

Western Experiences with International Migration in the Context of Population Decline

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Introduction

Concerns about population decline are time-honored in Western countries. In recent years such disquiet has become conjoined with other longstanding disagreements about appropriate levels and composition of immigration. Taken together, these represent a convoluted and often passionate set of issues to which full justice cannot be done in a brief treatment. This paper offers an overview of these issues as they have been experienced in Western countries, and seeks to link these to similar trends and debates in Japan.

Western Concerns about Population Decline

In modern times, Western concerns about population decline have been most urgently expressed by intellectuals and political leaders in France, spanning a very broad range of political views. This French tradition of concern began as early as the 1870s, when some intellectuals attributed the crushing military defeats of the Franco-Prussian War to France's low rates of population growth compared with those of Germany. By the 1890s, the National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population was established to promote higher fertility in France, with Emile Zola prominent among its leadership.² The tensions that preceded World War I, and the mayhem and slaughter that resulted, only increased such French concerns. Indeed it is poignant to note that in the 1919 parliamentary debate over ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, then-Premier George Clémenceau saw fit to speak about low fertility in France:

The treaty does not say that France must undertake to have children, but it is the first thing which ought to have been put in it. For if France turns her back on large families, one can put all the clauses one wants in a treaty, one can take all the guns of Germany, one can do whatever one likes, France will be lost because there will be no more Frenchmen.³

During World War II, the Vichy regime in France enthusiastically embraced the pronatalist agenda propounded by the National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population. In 1941, Marshall Petain himself sponsored a Mother's Day festival at Rheims. Women with 5 children were awarded bronze medals; those with 7 got silver; while gold medals went to French women with 10 or more offspring.⁴

In 1945 the new government of the Fourth Republic established and amply funded a large governmental demographic research institute, the *l'Institut National des Etudes Démographiques (INED)*,⁵ directed by the well-known French demographer Alfred Sauvy. In its founding documents, INED stated clearly that it "had been created for the purpose of studying the conditions of a national healing, after the French population had been weakened quantitatively and qualitatively by a chronic disease—meaning, presumably, low fertility."⁶

Lest one imagine that such concerns in France are artifacts of the tumult and violence that plagued the period between 1870 and 1945, consider the following opinions expressed in 1984 by President Jacques Chirac, when he was Mayor of Paris:⁷

Two dangers stalk French society: social democratization and a demographic slump....If you look at Europe and then at other continents, the comparison is terrifying. In demographic terms, Europe is vanishing. Twenty years or so from now, our countries will be empty, and no matter what our technological strength, we shall be incapable of putting it to use."

Such concerns were by no means limited to France. Germany under the Nazis, Italy under the Fascists, and the Soviet Union under Stalin adopted strong policies intended to increase fertility rates well above the low levels in the 1930s and early 1940s. In 1935 the Nazi government began payments to families with four or more children, though it limited these to "hereditarily healthy" German families only. The Mussolini government paid bonuses to those in the Italian military and civil service

upon the birth of each child, and more generally provided financial assistance to large families.⁸ In 1941, the Presidium of the USSR established special taxes on citizens who were unmarried or had fewer than two children, and in 1944 declared women who bore large families as “Heroic Mothers” eligible for official decorations such as the “Medal of Maternity” and “Glory of Motherhood.”⁹

After World War II, fertility rates in West Germany rose and did not again decline to low levels until the early 1970s. There it has stayed however, and it is notable that these sustained levels of very low fertility have gone relatively un-remarked in political and intellectual circles. Meanwhile, in East Germany similarly low fertility levels led the Communist government to adopt strong pronatalist measures, though these apparently had only modest effects. The relative quiet about low fertility rates in West Germany (and subsequently in unified Germany) may in part be due to the “tainting” of such demographic concerns that resulted from the vigorous pronatalist policies adopted by the Nazi regime. Even the discipline of demography itself seems to have been somewhat compromised by the Nazi era, in view of the involvement of a few German demographers of the period with the Nazi regime. The number of research positions for demographers in Germany has been small since World War II, and the country has not developed demographic research centers of the stature of INED in France or the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research and its predecessors in Japan.

Some with a sense of the ironic might say that, with respect to population decline, postwar Germany has been characterized by *sang froid* about its very low fertility, while postwar France has been beset with *angst* over perceived low fertility even though its rates are much higher.

