

The Declining Birthrate: Whose Problem?

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Abstract This paper argues that the decline in the Japanese total fertility rate was caused mainly by the rise in the unmarried population. Possible explanations are late marriages, high educational expenditures and housing costs, women's higher education and increased participation in the workforce, and a change in cultural values. The fertility rate among married women has remained at the replacement level for the last few decades, and the number of illegitimate births is almost negligible. Although fertility rates in most advanced countries show a conversion below the replacement level, the small differences have to be explained. It is difficult to measure the impact of family policies, but the high level of privatization of reproductive costs and the low value assigned to care work can be seen as signs of a child-unfriendly society. If an individual couple makes a voluntary decision to have fewer children, on the other hand, the low fertility rate may not constitute a problem.

1. Introduction

The Japanese government and economic circles experienced a “1.57 shock” in 1989. The total fertility rate (TFR) in fiscal year 1989 was reported to be 1.57, slightly below the lowest rate recorded (1.58), in 1966, the year of *hinoe-uma*, which arrives once every sixty years according to the Chinese calendar from ancient times. Believing in the folklore that girls born in this year would grow to gnaw their husbands to death, many couples tended to avoid having a child in 1966. As the birthrates immediately before and after this year were much higher, it is almost certain that the low birthrate in 1966 was intentional. It is surprising that as late as the 1960s young Japanese couples were still influenced by an age-old superstition. But the low birthrate in 1989 was a shock because there was no such reason to avoid childbirth in that year.

In fact, the low birthrate did not occur all of a sudden. Birthrates had been falling gradually for some decades before, and a TFR of 1.57 was a natural consequence. Since 1989 birthrates have continued to drop — to an all-time low of 1.42 in 1995. There is no sign of an inversion of this tendency.

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2. The Causes and Impact of the Declining Birthrate

Japan experienced a long-term trend of lowering birthrates even before World War II, and except during the postwar baby boom, birthrates have been on the decline. The Japanese government was positive about decreasing births after the war. On its defeat in the war, Japan lost its colonies, and the government had little means to accommodate the population pressures caused by returning servicemen and people repatriated from its former colonies. Thus, a reduced birthrate was what the government intended.

In the 1950s the TFRs of Japanese women dropped from the four-person level to the two-person level. About one decade was needed for reversing the fertility rate from an increase to a decrease. Compared with other countries in Asia, Japan can be said to be a model of success in controlling the population in such a short period. It is noteworthy that in Japan population control was not forced or encouraged by government initiatives but was undertaken voluntarily by individual couples. Considering the measures implemented elsewhere, such as the “one-child campaign” of the Chinese government and forced sterilization or incentive-induced sterilization in India and Bangladesh, Japan represents a good example to many developing countries faced with a population explosion.

Although Japan’s population has been controlled as a result of people’s voluntary decision making, there has been a gap between the desired number and the actual number of children in a family. Behind the reality of a two-child household, instead of the ideal number of three children per family, there is often an aborted child.

This reduction in the birthrate was not forced politically but was induced economically. Many parents gave the reason “it is expensive to bring up a child” for not having their ideal number of children (Figs. 1a, 1b). To keep their middle-class lifestyle, they could not afford to raise more than two children. By the end of the 1960s “two children in a family” was a widely accepted norm, and having more than two was considered to be a status symbol, as opposed to the past saying “the poorer you are, the more children you have.”

Unfortunately, in those days birth control was mainly a matter of induced abortion. Induced abortion is in no way a contraceptive method. However, it was used as such, first, because of women’s lack of knowledge of other options due to the unavailability of information, and second, because of men’s uncooperative attitude toward contraception. According to the statistics, fetuses equivalent to about two-thirds of live births were aborted in the 1950s (Table 1). In many cases abortion was practiced by married women who had already had two children. Their idea of birth control was to have the undesired third or fourth child aborted. It was their husbands who benefited from this practice by avoiding the economic difficulties arising with the arrival of unwanted children.

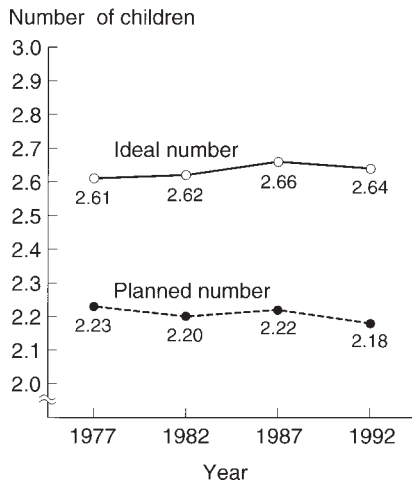


Figure 1a Trends in the ideal and planned number of children

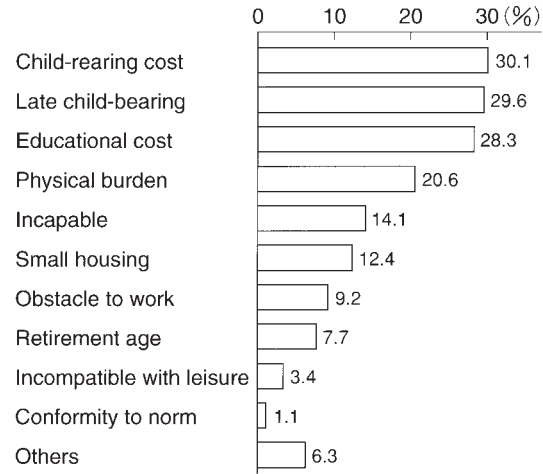


Figure 1b Reasons for not having the ideal number of children, 1992

Table 1 Trends in the registered number of induced abortions

Year	No. of Births (in 1,000s)	No. of induced abortions (in 1,000s)	Rate (%)	Within 12 weeks (%)
1950	2,338	489	20.9	74.9
1955	1,731	1,170	67.6	91.7
1960	1,606	1,063	66.2	93.0
1965	1,824	843	46.3	94.4
1970	1,934	732	27.8	95.4
1975	1,901	672	35.3	96.7
1978	1,709	618	36.2	95.3
1979	1,643	614	37.4	93.7
1980	1,577	593	37.9	94.1
1981	1,529	597	39.0	94.1

Japan in postwar days was given the dishonorable name, “Paradise of Abortion.” Unlike inhabitants of the Christian sphere, Japanese people are seldom stigmatized for having induced abortions. Feticide became a crime in 1880; the law, which was revised in 1907, still exists today. However, by relaxing the preconditions for induced abortion under the Eugenics Protection Law of 1948, relatively safe and inexpensive artificial abortion became accessible to Japanese women. This law is a revised version of the National Eugenics Law, enacted in 1940 during the war. The term “eugenics,” which reflects the concept of leaving superior descendants, remained in existence until 1996, when the National Eugenics Law was replaced with

the Maternity Protection Law (Botai Hogo Ho). Under the former law, induced abortion was legalized in real terms by interpreting a provision in an extended way that admitted abortion for an “economic reason” by a designated obstetrician. Therefore, the statistics of induced abortion in Japan can be trusted.

