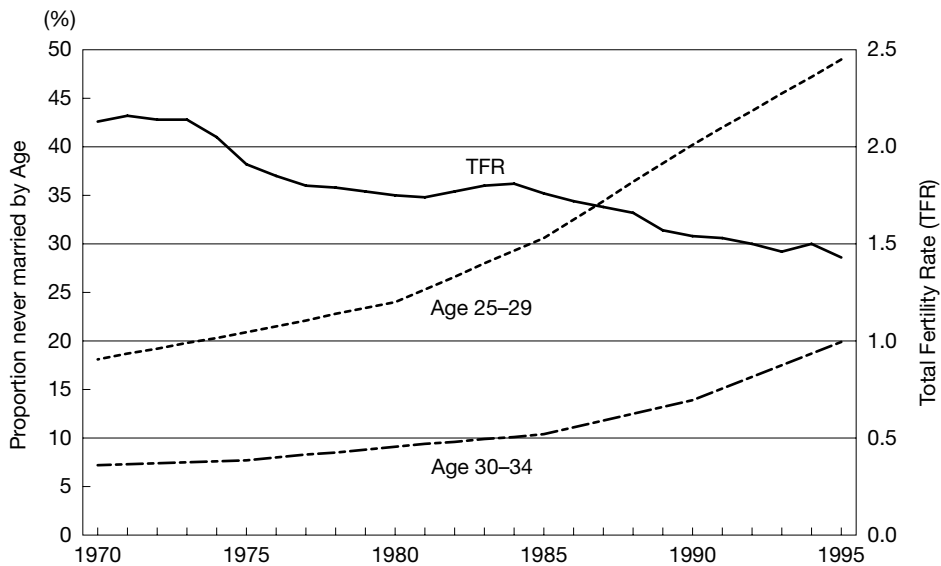
After going through fertility transition from the traditional high fertility regime to the modern low fertility regime by the end of the 1950s, the total fertility rate (TFR) in Japan stayed around the replacement level for more than a dozen years. But the TFR fell below the replacement level in the mid-1970s, and entered a new phase of fertility decline (Fig. 1). The trends in fertility for the two decades after the mid-1970s can be divided into two periods. Although fertility fell below the replacement level, the earlier period from 1973 to 1984 saw signs of a temporary rise, and the TFR in 1984 remained still at 1.81—about the same level as those of Britain, France, and the USA, which had the highest fertility rate among developed

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countries around that time. In the latter period from 1984 to 1995, however, fertility rates recorded a straightforward fall, and fertility continued dropping to record-breaking lows every year from 1989 until 1995 when it landed at 1.42. Among developed countries, this TFR is comparable to that of Germany and seems to approach those of such Southern European countries as Italy and Spain, which have the lowest rates in the world.

The demographic factors for the fertility decline in Japan after the mid-1970s are relatively clear. According to the decomposition analysis of the decline of TFRs into two factors, i.e., changes in the proportion of the population currently married and changes in fertility among married couples, the fertility decline was almost entirely affected by the decline in the proportion currently married (Atoh 1992). The fall in the proportion currently married among women of reproductive age is caused solely by the increase of never-married women, and the younger the birth cohort, the longer the period of singlehood. As a result of prolonged singlehood, the mean age at first marriage has continued to rise.¹ If the change in the proportion of males and females never-married from 1975 to 1995 is examined



Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare, Vital Statistics; Management and Coordination Agency, Population Census.

Figure 1 Trends in the total fertility rate and the proportion of women never married by age

¹ For women, the mean age at first marriage has continuously risen from 24.2 in 1972 to 26.3 in 1995; for men, however, the age rose from 26.7 in 1972 to 28.4 in 1987, and then remained almost at the same level, because the proportion of men who remained single up to their 40s had already begun to increase.

in more detail, it is evident that the increase in the proportion never-married was much sharper in the years 1985 to 1995 than that in the preceding 10-year period, corresponding to the fertility falls in the earlier and latter stages of the 20-year period (Fig. 1).

What factors were involved in the increase of the proportion never married and marriage postponement, causing fertility decline in Japan after the mid-1970s? In order to explain below-replacement fertility in Western developed countries after the 1960s two major approaches have been taken—the technological and the economic.

The technological approach emphasized the authorization and spread of oral contraceptive pills in the 1960s, the ensuing prevalence of modern contraceptives, especially sterilization, and the legalization of induced abortion in the 1970s. The spread of new and effective birth control measures contributed to a reduction in unwanted pregnancies and unwanted child births (Westoff 1983), which led to a reduction in “dependent marriages,” marriages urged by unmarried pregnancy (Bourgeois-Pichat 1987), and a decline in fertility among groups which traditionally had high fertility rates, such as Catholic and African-American populations in the United States. These factors altogether contributed to bringing about the general fertility decline (Jones and Westoff 1979). The economic approach notes the increased labor force participation of women after the 1960s. In particular, the studies based on the economics of fertility initiated by G. Becker and H. Leibenstein considered that as women’s employment opportunities were widened, and as their wage level rose, helped by their higher educational attainment, hourly cost for child-rearing (opportunity cost) would also rise and women would prefer employed labor to childcare; and as a result, they preferred fewer children, which led to fertility decline (e. g. Butz and Ward 1979).