Western countries outside of Europe include all of the “traditional countries of immigration”, conventionally the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (some might wish to add Argentina and Chile to this list.) All of these countries were ensnared in both World Wars of the 20th Century, and these violent and threatening periods did raise demographic concerns. During World War I, the Prime Minister of Australia William (“Billy”) Hughes warned Australians that they must “Populate or Perish.” World War II and the threats posed by a militarized and expansionist Japan caused Prime Minister Curtin to proclaim that Australia, given its location, would need to increase its population to 30 million to achieve a sem-

blance of security. Since Australia’s population was then about 7 million, Australian political elites recognized that increased fertility would not be sufficient to this end, and agreed to promote large-scale immigration. Immigration was initially limited to source countries in Europe, in keeping with the “White Australia” policy embraced a half-century earlier,¹⁰ but during the 1960s these geographical and/or racial restrictions were eliminated.

In Canada, too, elite leaders have long proclaimed the desirability of a population of least 30 million—mysteriously enough, the same target numbers as that embraced in Australia. To this end, Canada too pursued policies of active immigration recruitment. But after Canadian fertility rates declined sharply during the 1960s and 1970s, an expert group advised the Canadian to provide financial incentives favoring higher fertility, asking rhetorically:

whether the goal of maintaining the population was not as important as that of national defence. Perhaps as much could be spent for the first as for the second; in the long term, there is no point in ‘defending’ a population that is disappearing!¹¹

This recommendation was not embraced by the Canadian government, although the provincial government of Quebec did adopt some measures thought to support higher fertility rates. The Canadian government did, however, increase its targeted annual number of immigrants.

In the United States there have been far fewer expressions of concern than in France or Canada. One exception is Ben J. Wattenberg, a persistent proponent of the view that the West is “committing slow-motion demographic suicide.” Wattenberg is a political journalist and syndicated columnist at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think-tank in Washington. He began to express such concerns in the 1980s, both in his nationally-syndicated newspaper column and in a 1987 book described by its author as “this alarmist tract,”¹² and titled evocatively as *The Birth Dearth: What Happens When People in Free Countries Don’t Have Enough Babies?* In this book, the author put forward his own assumptions that future fertility in the industrial Communist world of the USSR and Eastern Europe would be higher than that in the industrial democracies of the West.¹³ He then incorporated these assumptions into 100-year projections, on the basis of which he argued that this differentially high fertility would lead to the military and economic ascendancy of the Warsaw Pact during the 21st Century. To avoid this unhappy outcome, he called for

urgent action by Western governments to increase the fertility rates of their populations.

In a 1987 review of Wattenberg's book, the present author wrote as follows about the predictive value of such very long term projections:

*One wonders...what political scientists would make of forecasts that hold national characters and military alliances constant for a full century; put another way, if Wattenberg had been writing 100 years ago, when the Czar ruled Russia and Britain ruled the waves, what would he have predicted about the relative strength of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in 1987?*¹⁴

The Wattenberg book was deeply flawed, and of course the Warsaw Pact (and eventually the USSR itself) dissolved into political and economic chaos within only a few years of its 1987 publication. Nonetheless its flawed arguments seemed to impress at least a few American political leaders of some stature: the back cover of the book carried endorsements from then-Senator Daniel P. Moynihan, former UN Representative Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, and former Presidential candidate Malcolm S. Forbes, Jr.¹⁵

“Ageing” Populations

The age structure of a population can in principle be affected by fertility, mortality, and migration. Of these, fertility is quantitatively the most important by far. Other things equal, a high fertility rate will produce a youthful age composition, while low fertility yields an older age structure. It follows that any population in transition from high to low fertility rates will experience a shift in its age structure from more to less youthful — this is the phenomenon known as population or demographic “ageing.” Increases in fertility will shift the age structure in the opposite direction.

The world is such a diverse place—in terms of history, culture, economics, religion, etc.—that it is usually unwise to even make attempts at global generalizations. Yet over the past five decades, fertility declines have been a very common experience among most (though not all) countries. As a result, most countries are now also experiencing age structure shifts towards “older” populations, i.e. toward declining proportions of children and increasing proportions of older residents.

Changes in both mortality and international migration can also affect the age structure of a nation's popu-

lation, but unless mortality or migration changes are very large in magnitude, their effects on age composition are much more modest than those caused by fertility change. Given that this symposium is focused on low fertility and international migration, I will not say much more about mortality.

International migration can have effects on age composition, given that such migrants are typically dominated by young adults. However, such effects tend to be small in magnitude, in part because young adults represent only part of the total flow of migrants, and hence the effects of international migration on age structure are less concentrated than are those of fertility changes.