After the “1.57 shock,” government and business circles began expressing concern about the declining birthrate. In particular, they were troubled by prospects of (1) a reduction in national strength, (2) a future shortage in the labor force, and (3) rapid aging of the population and heavy burdens of elderly care placed on the society. Compared with the inhabitants of other industrialized countries, the Japanese people are aging at an accelerated rate. It is impossible for any of the industrialized countries to curb the present trend in lowered birthrates and population aging, but they have been trying to delay the speed with which aging occurs in order to prepare for an era marked by a large elderly population. Otherwise, government policies and services will be unable to respond to rapid change, causing problems in many aspects of social life.

The first concern linking population decline with “reduced national strength” is an antiquated idea of the nineteenth century. Japan almost quadrupled its population in a little over one century — from 30 million at the time of the Meiji Restoration in the late 1800s to 120 million in 1985. Therefore, it is no use worrying about the current trend, which is likely to turn around.

Behind the second concern — manpower shortages in the coming decades — are unspoken racism and exclusionism. In forecasting the future labor market, they take into account only natural population growth, i.e., the birth of children of Japanese nationality. They do not calculate the growth of the social population, i.e., immigrant workers. As mentioned later, demand and supply in the labor market will depend largely on policies for immigrants. Connecting the lowering fertility rates directly with a possible labor shortage in the future is based on the premise that the current very strict Immigration Control Law will remain in force.

With regard to the third concern, the burdens of elderly care, a surprising simulation can be shown (Fig. 2). According to a projection of the “probability of unemployed married women taking care of bedridden elderly persons or those with dementia by age in 2025” by the Population Institution of Nihon University, almost 50 percent of married women between the ages of 40 and 49 will be caring for elderly members of their families. The demographers involved in making these projections — many of whom are thought to be men — have an unquestionable gender bias. First, they assume that the caretakers will be women only. Second, they anticipate that “unemployed married women” — in other words, “full-time housewives” — will not be exempted from providing domiciliary care for elderly parents. Third, they consider that the ratio of full-time housewives in the female population will remain at today’s level. If working women and men are included in

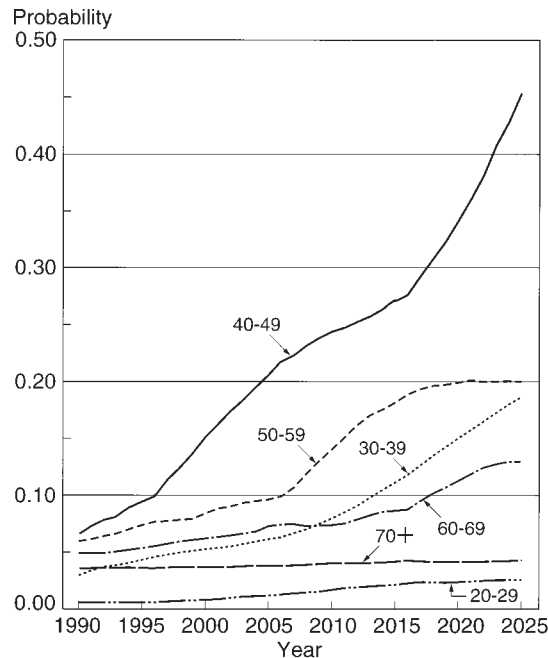


Figure 2 Projected probability of non-working women to take care of bedridden elderly or elderly with dementia at home

the caretaking population, this probability ratio will go down.

As for supporting the elderly population, it is predicted that younger generations must bear a greater tax burden to buttress the ever-shrinking national budget. This represents a pseudo-problem in considering the over-65 population as a “non-productive population” as a whole. Individual differences will become more apparent when people get old. An increasing number of the elderly will be healthy and have an active social life, and it will be desirable and necessary to incorporate them in the labor force. If the number of elderly people who work, have an income, and pay taxes is expected to increase, it is not appropriate to regard the elderly as a dependent population. For this to happen, the current wage scale system whereby wages are geared to age should be reformed.

Reduced fertility rates are showing similar developments in all industrialized countries. Except for the United States,¹ there is no country among them that shows population growth above the 2.1 replacement level. Sweden once registered

¹ At the request of the NIRA (National Institute for Research Advancement) I conducted a comparative survey on the decreasing birthrates in industrialized countries in Europe but excluded the United States from the list of target countries. Because America, as an immigrant country, is a multiracial society with a North-South gap within its borders, it can hardly be categorized as a developed country from a demographic point of view. NIRA (1994).

a rebound that later proved to be only transitory.

The industrialized countries with a similar tendency can be further divided into three groups: those with a relatively high total fertility rate of 1.8 such as France and Britain, those with a medium TFR of 1.5 such as Japan until recently, and those with lower TFRs. With its current rates below 1.4, Japan has joined the latter group. It happens that the former Axis powers (Japan, Italy, and Germany) have the lowest TFRs. This is more than mere coincidence. According to the Italian feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa, the low birthrates in her country represent a subconscious birth strike by women against machismo. These former fascist states share the nature of the male dominant society.

Differences in fertility rates among industrialized countries are nominal, and no country has a fertility rate above the replacement level. Even so, these nominal differences deserve further explanation, as a small difference may imply a difference in the speed of the aging process of the population. Factors leading to reduced fertility rates have been analyzed by a number of researchers. The major factors cited are (1) the rise in age at first marriage, (2) the increased cost of child care and education, (3) the rise in housing costs, (4) improved education for women, (5) the increased number of working women, and (6) the change in the public consciousness about family and children.

2.1. The Rise in Age at First Marriage

Higher ages at first marriage have an obvious inverse correlation with TFRs (Fig. 3).

2.2. The Increased Cost of Child Care and Education

A similar inverse correlation is found between TFRs and the increase in expendi-

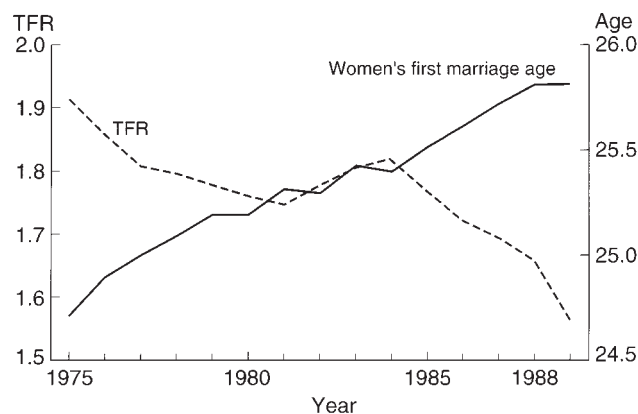


Figure 3 Trends in the total fertility rate and mean age at first marriage for women

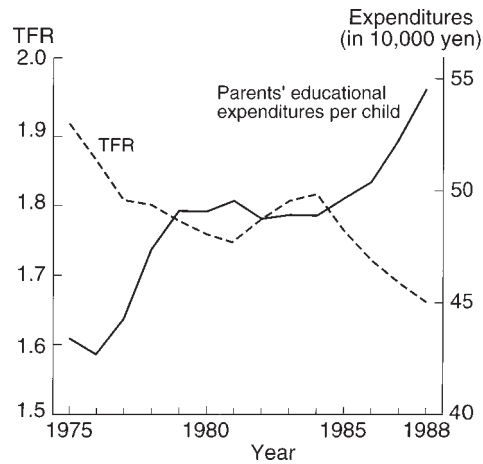


Figure 4 Trends in educational expenditures per child and the total fertility rate

tures for child care and education (Fig. 4). Popularization of higher education is a main factor behind the rising cost of education. At the beginning of the 1970s more than 90 percent of children completing 9-year compulsory education advanced to high school and the percentage of students going to 2-year or 4-year colleges also rose rapidly. A great majority of students are in private schools. With limited scholarships and other public support for education, education costs are borne by parents. Today, child care costs include the expenses for secondary socialization, i.e., higher education costs, which are paid by parents. According to the banking industry, the cost of rearing a child until he or she graduates from a 4-year university is about 20 million yen for a national and municipal school and 30 million yen for a private school — the price of a condominium of standard quality in a local city.