The first approach can hardly be applied to explaining the fertility decline in Japan after the mid-1970s. There was no significant change either in the laws relating to fertility control or in the prevalence of fertility control methods around that time (PPRC 1994a), and the level of “unwanted births” can be estimated to have already been very low in the 1970s (Atoh 1982 and 1989). In contrast, the second approach is very relevant, and there are some studies applying the economic models of fertility (Ogawa 1986; Ohbuchi 1982 and 1988). In postwar Japan, children advanced to higher education in increased numbers, such that by the end of the 1960s more girls than boys entered upper secondary high schools, and by the end of the 1980s enrollment rates for girls in institutions of higher education, including two-year colleges, exceeded those for boys. At present, the gap between boys and girls entering four-year universities is narrowing (Ministry of Education 1996). Women’s labor force participation rates turned upward in the middle of the 1970s after a period during which the rates had decreased for some

time. Between 1975 and 1995, the labor force participation rates for women aged between 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 rose from 66% to 74% and from 43% to 65% respectively (Statistics Bureau 1996). In 1995, the labor force participation rate for women above 15 years of age was 49.0%. The wage gap between men and women in the 20–29 age bracket has been gradually narrowing, and by 1994 women's wages reached almost 90% of men's (Ministry of Labor 1994). There is no doubt that from both sociological and economic viewpoints, the improvement of women's social and economic status contributed to the increase in the proportion never married, the rise in late marriages, and the consequent fertility decline during the period.

Both technological and economic approaches are useful in explaining the declining fertility in industrialized countries. Is it reasonable, however, to explain the phenomenon only with these approaches? Other than technological and economic factors, cultural factors are also considered to affect people's decisions upon questions of childbearing. It has been pointed out that religious and/or moral systems encouraging early marriage and large families were prevalent in traditional societies before fertility transition (Notestein 1945). According to the Princeton study on the fertility transition in Europe, it was found that fertility decline was experienced around the same time in regions where the same language and religion are shared, regardless of the level of economic development (Coale and Watkins 1986). Based on the studies of fertility transition in developing countries, Caldwell (1982) emphasized the need for intergenerational wealth flow to change its direction and, as a precondition for that, the need for the emotional nuclearization of the family.

As cultural factors are considered to be important in the study of fertility in other regions or in other times, it also appears important to consider the benefit of taking a cultural approach to examining the recent decline in fertility below replacement levels in industrialized countries. In the following sections, a third approach, value change hypotheses regarding changes in marriage and reproductive behavior in industrialized countries in the West after the 1960s, will be discussed; and at the same time, through a time-series comparison of various surveys on values and norms, the question of whether the same approach is relevant to explain the fertility decline in Japan after the mid-1970s will be examined.

2. Value Change Hypotheses for Fertility Decline in Western Nations

Western nations underwent the first fertility transition from around the mid-1900s toward the 1930s, as TFRs in some countries fell from over 5 to below 2 in that period (Council of Europe 1990). Unexpectedly, however, TFRs rebounded to higher than 2.5 in the 1940s, 50s and early 60s, which is marked as a baby boom period. In around the middle of the 1960s, fertility again began to fall, dropping

under the replacement level in the 1970s and then lingering until the early 1980s. Van de Kaa (1987) called the fertility fall during this period “the second demographic transition.” Since the mid-1980s, the fertility trends in Western countries have been branching out, as TFRs in Scandinavian countries and the USA have returned to levels close to the replacement level, and TFRs in Britain and France have remained stable at around 1.7 and 1.8, respectively; TFRs have remained low in Germany and its neighboring countries, and TFRs in countries in Southern Europe have continued falling, with Italy and Spain recording the world’s lowest TFR at 1.2 (Council of Europe 1996). Relevant to the lowering and lingering of low fertility rates below the replacement level, pre-marital sexual relations, cohabitation, extra-marital fertility, induced abortions, divorces and remarriages have increased, and the age at first marriage and the age at first childbirth have been rising in Western countries. From 1970 to 1994, for example, the ratio of extra-marital births in the total births per year increased from 18% to 50% in Sweden, one of the highest levels, and from 2% to 7% in Italy, one of the lowest levels.

What explanation can be made from the value change hypothesis about the second demographic transition in Western countries? The first demographic transition period in the West was a period in which the Western economies underwent a boom followed by industrialization, and Max Weber’s “spirit of capitalism” led to the emergence of an urban middle class or bourgeois. The “spirit” was to encourage thrift and diligence, saving and investment, and the concept of designing one’s life according to such practices. According to Aries (1982), the concept of life design was applied not only to one’s economic life, but also to the design of one’s family (the number of children), in other words, family limitation among couples, and hence, family planning became justified.

In Western societies, at least by the seventeenth century, the conjugal family system was established,² and the social significance of children began to be recognized. This tendency was further strengthened in the nineteenth century as people strengthened emotional bonding among the members of the nuclear family, in particular, mother-and-child emotional relations, while excluding intervention from their neighboring communities. Along with this process, the modern family based on the gender role division emerged (Shorter 1977). Under the modern family, the concept of “responsible parenthood” (Preston 1986) by a couple, and a child-centered society (Aries), whereby parents’ love for their children and responsibilities toward their future are emphasized, were firmly established.

² Based on statistical data, J. Hajnal showed that a Northwestern-style household formation system had existed at least from the seventeenth century which was characterized by late marriage, a single conjugal couple and many household servants, and was different from the joint household formation system in which early marriage and married couples living with their parents were normal. (See Hajnal 1982).

Van de Kaa (1987) maintains that people's motivation for birth control in this period was altruistic because it was for the sake of their children's future.

There is no sufficient consensus among authors as to the interpretation of the baby boom between the 1940s and early 1960s. It was certainly not a phenomenon that any one had predicted. Currently, there are three major standpoints to explain the phenomenon as an exceptional example (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1998), a transitory phenomenon (Aries 1982), and as a result of value change (Simons 1982). They all seem to agree, to some extent, on a vision of a society directed toward mass consumption promoted by industrialization, in which the spirit of capitalism would be transformed while the value system of the urban middle class (the modern family, the child-centered society, and responsible parenthood) would spread into the working class. It was the age of embourgeoisement, according to Lesthaeghe. Demographically, the main factors behind the recovery of fertility rates were increases in earlier marriages and family formation. Simons sees that the experience of World War II involving whole nations affected people to return to fundamentalism in values, which promoted the recovery of fertility.³

There is greater agreement in interpretations of the fertility decline after the 1960s, which Van de Kaa labels the second demographic transition. Around this period, a major value change occurred as an affluent society was established and modern (efficient) contraceptive methods became prevalent.⁴ Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (1988) termed this value change as secularization=individualization, Simons (1986) as a change from fundamentalism to pragmatism, Aries (1986) as the end of the child-centered society, and Van de Kaa (1987) as a change from conservatism to progressivism.