During the 1930s and 1940s, when low fertility and fertility declines were common in Europe, there emerged what we might call an “hypothesis of demographic senescence”: the claim that that populations with “older” age compositions are less vigorous, creative, ambitious, vital, dynamic, and powerful. Once again, some of the most evocative language of the day was French. In 1946, two prominent political intellectuals, Robert Debré¹⁶ and the demographer Alfred Sauvy (later to become Director of INED) offered the following lugubrious portrayal:

*The terrible failure of 1940, more moral than material, must be linked in part to this dangerous sclerosis. We saw all too often, during the occupation, old men leaning wearily towards the servile solution, at the time that the young were taking part in the national impulse towards independence and liberty. This crucial effect of our senility, is it not a grave warning?*¹⁷

In another setting, Sauvy characterized an aging society in vivid terms, as one comprised of “old people, living in old houses, ruminating about old ideas.”¹⁸ Different but related concerns were expressed by Gunnar Myrdal.¹⁹

Demographic Interactions between Low Fertility and Immigration

As noted, fertility decline shifts a country's age composition significantly toward higher average age, while increased international migration tends to operate in the opposite direction. Hence it is sometimes argued in a rather general and qualitative way that one approach to reverse current tendencies toward older populations would be to increase admissions of international migrants. In 2000, the United Nations Population Division pub-

lished a useful report that provides some quantitative understanding of what have heretofore been qualitative proposals.

The UN report, entitled *Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?* was based on a series of hypothetical scenarios projected out to the year 2050. These simulations explored the numbers of immigrants that would be required hypothetically over this 50-year period in selected countries in order to meet certain specified outcomes:

- Prevent a decline in the total population size
- Hold constant the size of the population between ages 15-65
- Hold constant the “old age dependency ratio” (defined as persons 65+ to those 15-64).

This project began in the summer of 1999 as informal estimates in anticipation of possible questions that might arise during the pending annual UN General Assembly meeting as to how many immigrants would be required to compensate for Europe’s low levels of fertility. In the event, the issue was not raised at the General Assembly, and the estimates lay fallow until Barbara Crossette, the *New York Times* reporter covering the UN beat included them in a story that was published during a “slow news day” on January 2, 2000. The headline writer²⁰ for the story sought to capture its message using somewhat exaggerated language, rendering it as “Europe Stares at a Future Built by Immigrants: It’s the American Way.”

When the *New York Times* story was reprinted in the *International Herald Tribune* based in Paris, the result was “sudden mayhem.”²¹ Within days there were more than 50 inquiries received from journalists, many directed toward the Office of the UN Secretary General. When the Secretary General’s press director sought a copy of the “study,” the UN Population Division found itself in the awkward position of reporting that there actually was no “study” as such, only some informal estimates prepared for the General Assembly. The Population Division was asked to prepare a formal press release on the “study,” which it did within 24 hours.

The results of the UN preliminary estimates were widely (sometimes wildly) misinterpreted, especially by the European press, politicians and advocacy groups. The elite Paris newspaper *Le Monde* published a story three days after the *International Herald Tribune* story, with a headline that a “pre-report” of the UN indicated that “Europe Would Need 159 Million Immigrants by 2025.”²²

The UN press release carried a subtitle that ended with a question mark—*Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?*—but the *Le Monde* story translated the Report’s title into French without the question mark, so that it now read as a declarative “Replacement Migration: A solution to declining and ageing populations.”²³ Other articles appeared in newspapers across Europe, including one on January 10 in the French paper *Le Figaro* entitled “The Report That Alarmed Europe.”²⁴ It is worth noting that at this point there still was no UN report available, only the hastily-written 2-page press release produced on 6 January 2000. Given the high level of attention to its preliminary estimates, the UN Population Division expedited preparation of a full report, which was produced and published only 3 months later. Following the release of the formal report, there was a second pulse of active press coverage, especially in Europe. Much of the reaction was quite critical: the UN report was criticized directly by Jean-Pierre Chevènement, then the French Minister of the Interior, and by the European Union’s Representative to the United Nations, who complained that the UN should not have been published without permission from member Governments.²⁵

Yet the actual conclusions of the UN *Replacement Migration* report differed rather dramatically from its portrayal in the press. Its key conclusions may be briefly summarized as follows:

- In countries with very low fertility rates, halting demographic ageing via immigration policy would require extraordinarily large numbers of immigrants
- Such a high level of immigration “...seems out of reach because of the extraordinarily large numbers of migrants that would be required.”

For example, the Report’s scenario that specifies a constant ratio of working age to “dependent” population (defined respectively as 15-64 and 65+) would require admission of some 188 million immigrants to Germany by 2050 (who then would account for some 80 % of the population in Germany). For Italy, the comparable numbers under this scenario would be 120 million immigrants (79 % of 2050 population); for the EU as a whole, the scenario would produce a flow of 700 million immigrants (accounting for 75 % of the 2050 EU population).

The UN *Replacement Migration* report included Japan as one of its key case studies. Given the future fertility rates in Japan that were assumed in the Report, the above scenario would require admission of 553 mil-

lion, who by 2050 would account for 87 % of the population in Japan.²⁶ It is no wonder that the Report concluded that such a level of immigration “seems out of reach because of the extraordinarily large numbers of migrants that would be required.”