A gender gap still persists in education, however. In 1990 the rate of female high school graduates attending higher educational institutions was 37 percent, two points more than that of males when for the first time more females entered colleges and universities than men of the same age group. But a breakdown of this figure shows that 22 percent of these young women went to 2-year colleges and the remaining 15 percent to 4-year colleges. After 1990, more women and men entered higher educational institutions after completing senior high school, but as far as 4-year universities were concerned, the female student body was 60 percent of the size of the male student body. Parents tended to regard the education of their children as an investment in their after-retirement life, and they did not find it beneficial to educate daughters on a level equal to that of sons as they could not expect to recover their investment from daughters. A change occurred in this pattern in 1995, when 4-year female university students exceeded in number 2-year female college students. Reflecting the small number of children per family, 40

percent of families have one or more daughters but no sons. Those families with only daughters cannot choose to discriminate against them in favor of sons.

2.3. The Rise in Housing Costs

The decrease in the number of children per family reflects the poor housing conditions that exist in Japan (Fig. 5). There is a clear correlation between housing and land prices and lowered TFRs. By prefecture, the probability of marriage is higher in areas with higher residential environment indices. In Tokyo and Osaka, the probability of marriage is remarkably low, demonstrating the poor residential environments in these large cities.

2.4. Improved Education for Women

The increase in the number of women with higher education is considered instrumental in lowering fertility rates. However, this is not evidenced by data. As the average age at the first marriage is 26, a superior academic background does not directly correlate with late marriage. Improved education does not correlate with women's continued employment, either. Rather, as the Japanese practice hypergamy, i.e., women marrying up, a superior academic background gives a woman the opportunity to enter a more advantageous marriage, in which she is more likely to become a full-time housewife.

2.5. The Increased Number of Working Women

The increased number of women who work outside the home is often considered to have a trade-off relationship with reduced fertility rates. This, however, is also not supported by data. A graph of the female workforce in Japan is M-shaped with two peaks. One peak is occupied by single women and the other by married women

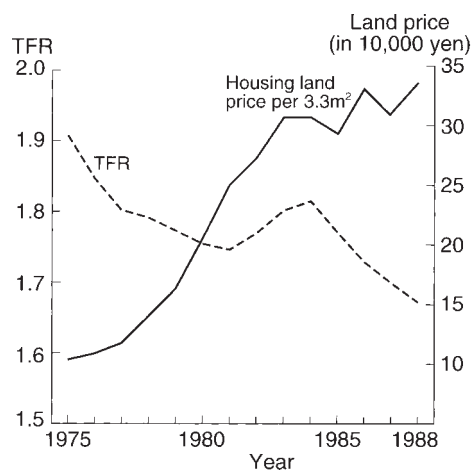


Figure 5 Land prices for housing and the total fertility rate

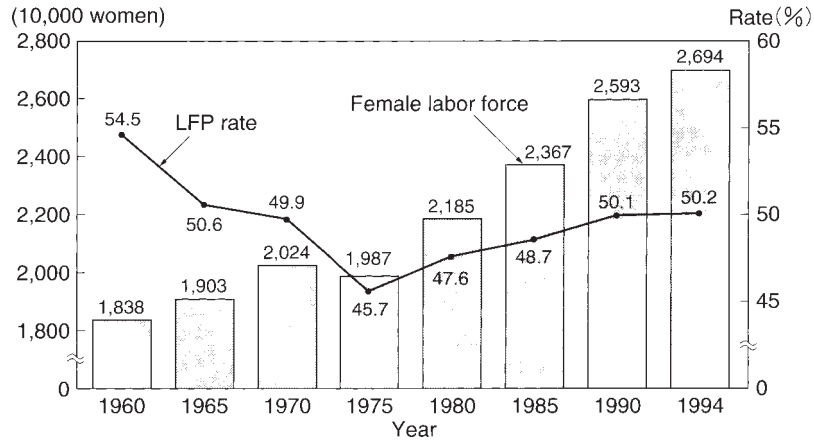


Figure 6 Trends in the female labor force

after their child care years, both of whom have been major participants in the workforce. “Women’s entry into the workforce,” in fact, has meant the marginalization of women workers. Women who stay in full-time jobs after marriage and childbirth represent only 20 percent of the total population of women of the same age. This percentage has remained unchanged for nearly two decades. In the longer perspective, female labor participation rates fell in the 1960s and hit rock bottom in 1975 (Fig. 6).² As seen by cohort, it was the postwar baby boomer generation that chose to be full-time housewives. It was also this generation that promoted the tendency to have fewer children. There is, therefore, no positive correlation between fertility rates and the percentage of full-time housewives among married women.

Although women’s participation in the workforce has increased, their opportunity costs have not risen. In the latter half of the 1970s, the peak period of “women’s entry into the labor force,” the wage gap between men and women workers expanded. Judging from an opportunity cost theory, women received little encouragement to continue working after childbirth. Even today the typical life course of women is “working full-time before childbirth, staying at home while caring for a baby, and beginning to work again after the child-care period.”

Statistics from Sweden also clearly show that a trade-off relationship does not occur between women who work outside the home and fertility rates (Fig. 7). In Sweden, women’s rates of workforce participation and lowered fertility were inversely correlated until the 1970s. With a sense of crisis, the government promoted

² The drop was mainly caused by the shift from family workers in cottage businesses to employed workers despite the increase of job opportunities through industrialization, except at the time of the oil crisis.

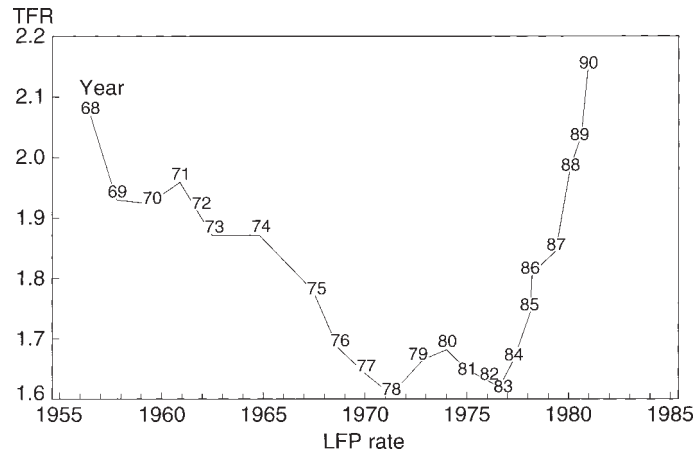


Figure 7 The trade-off between women's labor force participation and the total fertility rate in Sweden

family policies, and, as a result, the declining fertility rate showed a reactionary rise. Among the EU members, Sweden has the highest female labor participation rate and, at the same time, the highest birthrate. The effect of Swedish family policies will be discussed later.