Secularization, according to Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, includes three aspects: 1) belief in religious concepts such as salvation, the soul, and the spirit is weakened; 2) confidence in existing religions and religious organizations is reduced, as reflected, for example, in reduced attendance at ceremonies in churches; and 3) tolerance toward anti-social behavior, for example, behavior contravening the Ten Commandments, is increased. Individualization implies a stronger inclination to support individual freedom of choice as opposed to the existing institutional regulations. Lesthaeghe and Surkyn view individualization as closely related to the

³ Simons classified the principles of reproductive behavior as a moral obligation into four groups combining two dimensions of absolutism vs relativism, and collectivism and individualism. Fundamentalism combines absolutism and collectivism, and considers reproductive rules to be absolute based on social demand. The remaining three are "traditionalism" (relativism and collectivism), "Revisionism" (absolutism and individualism), and "Pragmatism" (relativism and individualism).

⁴ Preston (1986) considers that the crises of worldwide population explosion and environmental destruction, which was widely covered in the media from the 1960s to 1970s, contributed to justifying limitation of fertility by young people in developed countries.

indicators of secularization and post-materialism that were introduced by R. Inglehart. Post-materialism is a comprehensive value system that compares with materialism and places greater values on the freedom of speech and grassroots democracy than economic prosperity and law and order. Politically, it tends to support the left wing and the third party as opposed to conservatism, the peace movement, minority communities, and the international community rather than a state (Inglehart 1977). A common view here is that young people in the period have come to place the highest value on self-actualization; freed from the existing religions and morality, and as their interest in community interests weakened, they began to determine their own behavior related to reproduction, including sexual behavior, cohabitation, marriage, divorce, abortion, birth timing, and number of children, as their individual rights, and they no longer have children at the expense of their own life. In a child-centered society, getting married and having children were matters of course—it was an age of “king-child”—but couples have gradually come to choose to have a child only to deepen their relations, and thus an age of “king-pair” has emerged. From the data presented by Lesthaeghe, the process of secularization=individualization has been occurring not as time-series changes in societies but as cohort changes in Western countries (the younger the cohort, the greater the support for new values and behavior patterns).⁵

3. Value Change in Japan

Several studies have been undertaken about the recent fertility change in Western countries taking note of the value factor in addition to technological and economic factors. But there have been very few studies that link recent fertility decline in Japan to value change. This is because there is not a large body of researchers in this field, and no survey has been conducted until recently to cover values, marriage and fertility behavior and reproductive norms in Japan. And moreover, most research has been concentrated on the demographic analysis or application of economic theories to fertility trends.⁶ In this section, data on postwar value change will be reviewed to see if the timing of value change corresponds with the recent changes in norms and behavior in relation to marriage and childbirth in Japan. In this way, the adequacy of the value change hypothesis in Japan will be examined. To enable an understanding of value change in Japan,

⁵ Inglehart (1977) also notes that post-materialist values occurred not as temporal change but as cohort changes.

⁶ However, several surveys conducted by the Institute of Population Problems (IPP) of the Ministry of Health and Welfare in recent years were designed taking value factors into account (IPP 1990, 1993 and 1994).

various opinion survey data related to views on 1) religions and general morality; 2) parent-child relations and couple (man and woman) relations; 3) sexuality, marriage and divorce; and 4) fertility norms will be examined in turn.

3.1. Views on Religion and General Morality

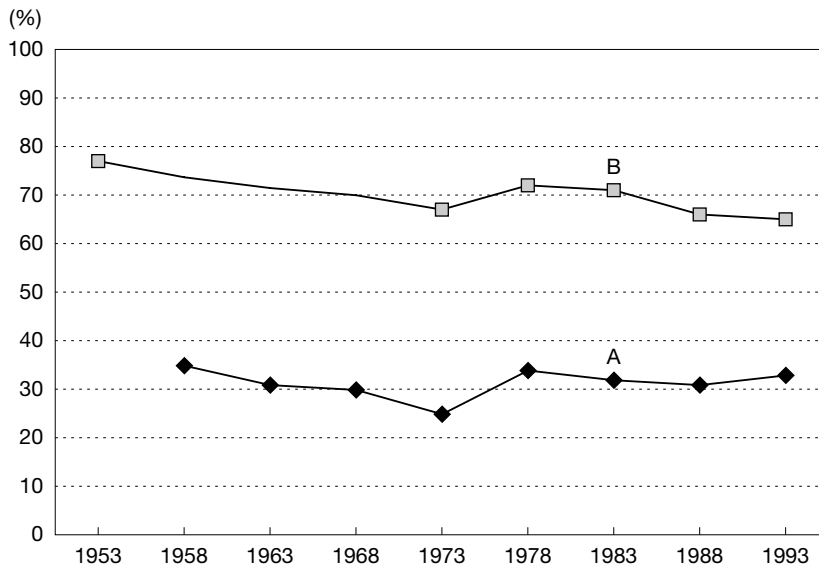
First, changes in views on religion and general morality among the Japanese will be discussed using data from surveys by the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS) of the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister's Office. The IMS has conducted nine nationally representative surveys on Japanese nationality every fifth year starting from 1953 to 1993 amongst people aged 20 and over (IMS 1994). Among the questions in the serial survey, a few questions have been asked in every survey that present a precious reference material to trace value change over the past 40 years. Another survey conducted once every five years, beginning from 1972 to 1993, the World Youth Attitudinal Survey by the Prime Minister's Office, surveying the attitudes of people aged between 18 to 24, offers very useful data to locate trends in the value systems of young people after the 1970s (Youth Section 1994).