Rapid Demographic Transformations

As might be guessed from the above hypothetical scenarios, there is another kind of demographic interaction between low fertility and immigration which involves aspects of demography other than age, and that needs to be considered. Specifically, large inflows of immigrants into a country with low levels of fertility implies unusually rapid transformations in the proportions that are native- and foreign-born. If the immigrants are concentrated among a small number of national or ethnic groups, there can be rapid shifts in population composition in the direction of such groups.

There are in fact some notable experiences with such transformations in regions that are now considered part of the West. In less than a century, international migration from Europe (and from Africa via European-initiated slavery) transformed the demographic composition of North America and much of Central and South America, from predominantly Native American/American Indian to populations dominated by European, African, and mixed population groups. These migrations were of sufficient magnitude to have had such dramatic effects on their own, even though it seems unlikely that fertility rates of the indigenous populations were low. In addition, however, the migrations led to sharp increases in mortality among the indigenous population, due to violence and war, exposure to European diseases (measles, smallpox) for which they had no immunity,²⁷ and coercive exclusion from territories on which they had long depended for sustenance. While many among the native populations may have opposed this rapid demographic transformation (hence some of the violence and warfare that accompanied it), these traditional societies simply lacked the capacity to restrain or reverse the influxes of European migrants.

In the 21st Century, rapid demographic transformations are possible in many industrialized countries, in part because indigenous fertility rates have declined to very low levels while substantial inflows of immigrants are occurring. There is no reason that the consequences of such rapid demographic transformations in 21st Cen-

tury societies need be repetitions of the violence and turbulence of 19th Century North America. In reality, however, what will happen is fundamentally unknowable. We simply lack the ability to accurately forecast likely outcomes, as these depend indeterminately upon differences among societies and their circumstances that are often quite intangible. Consider, for example, how societies and eras differ in their degrees of homogeneity or heterogeneity (whether real or perceived); in the extent to which foreign immigrants desire and/or succeed in integrating with the indigenous population or remain separate and distinct; and in the nature and flexibility of economies, labor markets, and legal systems.

Unlike Native American tribes, modern industrialized societies do have the organizational and technical capacity to restrain migratory movements. Whether or not they seek to do so will be determined by the ways in which immigration is viewed in these countries, and by the relative political influence of those who benefit from immigration and those who lose.

Western Views regarding International Migration

There is no consensus whatever among Western countries regarding international migration. Indeed, it is (perhaps) rather surprising that in this set of otherwise comparable countries—with their shared histories and cultures, economic prosperity, low fertility, and common commitments to individual rights, social mobility, mixed economies, and a variety of state-provided benefits and safety nets—one can find a remarkably wide range of perspectives on the admission and integration of foreign nationals.

Among these Western countries are the traditional countries of immigration—the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. All are former colonies of Great Britain, and as such share common characteristics of a cultural, linguistic, and legal variety and as destinations of emigrants moving abroad from Britain. In addition, all might be fairly characterized as developing countries of the 19th Century, rich in land and natural resources, but limited in population and labor. All four have longstanding traditions of admitting and integrating large numbers of foreign nationals, and a belief and legal system supportive of the view that nationality can be acquired by each individual by virtue of place of birth (*jus soli*) or by an affirmative act of naturalization, rather than

inherited from his/her parents (*jus sanguinis*).

At the other end of the continuum of Western perspectives on immigration, one might point to the German concept of the *volk* (people). This perspective, shared to a greater or lesser degree in other European countries such as Italy, Spain, and Austria, defines nationality in a more ethnic rather than political form. In the German traditional view, for example, a person born in Siberia who is an 8th-generation descendent of German migrants to Russia in the 18th Century is entitled to take up residence in Germany, and to be counted as a “returning” German national rather than as a migrating “foreigner”. Meanwhile, a third-generation German-born descendent of Turkish immigrants to Germany in the 1960s can be defined as a “foreigner” by virtue of the nationality of his/her parents and grandparents. After much fractious debate, the German laws dealing with such matters were recently revised.

Somewhere toward the middle of this continuum of Western perspectives is that of France, in which French-born offspring of non-French migrants have the right to claim French nationality. In this view, anyone can become French, but only if he/she become fluent in French and embraces French civic and cultural values. This tradition owes much to the French Revolution’s concept of the *citoyen*, enhanced by French success during the first half of the 20th Century in integrating into the French mainstream large numbers of migrant workers from Eastern Europe, Italy, and elsewhere.

With respect to immigration policies *per se*, there is much variation among these otherwise similar Western countries. Policies in the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are explicitly welcoming toward substantial immigration. In addition, ineffectual enforcement policies in the US have allowed the accumulation of millions of “undocumented”, “illegal”, or “unauthorized” immigrants to enter and reside in the country. Canada’s refugee and asylum system is such as to implicitly admit thousands of would-be migrants with less-than-fully-convincing claims to have been persecuted.