2.6. The Change in the Public Consciousness about Family and Children

In addition to socioeconomic factors, changes in the public consciousness about family and children are often cited as causes of declining birthrates. Reasons such as "uneasiness about the future," "I will not be able to do what I want to do if I had a child" are given for not having any children. People's attitudes toward marriage and child care have become more tolerant. A survey shows that many people support such an opinion as "Since there are many options in life, there is no need to stick to the conventional style of marriage." Such permissive thinking is widely shared among young people. Some people may see these changes as a reflection of ego-centeredness or child-hating. But from the perspective of family history, the opposite is true. In modern families, lowered birthrates are considered to be the result of an increased interest in children (Shorter, 1975). To "have a small number of children and bring them up healthily" was a conclusion based on increasing concerns about children and deeper consideration of them. Given the high cost of bringing up a child in modern society, parents now voluntarily control the number of children they have (Yamada, 1994). Indeed, at no time in history have expenditures for child rearing been so costly and privatized. Young people hesitate to have children not because they dislike them but because they foresee the heavy burdens that will be required to raise them. Today many mothers leave their jobs because they believe that child care requires their full-time attention.

It can be concluded that many factors are related to the declining birthrate, and it is difficult to identify a cause-and-effect relationship. However, the fact that enormous expenses for childbirth and child care are largely being met by parents privately is obviously a major reason for this decline.

3. Changes in the Family

Three factors are involved in the declining birthrate: (1) The declining rate of marriages, (2) The declining in-marriage birthrate, and (3) The declining out-of-marriage birthrate. Of these factors, the most significant is the declining marriage rate. The birthrate among married couples has remained at the 2.1 level for the past two decades with little sign of dropping (Fig. 8). The norm to have “two children per family” is widely accepted by married couples today, and “one child” tends to be avoided.

It is statistical magic to see that reduced marriage rates will result in lowered TFRs. This cannot be concluded until we know the completed fertility rates of women presently in their twenties and thirties and determine whether the present low marriage rate among young people merely reflects their inclination toward late marriage, whether they would end up being single throughout their lives, whether they would marry late and have two children, or whether their late marriages would lead to lower birthrates. It will take one or two decades to find answers to these questions. Traditionally, completed fertility rates are calculated at age 45. But

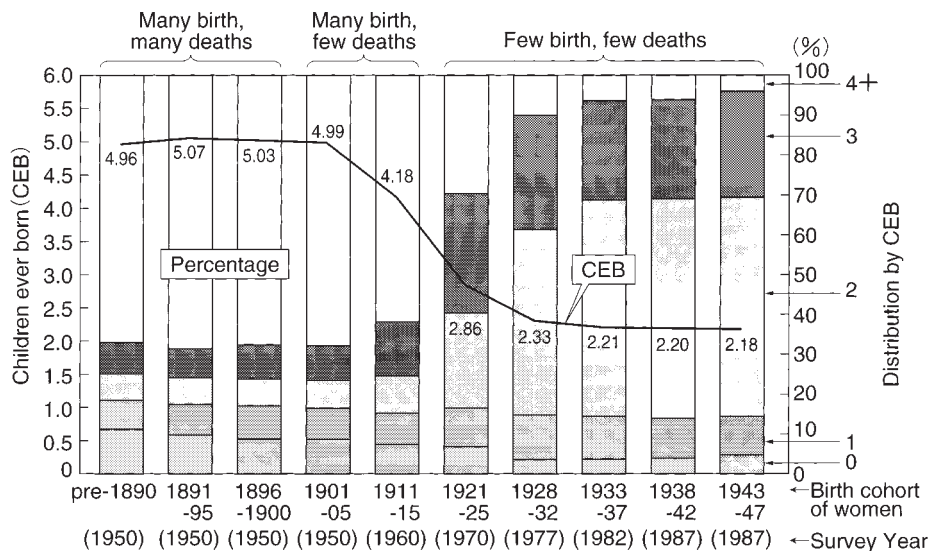


Figure 8 Cohort trends in completed fertility among married women

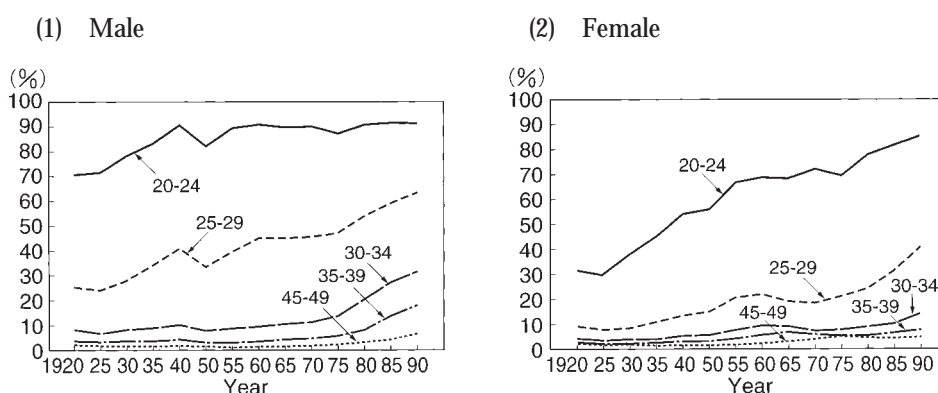


Figure 9 Trends in the percentage of never-marrieds by age and sex

with the advancements in reproductive technologies, the reproductive age range may be prolonged. Because the number of child deliveries by women in their thirties has been on the rise, the Ministry of Health and Welfare recently redefined women having a “late first child delivery to be those above 35 years old” which used to be above 30.

But how does the decreasing birthrate affect people’s view of marriage and family? This section examines the sociological factors behind the statistical data.

The statistics show a clear tendency toward late marriage, as well as a rise in the percentage of people who remain unmarried (Fig. 9). In 1995 the proportion of unmarried men in the 25–29 age group was 66.4 percent and of unmarried women, 49 percent; the proportion of men in the 30–34 age group was 37.3 percent and of women, 19.9 percent. The proportion of unmarried women in their late thirties fell to 9.7 percent, whereas that of men did not drop below 20 percent even among men in their forties. This tendency was stronger among younger cohorts. Strangely, in the United States this nonmarrying phenomenon is explained as a difficulty of women to find a spouse because they have become too assertive. By contrast, in Japan it is reported as just the reverse: a difficulty of men to find a spouse. Demographically, an excessive male population is said to be the cause. In industrialized countries the male-female ratio at birth is 105 : 100, a ratio that is carried over until marriageable ages.³ However, it does not mean that all men have a hard time finding a spouse. Unmarried older men tend to be poorly educated and to be concentrated among successors of farming and family businesses in less popu-

³ According to a recent report, the male-female ratio at birth in China turned out to be 115 : 100, which makes us suspicious of female infanticide and selective abortion due to the country’s “one-child policy.” It can be assumed that in 20 years men will have difficulty in finding a spouse. This presents a good example of when reasonable decision making on the microscopic level would not be reasonable on the macroscopic level.

lated areas. Unmarried females, on the other hand, are found largely among women with superior educational backgrounds living in cities. There is an extremely low possibility that people in these two groups could make suitable matches.⁴

To alleviate the “shortage of potential wives,” some local governments and intermediary agents once attempted to “import brides” from Southeast Asian countries. However, this type of “international marriage” was found to cause many problems and is no longer promoted.