3.1.1. Views on Religion

The IMS's surveys revealed that the proportion of the respondents who replied that they held religious views or faith remained between 25% and 35% for 40 years with no systematic changes (Fig. 2). However, those who replied "A religious mind is important" fell from 80% in 1983 to 72% in 1988 and 1993. Those who replied "I venerate my ancestors" have gradually decreased from 77% in 1953 to 72% in 1978, and to 65% in 1993 (Fig. 2). In the World Youth Attitudinal Survey, those who replied "It is (very or fairly) important" to the question "How important is a religion to your life?" dropped quite significantly, from 44% in 1982 to 29% in 1992.

3.1.2. Individualism vs Collectivism

A question in the IMS's survey asked respondents to choose two important values from among "filial piety, repayment of a favor, respect of individual rights, and respect of freedom." From 1963 to 1993 the change in rates of response in favor of "repayment of a favor" and "respect of freedom" was slight, while the rate supporting "filial piety" increased somewhat, and that for "respect of individual rights" fell somewhat (the largest change was shown between 1973 and 1978). Also, regarding a question comparing individual happiness with the status of Japan, in the 40 years between 1953 and 1993 those who replied "It is only when Japan is improved that individuals become happy" decreased a little, and those who replied "Japan becomes better only when individuals are happy" did not show any notable change.



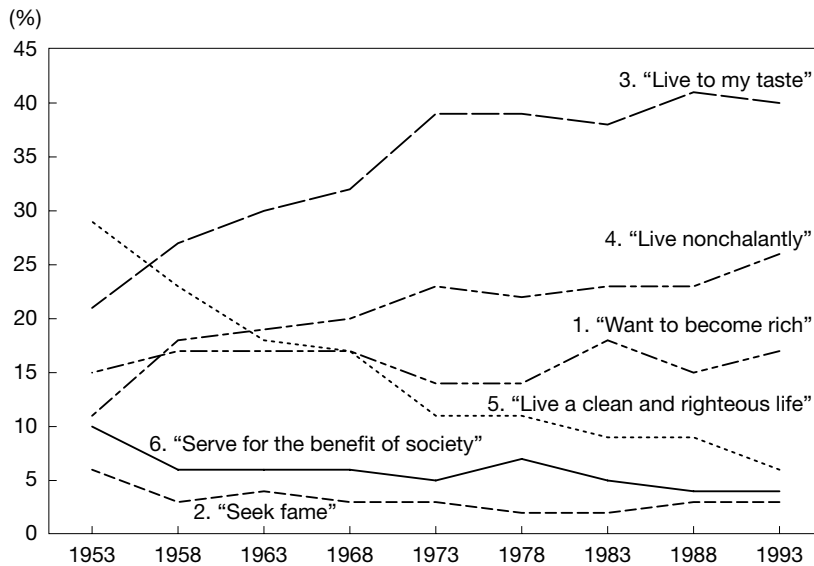
Source: (IMS, 1994)

Note A. Rate of respondents who replied “Yes, I believe in a religion” to the question “Do you have faith or a religious mind?”

B. Rate of respondents who replied “I do” when asked “Do you venerate your ancestors, or not?”

Figure 2 Religious mind and veneration of ancestors

In relation to philosophy about personal life, in the 40-year period from 1953 to 1993 respondents to the IMS’s survey in favor of “a life fitting my taste, and not care about becoming rich or famous” increased by 20%, and those who supported “take it easy and live each day nonchalantly” increased by 15%, while those who supported “live cleanly and righteously forcing out all evils in society”, “live diligently and win a name for myself,” and “devote myself for the benefit of society instead of thinking solely about myself” decreased (Fig. 3). The change in attitudes was most remarkable in the 20 years from 1953 to 1973, after which the response pattern remained almost the same. On another question, contrasting two extreme alternatives, between 1978 and 1993 those who replied “I would like to do what I want to do, even if it does not do any good to others” decreased about 10%, while those who replied “I would like to do things which are beneficial to others with no regard for whether I like to do them or not” increased. According to the World Youth Attitudinal Survey by the Prime Minister’s Office, the response rates to the question on alternative attitudes between “The most important thing is to satisfy my own life” and “Satisfying my own life is not sufficient, and I would like to do things useful to society” remained almost unchanged for 15 years between 1977 and 1992.



Source: (IMS, 1994)

Note: "What do you think is the closest to express your thinking among the attitudes listed below?"

1. I will work hard to become rich.
2. I will live diligently and win a name for myself.
3. I will live a life fitting my taste, and not care about becoming rich or famous.
4. I will take it easy and live each day nonchalantly.
5. I will live cleanly and righteously forcing out all evils in society.
6. I will devote myself for the benefit of society instead of thinking solely about myself.
7. Other
8. D.K.