Meanwhile, European countries such as Germany have long declared explicitly that they are “not countries of immigration”, although their implicit policies have admitted millions of international migrants as “guest workers” who were allowed to stay, asylum-seekers, and temporary humanitarian admissions. Italy, like the US, has laws and regulations that have made it difficult to control the smuggling of would-be migrants into the country.

Current Debates

The topics of this symposium—population decline and international migration—are highly topical in many Western countries. The possibility of population decline in the future evokes concerns that are of both economic/policy and nationalistic forms. Economic concerns tend to concentrate upon impacts upon the relative sizes of the working-age and “dependent-age” populations, which leads in turn to debate about the viability of current policies regarding retirement and pension benefits, and about the negative economic effects of increased taxation rates that would be required to continue financing them in their current form.

The nationalist concerns have more to do with the prospect of declining numbers of co-nationals (or in some cases co-ethnics), with latent fears that population declines once established may be difficult to reverse and might even accelerate.

Increases in admissions of international migrants have been proposed by some as a means to preempt such population decline, and thereby to avoid politically difficult changes in state-financed retirement and pension systems. In addition, some groups in a few Western countries (e.g. Germany) have argued that there is an economic need for special temporary work visas for persons with skills in high-tech fields, on grounds that domestic supply of such skills is deficient.²⁸

The debates on these issues have been energetic, sometimes emotional, in Europe, which is one reason for the exaggerated responses in the European press to the UN report *Replacement Migration*, described earlier.

In the US, there is little or no debate about population decline, but a longstanding debate about US immigration policy, both explicit and implicit. This debate has been much affected by security concerns emerging out of the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, which apparently were carried out mostly by Saudi nationals who entered lawfully under US under visa programs for visitors and students.

Free Trade Agreements and International Migration

Debates about proposed free trade agreements have often involved debates about international migration, in at least two forms. The first debate addresses whether freer movement of goods and capital should or should not be accompanied by freer movement of labor.

The series of agreements that culminated in formation of the European Union envisioned free movement of labor as an ultimate goal, but there was recognition that large differentials in economic prosperity and demographic characteristics implied that such goals must be deferred until economic and demographic convergence could be substantially achieved. One common arrangement has been to delay unfettered labor migration for seven years after the accession of a new member state.

In negotiations and debates that culminated in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1993 among the United States, Mexico, and Canada, the Mexican government argued that free movement of labor must accompany free movement of goods and capital. However, the US and Canadian governments rejected these arguments on grounds that the very large economic differentials between Mexico and the other two countries (earnings differentials on the order of 8:1 to 10:1, depending on exchange rates) would unleash unacceptably large migratory movements. Hence the NAFTA agreement limits Mexican labor movement to its northern neighbors to a category termed "Professionals Under the North American Free Trade Agreement."²⁹

The term "Professionals," however, was construed quite broadly. It initially included some 63 categories, ranging from traditional "professions" such as architect, accountant, engineer, and dentist, to less typical categories such as interior designer, hotel manager, scientific technician/technologist, vocational counselor, and "disaster relief insurance claims adjuster." Most of the "professional" categories required only a first university degree (Baccalaureate or Licenciatura); some (e.g. the scientific technician/technologist category) had no educational requirements. Unlike most other employment-based visa categories, US employers wishing to hire Canadian workers under this provision may do so even if qualified US workers are available. For Mexican hires, the employer must file a "labor condition application"³⁰ that proponents argue protects US workers from any negative impacts of workers imported from a low-wage country, a contention rejected by critics of this provision.

The second type of debate about free trade and international migration concerns whether such free trade agreements reduce the pressures favoring unauthorized migration to Western countries. For example, in September 1993 then-President Bill Clinton argued that "One of the reasons that I so strongly support this North American Free Trade Agreement is...that [it] will dramatically

reduce the pressure felt by Mexican working people to come here for jobs."