Miyamoto and her group of family sociologists (Miyamoto, Iwagami, and Yamada, 1997) conducted an interesting survey of unmarried people and their reasons for remaining single. The results show that the desire for marriage has not decreased among women at all. Although the “you’re at the marriageable age, why don’t you get married?” pressure is not as strong as it used to be, an overwhelming majority of both men and women desire to marry someday. Only a few choose to remain single. Indeed, until recently Japan showed remarkably high cumulative marriage rates. In the 1970s, 97 percent of men and 98 percent of women married *at least* once in their lifetime, and the number of people who never married was negligible. This “everyone gets married” society was a result of the modernization of Japan. In premodern times, the second and third sons, etc., were unable to marry unless they were fortunate enough to receive a portion of the family property from their parents. Thanks to the country’s industrialization, they became economically self-reliant. Behind the rise in birthrates supported by modernization is the advent of a society with a larger married population, or a society in which everyone can afford to marry. It may be normal for any society to have a “remain single” population at the 10 percent level. An extraordinary “everyone gets married” period from a historical point of view lasted only one century in Japan. As social pressure for marriage is now being relaxed, people consider marriage as an option in life.

Nevertheless, the desire for marriage is still strong, and marriage is still valued as an institution. Even so, this strong desire to marry *often* is not acted upon; hence, marriage rates keep falling. How can we explain this gap between desire and practice?

In the 1980s, “three highly desirable conditions” became a trendy explanation for the gap between women’s desire for marriage and the actual decline in their

⁴ Households consisting of an unmarried man in his forties and fifties and his old-age parents are on the increase in depopulated rural areas, causing great burdens to local government. There is little difficulty while the parents remain healthy, but if they become bedridden or in any way need care, a serious problem may arise, for often the son is unable to give care to old parents or even to provide for his own daily needs. Many cases of parent abuse reported by the media are committed by sons out of frustration and depression.

marriage rate. Their “three high desires” for a husband included “high educational background, high income, and high standing height (tallness).” According to this reasoning, even though women had a strong desire for marriage, they could not find a partner in the marriage market unless they compromised on these conditions, leading to a late marriage or staying single. The excessive demands of young women were blamed for the increase in the unmarried population. Data proved the contrary. This gap between illusion and reality was created by the media. But data did show that a major change had occurred in the selection of spouses, and late marriage was becoming more common. Age gaps between husband and wife had stayed between 2 and 3 years, but the distribution of age groups had changed, although not being shown in the average values (Fig. 10). A woman aged 26, an average age of first marriage, is most likely to get married to a man of the same age. Same-aged couples have increased in all age groups.

While the media was inflating the idea of “three high desires,” marriages by same-aged couples were increasing. To explain the difficulty of young people in getting married, the media reporters approached marriage matchmaking agencies as sources of information. As those women who registered with such agencies were paying as much as 300,000 yen (U.S. \$2,400) in registration fees, it is quite natural that they would ask for an introduction to individuals meeting the “three high”

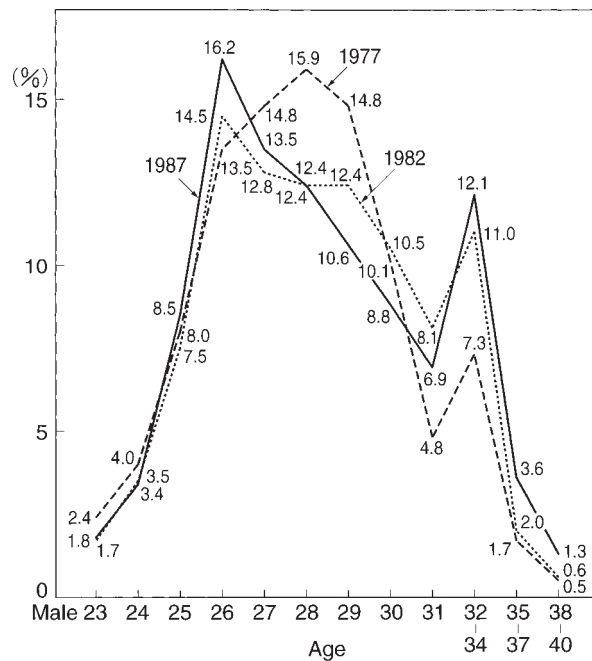


Figure 10 Age distribution of males married to 26-year-old females, 1977, 1982, and 1987

conditions. The general public, however, has not displayed a similar tendency. Surveys have found that the traditional views of marriage — i.e., “seeking economic security” or “attaining social recognition as matured persons” — are losing public support. In their place, expectations of mutuality such as “mental security” and “mutual support” are growing among young people. This can be rephrased as an expectation of “partnership” in married life as symbolically expressed by the increase in same-aged couples. Couples who start out as friends in a group, such as participants in a club activity who say “we would like to enjoy playing together and living together,” are on the increase. Imperative among them is that they share the same hobby or the same values. The postwar coeducational system exerted a significant influence on young people, causing them to think about marriage in the more egalitarian way.

Their expectations of security and mutual support in marriage can be seen from an ironic point of view as well. Data on the academic careers and occupational strata of married couples indicate that the principle of class endogamy or “marrying among the same social group” is persistently followed, even though many couples marry for love instead of entering an arranged marriage. The “same group” indices are higher among couples who married for love, whether seen by locality or age group. The rule of marrying a person within the same stratum is not shaken at all, and a misalliance still causes a sensation because it is exceptional. For young men and women to develop a loving relationship, “sharing of tastes and values,” or “symbolic capital,” borrowing Pierre Bourdieu’s term in *La Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1979), functions as a screening mechanism in match-making. In this sense, the shift from arranged marriages to marriages for love implies that the decision makers have changed from families (parents) to the marrying couples themselves, leaving the criteria for choosing their partners as before. Although they have internalized the utilitarian and institutional criteria, the parties concerned call it a “love” marriage when they have chosen each other (Ueno, 1995).

Incidentally, a phrase like “friend-like couple” became topical when the postwar baby boomers reached a marriageable age in the 1970s. The shift from arranged marriages to love marriages was already under way in the 1960s, and the strong inclination to seek a partnership in married life began to be observed among the young. As noted earlier, this is the cohort that comprised the largest percentage of full-time housewives in postwar Japan. But the ideal “friend-like couple” was not actually realized where the division of roles persisted. It was left to the next generation to make the “partnership marriage” a reality both in name and execution.

Nevertheless, the conventional gender role expectations are still maintained. Although the concept “men work outside, women do household chores” is endorsed by fewer people, there is a gap in the degree of change between men and women. Husbands still expect their wives to assume responsibility for and perform house-

hold tasks. The increase in the unmarried population due to this unbridgeable gap between women's expectations for a "partnership marriage" and men's desire for marriage with "gender role assignments" pervades Japanese society. Young men still fall behind the changing attitudes of women.