Figure 3 Attitudes in life

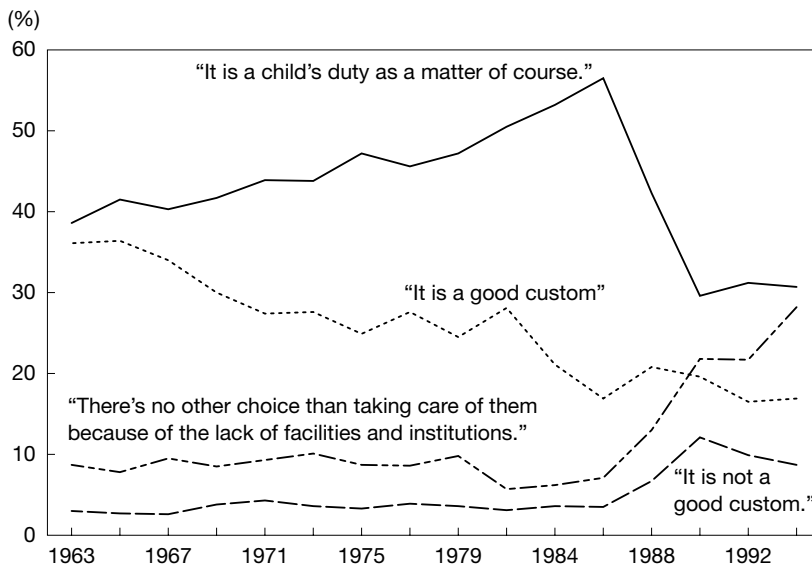
From the above data, it is observed that changes in general morality among the Japanese have been very moderate in the four decades after the war. Certainly, people's religious sentiment has been gradually weakened in general, and they have come to hold greater interest in personal life rather than in social or national affairs. In this sense, Lesthaeghe's notion of secularism=individualism has progressed in Japan also, although much more gradually. The change does not appear to be as strong in Japan as in the West where people place priority on the rights and freedom of individuals before anything else. Changes toward an individualist inclination were much stronger in the 20 years after the war rather than more recently, and this can be connected with the first fertility transition after the war. The moderate change after the 1970s, however, can hardly be considered to be related to the rapid increase in singles and late marriages—the second fertility transition in Japan.

3.2. Views on Parent-Child and Couple (Man and Woman) Relations

Customarily, the Japanese family was based on the patrilineal stem family system. This system was fixed and became universal under the *Ie* system of the Civil Law enforced in the Meiji Era, and was further strengthened for several decades before the end of World War II. After the war, the Civil Law was revised, modeled after the conjugal family system of the West. As the rapid economic development after the mid-1950s brought young people in masses to large cities, who later formed nuclear families, and elderly people remaining in rural villages came to live in nuclear families or single-person households after the 1970s, the number of three-generation families decreased (IPP 1996). Below, relations between changes in actual family structures and those in views on family, in addition to those between family change and the recent fertility decline will be examined.

3.2.1. Responsibilities to Support Aged Parents

Since 1952, the Population Problems Research Council of the Mainichi Newspapers has been conducting a biennial survey on family planning for married women under the age of 50. Tracing the responses to the question “What do you think about children taking care of aged parents?” for the period from 1963 to 1996, amongst those who had an ethically affirmative response, the number of respondents that considered supporting aged parents to be a “good custom” showed a slow decrease from 1963 to 1986, and, in turn, the number of respondents who indicated “It is a son’s or daughter’s duty as a matter of course” rose (PPRC 1996) (Fig. 4). However, in the period from 1986 to 1996, those who considered elderly parent care to be a duty decreased steeply, while those who replied “There’s no other choice than taking care of them because facilities and institutions are insufficient” rose remarkably, while there was a slight rise in the proportion that considered “Taking care of aged parents is not a good custom.” The same survey has also asked the question “Do you intend to depend on your sons or daughters for your living when you get old?” from 1950 until 1996. Those who replied “Yes” accounted for about 60% of respondents in 1950, but fell to 20% in 1971 and, after having remained on the same level until 1986, further decreased to 13% in 1996. According to the second of the five surveys (1977–92) of the World Youth Attitudinal Survey commissioned by the Youth Section of the Prime Minister’s Office (1994), the percentage of respondents that replied “I will support my parents by all means” fell by 12 percentage points from 35% to 23% in the 10 years from 1982 to 1992, while those who said “I will help my parents in accordance with my capability to do so” increased. Those who responded “I will trust my parents’ own capability and the social security system” accounted for less than 10% in all surveys with almost no change.



Source: (PPRC, 1994-b)

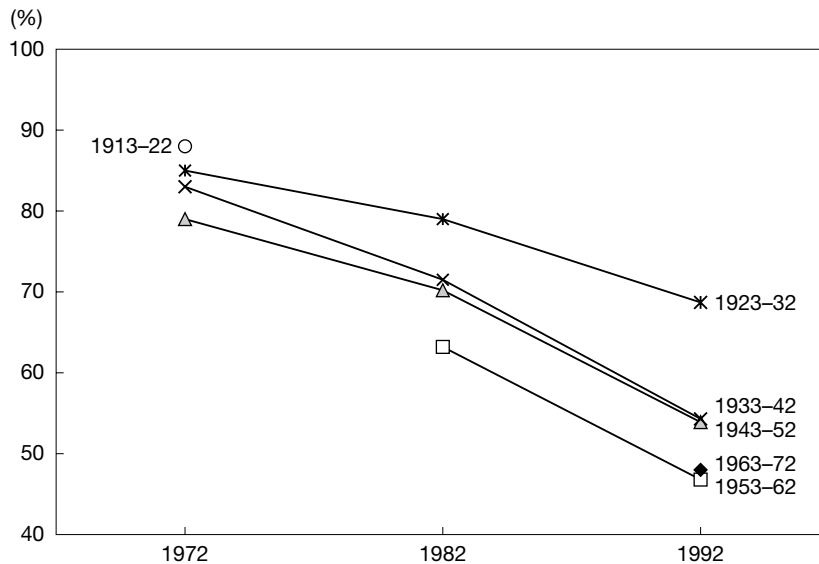
Note: "Others, D.K., N.A." are excluded from this figure.

Figure 4 Attitudes toward giving care to aged parents

From the results of these surveys, it is observed that views about supporting aged parents underwent slow and moderate change after the war until the middle of the 1980s, after which the change in values was remarkably swift.

