

# Longevity Extension and Health Transition: The Case of Japan

Reiko HAYASHI

Life expectancy in Japan is among the longest in the world, and it is still steadily, but slowly, increasing. Over the years, the most common causes of death have shifted from infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, to chronic diseases such as malignant neoplasm, cerebrovascular or heart diseases, following the typical epidemiological transition model. However, due to the increasing number of deaths at very old ages, causes of death are becoming more complex. In addition to the single underlying cause, the analysis of multiple causes will be useful to understand how people live and die. As for the place of death, death at the hospital has been the most common, but the number of death at facility is increasing. Changing household structures and living arrangements might induce new ways of living, care arrangements, and dying.

Health can be defined in various ways. There are people who feel healthy but need help and care, or people who feel unhealthy yet have no limitations to their daily activities. Using various health indicators differently defined, healthy life expectancy in Japan is extending along with life expectancy.

The argument on the biological limit of human longevity is yet to be settled, but even assuming the conventionally alleged biological limit of 120 years, there is a margin of 40 years of expansion from the actual life expectancy of about 80 years. This longevity extension has been the most effective factor in slowing the population decline in Japan so far, and continuous efforts to encourage healthier and longer lives are crucial for a sustainable society.