According to a people's daily life survey in 1991 (Fig. 11), the average paid working time of husbands among working couple households is 8 hours and 15 minutes whereas that of wives is 5 hours and 30 minutes. Husbands work longer than wives where paid work is concerned, but for unpaid work, such as household chores, child care, and care for the elderly and sick, wives work 4 hours and 16 minutes and husbands only 19 minutes. In total, the wife's working time is 9 hours and 46 minutes whereas the husband's working time is 8 hours and 34 minutes. Thus a wife's working time is longer than her husband's. Among households with a working husband and a full-time housewife, the husband spends only 24 minutes performing household chores and child care activities. It is statistically clear that a husband's participation in household work is very limited regardless of whether his wife is employed outside the home and that household responsibilities are unilaterally borne by wives. Therefore, a working wife has a "second shift" of work after returning home (Hochschild, 1989) and tends to be overworked.

The third report of the National Action Program on women, compiled by the Prime Minister's Office (1983), began calculating both the paid and unpaid working hours of women. Women's unpaid working time has finally come to receive due recognition.

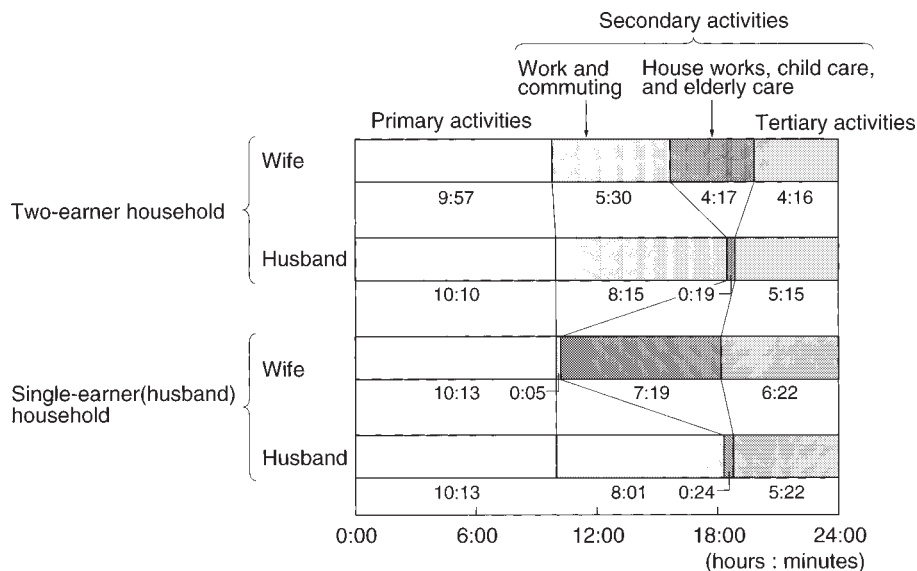


Figure 11 The time use of couples, 1991

The joint study by Miyamoto, Iwagami, and Yamada (1997), based on empirical research, presents more practical observations. It finds that the increase in the unmarried population has two causes. The first is the increase of intergenerational exchange between adult children and their parents. The reasons for this phenomenon are:

- 1) Mounting uneasy feelings of parents about their prolonged elderly life.
- 2) Increased dependence of unmarried adult children on parents for support of their prolonged single life.
- 3) Increased expectation for parental assistance of married daughters with children who continue working and need help with household chores and child care.
- 4) Increased expectation of parents that their adult daughters, as helping hands, will take care of them. Hence, intergenerational exchange is progressing along the matrilineal kinship. As a matter of course, there is parents' economic resource as a precondition.

According to Miyamoto and her colleagues, a high percentage of people in their twenties are living with their parents, and most of them are exempt from household work. Many who live with parents in the metropolitan areas, where housing is extremely expensive, do not pay for housing or even contribute to their parents' livelihood. Miyamoto's team calls these young people "parasite singles." The parasite single is looked after by a mother who is a full-time housewife and a father who can support the family with his single income. This economic strength has so far been maintained by Japan's growing economy and the seniority wage system that is linked to the growing economy.

The parasite single is not so strongly motivated to marry as to compromise his or her present living standard provided by the father. Some data show that women in their late twenties wish their future husbands to have an annual income of 7 million yen, which would enable them to continue to enjoy the same standard of living after their marriage. Few men in the marriage market can meet this requirement, and, as a consequence, such women find it difficult to find a future spouse. As it happens, an annual income of 7 million yen is obtainable even by young couples if both husband and wife work.

The second cause of the rise in unmarrieds, as seen by Miyamoto and others, is a maternal myth persistently held by young women who believe that "children should be reared by their mother" or that mothers should devote themselves on a full-time basis to caring for children while they are small, despite their inclination toward a "partnership marriage." Miyamoto's colleague, Yamada Masahiro, ironically observes that a "partnership marriage" is a self-seeking demand for mutual dependency whereby the husband expects the wife to supplement the household

income while performing all household work, and whereby the wife imposes earning a livelihood on the husband while concurrently expecting his help with household work. As such, the researchers conclude that the disparity in expectations between men and women is the *second* cause for the increase in unmarried people.

At the same time, the number of unmarried people who have sexual relations is increasing, and the probability of marrying the person with whom one had the first sexual encounter is decreasing for both men and women. Demographic changes showing indices of a sexual liberation such as higher divorce rates and higher birthrates of children born out of wedlock are much smaller in Japan than in other industrialized countries. Even so, sexual liberation has gradually taken place. Certainly, by separating marriage and sexual life, single life has become easier. The parasite singles can remain unmarried at little cost to their sexuality. Even though they live with their parents, there are a number of places commercially available for this purpose in town.

However, with a long economic recession and low economic growth, the Japanese-style employment system characterized by lifetime employment and the seniority wage system can no longer be maintained. Miyamoto and her group predict that a collapse of the seniority wage system, which serves as the precondition for parasite singles to continue their dependency on their families, would cause a more serious conflict between parent and child over the distribution of resources. Yet it is unclear whether it would increase the pressure for marriage among younger generations.

The decline of births outside of marriage, another factor contributing to the lowering birthrate, should be touched upon. The rate of out-of-wedlock births in Japan is far below that in other industrialized countries (Fig. 12). Children born outside of marriage represent more than half of the live births in Sweden, about one-third of those in the United States, at the 20% level in France, at the 10% level in Germany, and 7% even in Italy, a country strongly influenced by Catholicism. In Japan, they remained negligible (below 1%) for a long time — until a recent increase to 1.1% of live births. Historically speaking, these low rates are a relatively new phenomenon. Before World War II the rates of children born out of wedlock were much higher, due to the polygamous practices and the time lag between the cohabitation and legal registration. These children have long been discriminated against in the distribution of inheritances and other aspects of social life. After the war, as the dates of commencement of cohabitation and marriage registration became the same, the birthrates of children outside of marriage fell rapidly.