3.2.2. Division of Roles between Husband and Wife

It is very difficult to identify when the view on gender role division began to take root in Japan. It may have originated in pre-modern Japan, but it was clearly consolidated during the period of rapid economic growth when the process of industrialization and urbanization continued and the portion of employed workers increased and, as a result, the separation between workplaces and homes began to take place for a large number of people. According to the national survey by the Prime Minister's Office in 1972, for people aged 20 and older, more than 80% of both male and female respondents gave an affirmative reply to the following statement on the gender role division, "Men work outside, women keep home"—20 years later, in 1992, the figure fell to 66% among men and to 56% among women, revealing a gap between men and women (PRS 1972 and 1992; WAS 1982). When comparing women's responses by year and by cohort, it is found that older cohorts always show larger portions supporting the gender role division. In any of the cohorts surveyed, however, the percentage of respondents in favor of the gender role division declined in the recent two



Sources: (PRS, 1972 and 1992; WAS, 1982)

Note 1: The proportion of women who replied “agree” and “rather agree” to the statement “Husbands work outside and wives keep home.”

Note 2: Survey results by 10-year age group for 3 survey years were reconstructed into cohort data.

Figure 5 Women’s attitude toward gender role division by birth cohort—portion in favor of “Husbands work outside and wives keep home.”

decades with the most notable falls occurring in the 1980s (Fig. 5). The same trend is apparent in the results of the World Youth Attitudinal Survey, in which those who were in favor of the gender role division decreased from 50% in 1977 to 35% in 1992, while those against the idea increased from 32% to 55%. The remaining respondents gave no answer.

3.2.3. Views on Men and Women

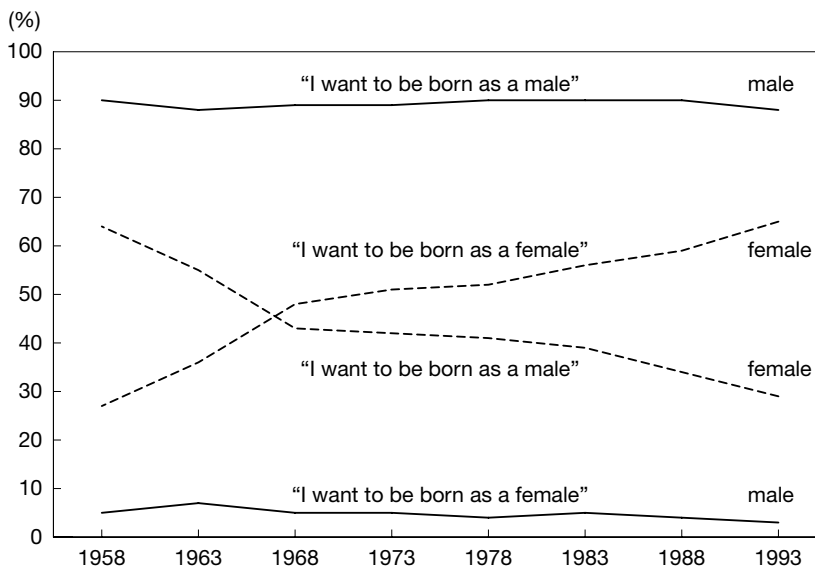
Since 1958, surveys by the IMS have asked the question “If you were to be born again, which would you prefer to be, male or female?” (Fig. 6). Men have shown little change in their response—the majority of male respondents have consistently responded that they wished to be born male. Women who wished to be born male shared 64% in 1958, but decreased steadily 29% in 1993. The substantial falls were seen during the periods from 1958 to 1968 and 1983 to 1993.

The National Fertility Survey by the Institute of Population Problems of the Ministry of Health and Welfare has asked about a desirable sex composition of the ideal number of children for married women under age 50. From 1982 to 1992, the results revealed a clear transition from favoring boys to favoring girls (IPP 1993). Among married women considering 3 children as ideal, for example,

those who favored “two boys and one girl” outweighed those who favored “one boy and two girls” by 62% to 36% in 1982. However, the pattern reversed in 1992 to 45% and 53%, respectively.

The changes in views on sex and gender as seen above reflect various phenomena occurring in recent decades such as the fact that the need for having a son (or sons) to succeed the family name has weakened in the process of a change in view away from the patrilineal stem family system; that mothers tend to desire to have girls as conversation partners, and as future caregivers for their aged life; and that women’s economic status has been enhanced while social restrictions toward women have been reduced, and thus, women have come to enjoy increased freedom of choice.

In terms of views on parent-child relations (supporting aged parents), and the division of roles among a couple and gender status, change appears to have occurred initially in the views on parent-child relations, followed by views on the division of roles and then gender status. In any case, the most remarkable changes occurred from the 1980s to 1990s. From this perspective, changes in views on the family and rapid increases in the numbers of singles and late marrying people can be seen to have occurred in parallel in the same period.



Source: (IMS, 1994)

Note: Response to the question “If you were to be born again, which sex would you prefer to be born?”

Figure 6 Which would you prefer to be born, male or female?

3.3. Views on Sexual Relations, Marriage and Divorce

3.3.1. Views on Sexuality

The World Youth Attitudinal Survey by the Prime Minister's Office revealed that the number of respondents who considered premarital sexual relations to be avoided in any situation fell sharply from 27% to 5% in the 15 years between 1977 and 1992 (Youth Section 1994). In the same period, those who chose "Premarital sex is allowed, if both partners love each other" occupied around 70%.