An opposite view was put forward by Reform Party presidential candidate Ross Perot:

[It is a myth that] NAFTA will reduce illegal immigration. As manufacturing in northern Mexico expands, hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers will be drawn north. They will quickly find that wages in the Mexican maquiladora plants cannot compete with wages anywhere in the US. Out of economic necessity, many of these mobile workers will consider illegally immigrating into the US. In short, NAFTA has the potential to increase illegal immigration, not decrease it.³¹

With the 20/20 vision of hindsight, all would agree that unauthorized Mexican immigration to the US substantially increased after implementation of the NAFTA agreement, but there is no consensus among immigration researchers in Mexico and the US as to whether the NAFTA agreement itself decreased or increased the propensity toward such migration. Some believe that the increase in Mexican migration would have occurred with or without NAFTA, while others believe that provisions in NAFTA that opened Mexican markets to cheaper US-produced farm products had the effect of displacing 25 million Mexican farmers, millions of whom subsequently migrated unlawfully.³²

It is striking that over the past decade, countries such as the United States have allowed their trade negotiators to negotiate complex international agreements that included binding limitations on their subsequent ability to change their immigration policies, a prerogative normally jealously guarded by legislators. The NAFTA agreement is one example of this. A second is the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), under Mode 4 of which the United States Special Trade Representative agreed to "bind" the US to continue its politically controversial "H-1B" visa program that provides up to 65,000 temporary visas per year for foreign "specialty occupation" workers with a bachelors or higher level of education.³³ Both the NAFTA and GATS treaties required a "yes/no" vote of ratification by the US Senate (with no amendments allowed), but given the complexity of these agreements it is impossible to know whether most Senators could have understood the effect of this "binding" on their subsequent ability to modify immigration laws.

Some Demographic Particularities of Japan

Japanese fertility as measured by the “period” (or annual) total fertility rate (TFR) has declined by nearly one-third between 1975 and 2001, from 1.91 to 1.33.³⁴ Yet it is interesting to note that over roughly the same period the number of children ever born among married women exhibited but little decline, from 2.21 in 1982 to 2.13 in 1997.³⁵ Similarly, regular surveys of Japanese women between 1977 and 1997 show little or no change in their “expected” number of children; indeed the number was 2.17 and 1977 and 2.17 in 1997.³⁶

To a demographer’s eye, such apparently contradictory trends suggest that there may be substantial changes underway in marriage behavior. And indeed, examination of data on age at first marriage of Japanese women shows that this key element of fertility trends has indeed been rising, especially for women:

Such data indicate that substantial deferment of marriage is underway among Japanese women who eventually marry.

However, the most fascinating characteristic of Japanese marriage trends is the remarkably high percentage of Japanese women who have never married while in their 20s, normally the prime decade of childbearing. For example, of Japanese women aged 25-29 in 2000, over half (54.0%) were never-married, while nearly 9 out of 10 (87.9%) of those 20-24 were never-married.³⁷ These percentages are much higher than the roughly 30-40 percent never married for ages 25-29, and the 60-70 percent for ages 20-24, in comparable countries such as Canada, Netherlands, UK, France, and US.

There are a few other countries reporting similarly high percentages of women 20-29 who are never married, but these tend to be Nordic countries such as Iceland, Norway and Sweden, countries in which one-half or more of births are extra-marital.³⁸ In other words, non-marriage is not a strong impediment to childbearing

in these countries, whereas in Japan over this same period, the percentage of births occurring extramaritally was less than 2%.³⁹

One of Japan’s most sophisticated demographers, Shigemi Kono, concludes that “the recent decline is mainly attributable to recent declines in marriages and in the percentage married among the women aged 20-29.” He cites a recent study of Iwasawa that shows that “reductions in the first marriage account for 70 percent of the decline in Japanese fertility between 1970 and 2000.”⁴⁰ While it appears that there is no clear explanation of these marriage patterns of younger Japanese women, some speculate that they may be associated with rising education and labor force participation of women, weakening of the traditional arranged marriages and family value system, increasing attractiveness for young adults of maintaining residence in the parental home, or a tightening marriage squeeze resulting from better-educated women unable to find marriageable males with comparable or higher levels of education or occupational status.⁴¹

Others have suggested that traditional Japanese views regarding the proper roles of women have been sustained in Japan despite dramatic transformations in other characteristics of Japanese society since World War II.⁴² Here we might pose questions such as:

- To what extent is there consensus (or not) in Japanese society that working careers for women are incompatible with the roles of Japanese motherhood?
- To what extent are such views shared by Japanese women, even professionals, who feel that if they wish to work they must defer marriage or not marry, or if they do marry decide to not have children?
- And, to what extent have powerful urbanization trends in Japan had the effect of weakening the traditional support for childrearing that used to be available from extended kin networks, while alternative sources of such support have been slow to emerge?

The Need to Understand the Phenomena

Are recent and prospective Japanese fertility rates too low for the wellbeing of Japanese society? What are the appropriate levels and characteristics of international migration to Japan?

Fundamentally, these are questions of societal values rather than scientific analysis, and hence can be assessed only by Japanese leaders supported by sophisti-

Age at First Marriage, Japan		
	Male	Female
2001	29.0	27.2
1997	28.5	26.6
1987	28.4	25.7
1977	27.4	25.0

Source: NIPSSR, *Latest Demographic Statistics*, Table 6-12

cated understanding of the measurement, implications, and alternatives involved. Advice on such matters from outside is inappropriate, and in any case unlikely to be well-informed, since the appropriate answers also require nuanced and subtle understanding of the complexities of Japanese society and values.