Behind the birth of children out of wedlock is an increase in common-law marriage (cohabitation without marriage registration). In Japan, the rate of unmarried cohabitation is remarkably small (Table 2). In Sweden and Denmark, although late marriage is an ongoing trend, people in the 20–24 age group show the highest rate

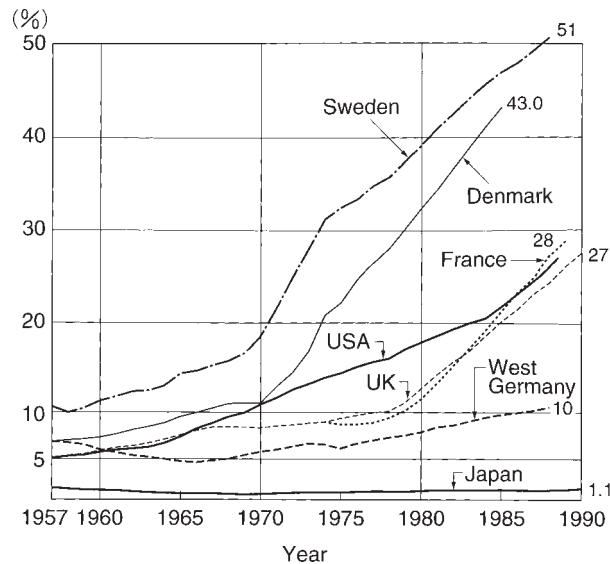


Figure 12 Trends in out-of wedlock (illegitimate) births (%)

of cohabitation. The ages when they actually live together have not greatly changed. In Japan, the age at which a man and woman begin to live together and the age at which they register their marriage are identical. Therefore, the late marriage trend in Japan is literally interpreted as a late start of cohabitation. The age when Japanese couples begin living together may well be the oldest in the industrialized world.

Social sanctions against out-of-wedlock births still exist, and people fear discrimination against such children. For this reason, a legal marriage is considered to be a prerequisite for having a child.

Encouragement of out-of-wedlock children is an option to increase the birthrate. In Singapore, for instance, the government, concerned about the declining birthrate, launched a campaign to promote childbirth. One of its measures was "encouraging unmarried mothers."⁵ Although troubled by its own declining birthrate, the Japanese government has never considered advocating out-of-wedlock childbirth. On the contrary, officials are now thinking about curtailing child benefits for single-parent households (mainly mother-headed) due to shrinking finances. If the government is serious about encouraging childbirth, this line of thought is directly op-

⁵ In Singapore, women have a strong tendency to marry men with superior educational careers to their own. As a result, highly educated women tend to remain single. Men who would be suitable spouses are usually married. In the 1980s Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew encouraged these highly educated women to take lovers; women's organizations protested, declaring the policy to be an "enemy of marriage and family."

Table 2 The percentage of never-married in nonmarital cohabitation

Country	year	Age					
		15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44
Japan	1987	0.8	0.8	0.0	0.6		
	1992	0.8	1.1	1.4	1.6		
Denmark	1975	23	29	10	4	5	4
	1981		37	23	11		
France	1975	1	3	2	1	0	1
	1981	1	8	5	2	1	1
	1986		19	11	8	5	5
West Germany	1972		—	—	—	3	—
	1981		—	—	—	12	—
United Kingdom	1976	1	2	3	—	—	—
	1979	4	5	4	2	2	1
	1986-87	—	—	11	6	—	4
Netherlands	1975	1	10				
	1982	2	16	10			
Sweden	1975	14	9	17	8	5	4
	1980	13	32	26	14	8	6
	1981		44	31	14	10	7
Canada	1981	3	15	21	19	16	3
United States	1976		2	1			
	1982	2	5	16	11	3	
	1986-87	—	—	16	17	13	12

posed to the needs of the present time. Basically, the current policy of government and economic circles alike is to encourage reproductive activities within the institutional framework of the family and in principle to leave the burden of reproductive and child-rearing costs with the parents.

4. Family Policies and Their Effects

In many countries a “family policy” implies a population policy. It is totally neglected when births are to be controlled, but when births are encouraged, the family policy becomes a major issue, often in the name of “welfare.” When the decreasing population became an issue in Japan, a birth encouragement policy such as “Angel Plan”⁶ was instituted.

⁶ In this line of policy, the government implemented the parental leave act in 1991 and better financial support for child care facilities.

A family policy, after all, reveals the ways a society chooses to share reproductive costs. Possible measures are to provide (1) preferential tax treatment, (2) child care (family) benefits, (3) childbirth and child care leave, and (4) child care support services (e.g., child care nurses, public child care facilities).

Regarding preferential tax treatment (measure 1), a liberal tax deduction is already given to dependents, in particular, to full-time housewives. Unemployed married women receive preferential treatment in pension as well as health insurance. The Japanese government supports reproductive activities within the conventional family institution with gender-role assignment. In “Japanese-style welfare,” the view of family members as “potential assets” is consistent with also caring for the elderly and the handicapped.

In Japan, child care (family) benefits (measure 2) are nominal. Some local governments whose population is decreasing present a money gift to newlyweds or newborn babies. It has been proved, however, that monetary incentives do not contribute to a rise in the birthrate.

In Germany, the government carries a heavy financial burden for the support of families, with a large portion of its budget allocated to family benefits. Even so, demographers point out that the impact of this policy to raise birthrates is limited. They explain that the target of monetary incentives and the target of policies are inconsistent. The family benefit is given to households with full-time housewives where the potential for having children is traditionally considered to be the greatest; policies to assist the ever-increasing households with working mothers are feeble in comparison.

Some legal steps have been taken to provide childbirth and child care leave (measure 3) in Japan. In 1985, in exchange for enforcement of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, the provisions for women workers in the Labor Standard Act were either revised or eliminated. In lieu of the repeal of indirect maternal protection provisions such as menstruation leave, direct maternal protection was reinforced, for example, by extending maternal leave from 6 weeks to 8 weeks both before and after a child’s birth. The Labor Standard Act also ensures that a mother of an under-12-month-old infant may take one hour off for child care each day.

In 1991 the Child Care Leave Act became law. The bill was approved as a windfall measure driven by the sense of crisis in political and business circles after the “1.57 shock.” Focal points of the deliberative process were (1) whether a 1-year leave after childbirth should be paid or unpaid, and (2) whether this leave should be available to both men and women. Finally, the assertion of the “No work, no pay” principle by the employers associations was agreed to, and the second point was easily accepted without much discussion. Thus, the Child Care Leave Act stipulated that the leave must be taken without pay (later this provision was amended to allow 20 percent of the employee’s basic salary to be paid from Employment

Insurance) and that it was available to both men and women (either one at one time). The reason for so little discussion of the second point was that the politicians and employers were certain that few men would be interested in the benefit even if it was offered to them. They were right. In the first year of enactment, only 14 out of eligible male workers in 47 prefectures went on child care leave. They immediately became local heroes and were taken up by the local media.

The Child Care Leave Act had some problems from the beginning. Even so, it was welcomed by working women, as they were legally permitted to have time to care for their children with job security. However, there always is a gap between an institution and its administration. As a majority of women work in smaller-scale corporations, in real life they cannot enjoy their legal rights easily.

Japan can be proud of its child care support services (measure 4), such as public facilities, which are comparable to those in European countries. Japan's public child care services are the equivalent of those in France and exceed those in Great Britain and Germany. They cannot equal the child care provided in Sweden, however, which is highly advanced in this area. In the United States, which demands the greatest privatization of reproductive costs, working mothers have to find personal solutions to their child care needs. Compared with America, the availability of public child care services in Japan is almost equal to those of socialist societies. Because of the public authorization system, the equipment and management of child care facilities must meet prescribed standards of quality. Fees vary according to parents' income, and parents have easy access to child care services.