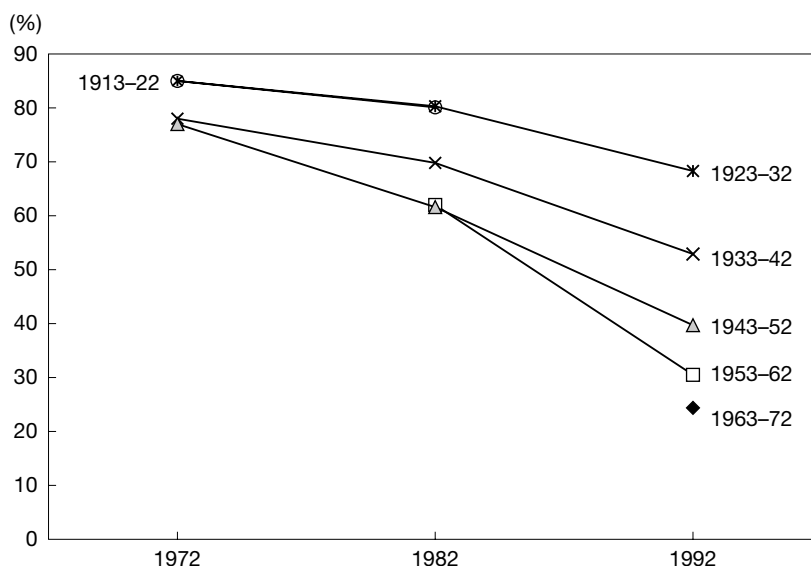
3.3.2. Views on Marriage

The National Opinion Survey by the Prime Minister's Office (1972, 1982 and 1992) asked about "women and marriage." Those in favor of "marriage" (the total proportion of respondents who answered "Women's happiness lies in marriage," "Women become mentally and economically stable by marriage," or "It is natural as humans") decreased, among both men and women, in the 28-year period from 1972 to 1990 from the 80% level to the 40% level. On the other hand, the proportion of people who responded "It is not necessary for women to marry" increased (PRS 1972 and 1992; WAS 1982). Seen by year and cohort, differences among cohorts were small in 1972 and 1982, but they expanded in 1992. The younger the respondents, the fewer were those who considered "Women should marry" (Fig. 7). Just as in the case of gender role division, however, people were greatly affected by the change in society around the 1980s. It is said that society as a whole has become more tolerant to non-marrying women in this period.

3.3.3. Views on Divorce

The same opinion survey revealed that in the two decades between 1972 and 1992 those who gave an affirmative answer to the question "Do you think it is allowable to get divorced if you are not satisfied with your spouse?" (the combined number of "agree" and "rather agree") increased from around 20% to 40% in the two decades between 1972 and 1992 (PRS 1972 and 1992; WAS 1982). By year and cohort, younger cohorts showed a more affirmative view on divorce in all survey years although they remained very low until 1982. The rates of affirmative replies substantially increased from 1982 to 1992 in all cohorts (Fig. 8). Similar to the survey result on women and marriage, divorce became more permissible in society in the 1980s.

Views on sexuality, marriage and divorce changed remarkably in the 1980s toward the beginning of the 1990s, and society has become more tolerant of premarital sexual relations, non-marriage and divorce. Such value changes have occurred in parallel to the rapid increase in singles and late marriages; hence, they are considered to be interrelated.



Sources: (PRS, 1972 and 1992; WAS, 1982)

Note 1: The proportion of women who considered “Women should marry” is the total of the combined rates of those who replied “Women’s happiness lies in marriage,” “Women can obtain mental and economic stability by marrying,” and “Marriage is natural as humans.”

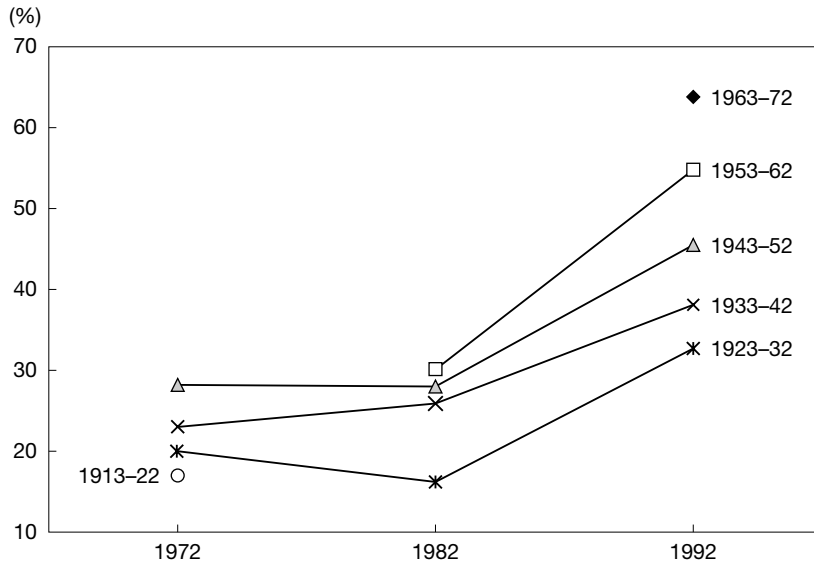
Note 2: Survey results by 10-year age group for 3 survey years were reconstructed into cohort data.

Figure 7 Women’s attitude toward their marriage by birth cohort—
portion in favor of “Women should marry.”

3.3.4. Norms on the Number of Children to Bear

Throughout the period of declining fertility since the middle of the 1970s, there has been no major change in norms with regard to the number of children that people have desired. According to the National Fertility Survey by the Institute of Population Problems of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, for all couples in which the wife’s age is under 50, the average ideal number of children fell from 2.8 in 1972 to 2.6 in 1977, after which it remained almost unchanged until 1992 (IPP 1993). The greatest share (a little less than 50%) of these couples desires 3 children, and the next greatest has a desire for 2 children (a little less than 40%). Couples considering having no child or only one child to be ideal are almost exceptional, and there is no sign of their increase. The number of children that wives aged between 25 and 29 intended to have changed only slightly from 2.15 in 1977 to 2.21 in 1992. The number of children desired by singles between 18 and 34 years old who have an intention of marrying fell from 2.34 to 2.23 among men and 2.29 to 2.17 among women in the decade between 1982 and 1992, but the rates of decline are nominal (IPP 1993).

