

# Emancipation, Deprivation, or Withdrawal? Classification of Japanese Never Married Singles, 1982 - 2021

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There is no doubt from statistical evidence that there has been a rise in the percentage of never-married people in Japan over the past several decades. However, there are mixed views on the interpretation of this increase. In order to reconsider the situation of the never-married and how it has changed over time, this paper proposes four types of being never-married based on whether or not never-married men and women aged 25-34 have an economic base (regular employment/self-employment), an intimacy base (having a boy/girlfriend), and an intention to get married reflecting their perception of the desirability of marriage. We classified never married statuses into four groups ("precursor," "emancipation," "deprivation," and "withdrawal"), and observed changes in their composition over the past 40 years.

The increase in never-married people since the 1980s began with an increase in "precursor," which is characterized by the possession of two bases and the intention to marry (postponed marriage), and since the 1990s there has been an increase in "deprivation" due to a lack of economic base. Since 2010, the lack of economic base has eased somewhat, but there has been an increase in "deprivation" due to lack of intimacy base. During the same period, the number of "withdrawal," those who lack the two bases and have no intention to marry, has increased sharply, contributing to the increase in unmarried people around 2020. Then, throughout the observation period, the share of "emancipation" was rare.

The attitudes toward marriage and having children, as well as the circumstances that prevent marriage, differed depending on the type of being never married. This suggests that employment measures, housing security, work-life balance policies, and support for nursing care may remove some of the obstacles to marriage. However, some types of being never married are difficult to intervene directly through socioeconomic policies and measures, and it is necessary to modify the social institution on the assumption that today's level of marriage decline will continue to some extent in the future.

Keywords: marriage decline, secure economic base, intimacy base, marriage intention