According to the enrollment data of small children in Japan, 44 percent of 3-year-olds attend either kindergarten or day-care center, and this rate rises to 89 percent among 4-year-olds. Almost 100 percent of children have preschool education. Thanks to the decreasing number of children, entrance to public kindergartens or day-care centers has become less competitive. As a result, these facilities offer incentives to attract clients. But although enrollment is high, there are some problems in the administration of child care facilities, including shortages of (1) under-1-year-old care, (2) extended hours of service, (3) night-time care, (4) sick child care, (5) temporary care, and (6) after-school care for school-aged children.

The greatest problem has been the shortage of under-1-year-old care. Before the enforcement of the Child Care Leave Act, this posed a dilemma for employed women who wanted to continue working after childbirth. In Tokyo, a municipal office of Shinjuku has had a generous system of child care for children below 1 year old, and those in need moved to this area. This suggests that if a local municipality wants to attract people at reproductive ages, it should provide sufficient child care services for under-1-year-olds and school-aged children. As the cost of caring for children under the age of one is so expensive, supply usually does not meet the needs.

The deficiency in extended hours of service, night-time care, sick child care, temporary care, and after-school care is often attributed to the lack of flexibility in the administration of nursery schools. As most of them are public facilities run by public servants, they do not adjust their hours of service. Consequently, parents must provide their children with a private child care facility after the public facility closes. Even so, mothers can feel secure that their children are being cared for until at least 5 : 00 P.M. as long as their children are of preschool ages. When children begin to go to school, after-school care becomes a serious concern for working mothers. The presence of after-school care services is another factor for working mothers to move their residence.

Child care, in theory, cannot be categorized as a family policy. It cannot even be said to be a child care support policy. In Japan, the number of day-care centers increased as a result of tireless efforts by working women in the 1950s and 1960s under the slogan "Increase day-care centers up to the number of mailing posts." Initially, day-care centers were considered to be "social welfare institutions" for children who lacked maternal care. More precisely, it was originally a labor policy to employ women workers for the growing economy. Day-care facilities were meant for working mothers, not for children. And in reality, the first beneficiaries of this policy were the companies that hired women workers. It was these companies that should have taken responsibility for providing child care as a cost of employing women workers. They benefited from public services by not having to spend the money for child care on their own premises.

From a long-term perspective, it was a right choice to expand public child care facilities. First of all, a certain standard of quality can be maintained through public management of these facilities. Second, women workers have the freedom to leave one job for another without having their children taken as hostages. Many on-site child care facilities have been of relatively poor quality because companies wanted to minimize costs, and reports suggest that some company-sponsored facilities might actually impede the growth of the children in their care.

Historically, Japan began offering public child care services earlier than other industrialized countries. Many family policies were initiated during World War II. The Ministry of Health and Welfare was established in 1938. The Institute of Population Problems, the predecessor of the present National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, was founded in 1940. In the following year, the Principle for Establishing Population Policies was formulated. One goal was to increase the population (on the Japan archipelago) to 100 million by 1960. This goal was achieved in spite of the fact that the government switched its policy of encouraging childbirth before and during the war to one of discouraging childbirth after Japan's defeat in the war.

In 1940 the National Eugenics Law was enacted, and eugenics marriage counsel-

ing centers were set up across the country. In 1942, the marriage registration system was enforced and officials began distributing a Maternal and Child Health Handbook. Thus, almost all the postwar family policies were initiated during the war. Women activists of those days welcomed the reforms, as they found that their long-standing demand for maternity protection was finally recognized as a political issue.

The population and maternity protection policies developed during World War II were based on the concept of “public motherhood.” Family, which was once constructed as the private sphere, was on the way of nationalization, and children were regarded as public property. As such, reproductive activity was placed under public control.

The family and child care policies of postwar Japan were an extension of the wartime reforms. The motherhood that supported these policies was also “public motherhood.” The concept of public motherhood employed for military mobilization was effectively used to encourage women’s participation in the workforce after the war. Compared with other capitalist nations, the family policy of Japan is remarkable in its ability to forge a consensus that reproductive and child care services should be supported by public funds. The ambivalence associated with this policy is noteworthy, for a nationalist concept of public motherhood underlies this apparent generosity.

Moreover, do family policies really affect birthrates? In countries where such policies are being put into practice, their effectiveness is questioned. Sweden, which enjoys the highest birthrate among industrialized countries, asserts that its family policy after the 1970s has led to this positive result. But neighboring Scandinavian countries show birthrates at the same level as Sweden without its liberal family policies. Sweden achieved birthrates exceeding a TFR of 2.1 in the early 1990s. This soon proved to be a calendar effect produced by policy incentives — that is, people who had postponed having children chose to have them at that particular time because of the incentives. Over the long term, however, the trend of declining birthrates was not affected by these incentives.

France is known to maintain a relatively high birthrate, a fact that policymakers attribute to well-advanced child care services and generous family benefits. But Britain’s birthrate has been equal to that of France even though it offers a much lower level of family benefits. Nevertheless, demographers in France stress that but for the current family policies, the country would have been unable to sustain the present birthrate level.

There is, of course, proof to the contrary. A famous illustration is that the birthrate fell in Saar when the administration of this district was transferred from France to Germany because people in Saar could no longer enjoy the generous family benefits provided by the French government. A more recent example is the

rapid fall of birthrates in the former East Germany after reunification, said to be the result of a reduction in various social security benefits offered by the East German government.

It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of family policies. According to the convergence theory in demography, birthrates in industrialized countries converge into the same tendency at a certain width. This is empirically supported,⁷ but it is next to impossible to explain the reasons for this. If so, family policies may prove to have no effect and thus there may be no reason for their existence. Leaving aside the question of each policy's effect, birthrates are commonly recognized to decline in societies where bringing up children is costly and where the environment is unfriendly to mothers and children. Such a phenomenon is occurring not only in Japan but also in all industrialized countries.

5. Conclusion

The dilemma posed by a decreasing child population and an increasing elderly population is the matter of distributional justice of reproductive costs (Ueno, 1990). In other words, which sector of society should bear the cost of the labor of life involved at the beginning and the end of human life (the so-called labor of love). The view that sees a decrease in the child population accompanied by an increase in the elderly population as a problem should be questioned. From a different perspective, this demographic phenomenon can be regarded as only a "pseudo-problem." If birthrates drop as a result of voluntary decision making by couples, a resultant decline in the number of children will not present any problem. Then it is correct to do nothing on the policy level.

However, if the goal of a society with a smaller child population and a larger elderly population is to ensure the security and welfare of all people throughout their lives, then there is much to do on the policy level. All members of the society — men and women alike, whether or not they have children and whether or not they have jobs — should bear the cost of the "labor of love" equally, and that "labor of love" should receive greater social recognition.

⁷ The birthrates in France with liberal family benefits are almost the same as those in Britain with almost no family benefits. Sweden, which is considered to be an advanced welfare state, has had birthrates similar to those of neighboring Scandinavian countries. Furthermore, the birthrates among immigrant communities "converge" at the level of those in host communities in a short time.

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