The norms in terms of the number of children hardly changed in the 1980s and 1990s, and this may be reflected in the fact that the completed family size for married couples remained unchanged—at around 2.2—throughout these decades.



Sources: (PRS, 1972 and 1992; WAS, 1982)

Note 1: Proportion of women who replied “I understand the feeling,” and “I understand the feeling to some extent” to the statement “I may divorce if I am not satisfied with the spouse.”

Note 2: Survey results by 10-year age group for 3 survey years were reconstructed into cohort data.

Figure 8 Women’s attitude toward divorce by birth cohort—portion in favor of “I may divorce if I am not satisfied with my spouse.”

4. Relations between Change in Values and Increase in Singles and Fertility Decline

It is difficult to discuss the change in values in Japan in the same terms as Western societies. Western societies had cherished the tradition of the conjugal family (nuclear family) system since the seventeenth century. The system was reinforced in the modern age and a child-centered society was established with a strong emphasis on parents’ responsibility toward their children. It is considered that their sense of responsibility to children naturally led to limiting family size; hence, the occurrence of the fertility transition. In contrast, in Japan, the patrilineal stem family system, legally termed the *Ie* system, was dominant until the point where the fertility transition occurred, and children were supposed to devote themselves and perform obligations toward their parents. Although the ideal of the legal family system shifted toward the conjugal family system after the war, changes in family norms have been slow and remnants of the patrilineal stem family system are still abundant. In the case of Japan, fertility transition occurred in an extremely short period of time, and the nuclearization of households followed. In this process, moral norms emphasizing “the child’s duties toward

parents” have been slowly weakened while norms emphasizing “parents’ responsibility toward children” have been taking root (Atoh 1996).

In Western societies, the child-centered society emphasizing parents’ responsibility toward children has ended, the existing morality (moral sense associated with Christian doctrines, religious organizations, and faith in God) has been relaxed, and individualism, which places the highest value on self-realization, has prevailed from the 1960s on. Such developments have affected people’s reproductive behavior including sexual behavior, cohabitation, extra-marital fertility, marriage, timing of child delivery, divorce and induced abortion, and they are consequently considered to have exerted influence on fertility levels.

In Japan, nuclear families are on the continuous rise as the dominant type of household. Couples who have newly formed their families share the norms of the number of children and the actual number of their children at 2 or 3, with no major changes in a few decades. Thus, the child-centered society seems to be increasingly consolidated. Nevertheless, singles, late marriages and late child-bearing have dramatically increased since the middle of the 1970s, resulting in the rapid fertility decline far below the replacement level. What value changes can be considered to be contributing to this phenomenon?

Individualism appears to have gradually become prevalent in postwar Japan, but it has not shown a dramatic rise after the middle of the 1970s. Change in people’s religious consciousness has also been very slow. In contrast, attitudes toward parent-child relations, spouse relations, and male-female relations changed dramatically in the 1980s: women who see giving care to aged parents as an obligation radically decreased in number, people who have an affirmative attitude to the gender role division decreased, and the value of girls was raised rapidly. Furthermore, society became much more tolerant toward premarital sexual relations, non-married women, and divorce in the 1980s.⁷

⁷ Using the data from the 10th National Fertility Survey (for married women) in 1992, Kaneko (1993) conducted an analysis of attitude toward marriage, wife’s roles, and parent-child relations by their age. He clarified that the younger the age cohort, the stronger the “inclination toward modernization” (meaning against conservative inclination). At the same time, the stronger their inclination toward modernization, the older their age at first marriage, and the smaller the intended number of children, the ideal number of children and the actual number of children they had. The result of our time-series analysis made for this paper, based on various survey results, corresponds partially with the outcome of Kaneko’s cohort analysis. Our observation that value changes have occurred in parallel with the rapid increase in the number of single people also corresponds with the positive interrelations between the modernizing inclination and average age at first marriage that Kaneko revealed. However, Kaneko’s analysis showing negative interrelation between the modernizing inclination and couples’ actual, ideal and intended numbers of children does not accord with the result of our time-series observation. The result of our observation was that married women’s reproductive behavior and norms on family size are quite stable in spite of rapid value change on women’s status and roles.

The greatest changes in values in the 1980s are all related to women's status and roles in the home and the wider society. Dramatic value changes occurred in the 1980s; chasing after improved socio-economic status, an increased proportion of women were advancing to higher educational institutions and working in the labor market supported by higher wage standards, which began to be significant at the middle of the 1970s. Upon examining changes chronologically, it can be said that the increase in single persons after the middle of the 1970s would be directly linked to "the sex-role revolution" termed by Davis (1990) rather than to the weakening of the existing morality and to the promotion of the general inclination toward individualism as seen in Western societies.

After the middle of the 1970s, the pace of increase in single persons was much faster in the latter 10 years than the earlier 10 years. This may be attributed to the value change regarding gender roles that occurred among women in all age groups, and particularly amongst younger cohorts, in the 1980s, in addition to changes in women's socioeconomic status and roles. There were notable political developments in the 1980s, internationally, including the 2nd World Conference on Women (Copenhagen Conference) in the middle of the UN Decade for Women (1980) and the 3rd World Conference on Women (Nairobi Conference) in the final year of that decade (1985); and in Japan, including Japan's signing of the Treaty on the Abolition of Discrimination against Women (1980), the ratification of that treaty (1985), and the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1985) intended to enhance women's status (PMO 1994). These developments as well as their impacts through media coverage should be considered as reasons for such a conspicuous value change in relation to women's status and roles in the 1980s, in addition to the after-effect of behavioral change pursued in the form of advanced social participation by women.

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