An outside observer might be forgiven, however, for offering some thoughts as to how responses to such questions might be approached.

First, it will be critical to first understand what is actually happening with respect to Japanese fertility. The fact that annual (or “period”) fertility rates such as the total fertility rate have declined to very low levels while completed family sizes have remained quite high suggests some of the complexities that will need to be addressed. In this respect, the Government of Japan is well-served by its support for sophisticated data collection and research on the part of the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, the Institute of Developing Economies/JETRO, as well as by academic and other researchers outside of Government agencies.

A *second* watchword is quantitative realism: proposed actions need to be tested against the plausibility of their claimed outcomes. If financial incentives favoring higher fertility are proposed, are they of sufficient magnitude to affect the fertility behaviors of Japanese couples? Here the experience of countries (mostly in Europe) that have tried such approaches in the past would warrant careful assessment. If expansion of immigration is proposed to reverse trends toward demographic ageing in Japan, advocates must provide realistic quantitative analyses (such as those in the UN *Replacement Migration* report) demonstrating what volumes of immigration would be needed to do so.

Third, discussions and projections about “dependency ratios” should be informed by understanding of the critical assumptions that underlie a fixed life-course definition of “dependency”. In a society with Japan’s high levels of life expectancy and health, the first word of “dependency ratio” actually does not mean dependency at all. Instead, it reflects arbitrary boundaries of age categories (60 or 65) that were adopted during a different era, since which time life expectancy and productivity of those 65 and over have risen sharply.

Fourth, while very long-range (e.g. 50-100 year) projections are useful, it is important to be aware of how profoundly misleading these can be. A long time horizon for demographic trends is essential, especially be-

cause decisions taken earlier to adjust to such trends are far less burdensome than such decisions delayed. Yet the truth is that no one can forecast accurately 30-50 years out. Demographers do better than most—but still badly. In Dante’s *Inferno*, there is a very special punishment reserved for “prognosticators” or “diviners.” Their heads are rotated permanently to the rear, so those who in life sought to peer too far ahead into the future can no longer even see in front of them, for all of eternity...⁴³

Any policy proposals that emerge from such assessments should be informed by an understanding that there is no simple answer to such complex questions. A single-minded focus on any one type of policy measure is unlikely to be sufficiently powerful to address the multi-dimensional forces that underlie recent trends in Japanese demographic change. Instead what will be needed is an array of approaches, each of modest magnitude and slow of pace, but all operating in the same direction, and hopefully with cumulative effects.

Those who worry about the sufficiency of the future labor force in Japan might usefully address the feasibility of incremental modifications of policies that affect the current allocation of labor in Japan. These changes might include measures to allocate future Japanese labor resources away from those sectors that show relatively low levels of productivity (e.g. wholesale/retail distribution, parts of agriculture) and toward those with world-class productivity levels such as Japan’s export manufacturing sectors.

Measures to increase Japanese fertility rates might sensibly be focused on factors that may be driving the unusual pattern of large percentages of never-married women in their peak childbearing years. Is this pattern affected by the high costs of family housing? By conflicts between career paths for women and marriage/childbearing? If so, are there subtle changes that might be considered that would reduce such conflicts, and thereby facilitate Japanese women’s pursuit of careers with marriage and children?

Given the very large economic differentials involved, immigration to Japan can easily be increased, especially from China and other parts of Asia. Leaders in Japanese politics and industry who support such measures should understand that large-scale immigration would produce rapid changes in demographic composition if Japanese fertility rates were to remain at recent lows, and should seek credible data as to how such changes would be seen by Japanese public opinion.

A variety of relatively modest and gradual changes could be considered to address the “ageing” of the Japanese population and attendant fiscal stresses on public pensions and other age-related benefits. Candidate actions might include some of the following:

- The age of pension eligibility can be raised, but only modestly and gradually.
- The rate of “contributions” or taxes paid by active workers could be increased, but modestly and gradually;
- The rate of labor force participation could be increased among groups with low levels;
- The rate of increase in future payouts to pension recipients could be constrained;

None of these possible actions will be of sufficient magnitude on its own, but the sum of their effects taken together could be quite powerful.

At their core, most of these matters rest upon tradeoffs among rather fundamental values as to the future of Japanese society and its population: Is it important that the current population of Japan be sustained at its current size? Should the population resident in Japan remain overwhelmingly Japanese in origin and culture? Have forces favoring globalization substantially diminished the importance of national states such as Japan, with their long-established territorial boundaries and political identities, vis-a-vis the impacts of multinational firms, regional trading blocs, and transnational populations moving among large metropolitan areas such as Tokyo, Manila and Sao Paulo?⁴⁴ Should the apparent cultural conflicts between the status of Japanese women and their propensity to marry and bear children be addressed? Should current practices with respect to retirement age in Japan be sustained, or should future retirement age be linked to any increases in life expectancy, independence and productivity of some of those currently deemed to be dependent on grounds of their age?

The answers to such questions go to the very heart of how Japanese society perceives itself, and its future.

Notes

¹ The author wishes to thank Shigemi Kono, Keiko Osaki, Yasuko Hayase, Ryuzaburo Sato, Hiroshi Kojima, and Jay Winter for their assistance.

² Teitelbaum and Winter 1985:27-38.

³ Teitelbaum and Winter 1985:27.

⁴ *Revue de l'alliance nationale contre la dépopulation*, July-

August 1941, pp. 249ff.

⁵ In 1946, and for similar reasons, the British government established a Royal Commission on Population, but this was a temporary enterprise that concluded its work only a few years later.

⁶ Etienne van de Walle, book review of Paul-André Rosental, *L'intelligence démographique: sciences et politiques des population en France (1930-1960)*, *Population and Development Review*, 29 (3), pp. 518.

⁷ “Interview with Jacques Chirac,” *Libération*, 30 October 1984. p. 1.

⁸ David L. Hoffmann, “Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist pronatalism in its pan-European context,” *Journal of Social History*, September 2000, p. 7.

⁹ R. Schlesinger, *The Family in the U.S.S.R.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960, pp. 251-274.

¹⁰ Lines 1992:199

¹¹ Canada 1984:5-8.

¹² Wattenberg 1989:10

¹³ Appropriately, Japan is included in the industrial democracies category, but Wattenberg adds some confusion by referring frequently to this category as the “West”.

¹⁴ Teitelbaum 1987.

¹⁵ Wattenberg 1989:177.

¹⁶ Robert Debré's son Michel later became the first Premier of the Fifth Republic.

¹⁷ Debré and Sauvy 1946:58.

¹⁸ Teitelbaum 1978:xx-xxi.

¹⁹ Myrdal 1940:165.

²⁰ In US newspapers, journalists do not normally write the headlines for their own stories.

²¹ J-F Grinblat, UN Population Division, personal communication, March 2003.

²² “L'Europe aurait besoin de 159 millions d'immigrés d'ici à 2025”, *Le Monde*, 6 January 2000.

²³ “Migration de remplacement: une solution aux populations en déclin et vieillissantes” *Le Monde*, 6 January 2000.

²⁴ “Le rapport qui alarme l'Europe,” *Le Figaro*, 10 January 2000.

²⁵ Approvals by governments are not required for publication of reports by the UN Secretariat.

²⁶ Source: UN, Replacement Migration, 2000, Tables IV.4 and IV.7

²⁷ Such sharing of infectious diseases seems to be an inevitable by-product of encounters between previously quite separate human populations, though some believe

that the spread of some infectious diseases to American Indian populations was deliberate. There was, of course, disease transmission in the opposite direction as well, e.g. the spread of indigenous American diseases such as syphilis to Europeans and thence to Europe.

²⁸ The German debate on this issue is much confused by its use of the term “green cards” for such temporary visas for skilled workers. The notion of a “green card” (there was a popular Hollywood film titled “Green Card”) comes from US visas for permanent residence leading to citizenship, rather than for temporary admission. Moreover, the US “green card” has not even been green in color for a very long time.

²⁹ http://travel.state.gov/tn_visas.html

³⁰ Details available at <http://www.lca.doleta.gov/>

³¹ Perot, et al., p. 72

³² For recent US journalistic coverage of this issue, see <http://www.thedesertsun.com/topics/nafta/stories/20030707021740.shtml>

³³ See Mode 4 GATS Commitments by Country, USA, available at http://www.esf.be/e_pages/Mode%204%20GATS%20Commitments.htm

³⁴ NIPSSR, “Population Statistics of Japan 2003,” Table 4.3)

³⁵ NIPSSR, “Latest...,” Tables 4-26 and 4-27.

³⁶ NIPSSR, “Latest...,” Table 4-22

³⁷ NIPSSR, “Population Statistics of Japan,” Table 4.15

³⁸ Ventura and Bachrach, p. 15.

³⁹ NIPSSR, “Latest...,” Table 6-25.

⁴⁰ Kono, “Relationship between...,” p. 15. Iwasawa, 2002.

⁴¹ Kono, p. 15.

⁴² Keiko Osaki, UN Population Division, personal communication, September 2003.

⁴³ Canto XX: Circle Eight (Bolgia 4).

⁴⁴ See, for example, the arguments of Mayer, 2000.

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