

Invited paper

Foreseeing future Japanese society

Abstract

This paper tries to foresee the future Japanese society through surveying the long-time span changes after the World War II, with mainly based on the various statistic data. After pointing out three major directions of changes and five periods of the last 70 years, several basic data are presented, including those on population growth and economic growth rate. Then the paper discusses four particular topics, that is, changing household structure, changing life course, cultural homogenization, and “the lost 30 years” to characterize the Japanese responses toward the worldwide tendency of modernization and democratization. The concluding section presents the facing problems of Japanese society and the needed responses to them.

Key words

life style modernization, fluidization of social bond, cultural homogenization

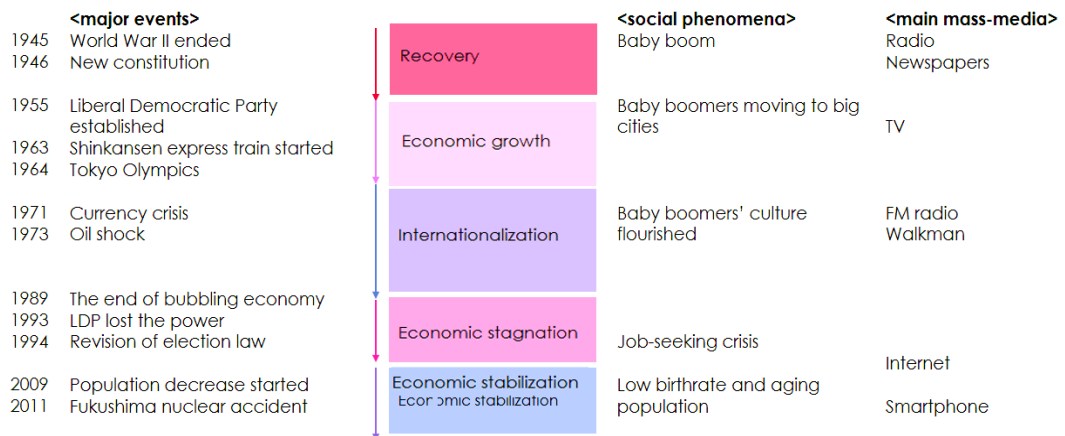
1. Three major directions of changes in the last 70 years

Through the last 70 years after the end of the World War II the Japanese society has changed drastically. We can observe three major directions in it, that is, the modernization of life style, the fluidization of social bond, and the homogenization of cultural trends. The modernization of life style includes Westernization of life style, urbanization and electrification of house utensils. The fluidization of social bond means the weakening solidarity of family, community and company. The homogenization of cultural trends in national level has been promoted by the increasing inter-local migration for pursuing higher education and job, rapidly spreading electrified house utensils, and advancing national broadcasting system (radio & TV). These trends are not specifically Japanese but rather universally found in many countries, but the changing pace in Japan has been outstanding.

2. Five periods of the last 70 years in Japan

The changing process of the last 70 years in Japan can be grasped obviously if we divide the term into five periods. Each period could be characterized as: (1) the recovery phase from the defeat in the World War II (1945-1955), (2) the catching up phase of the developed countries (1955-1973), (3) the joining phase into the developed countries (1973-1990), (4) the adjustment phase of bubbling economy into normal one (1990- 1997), and (5) the economic stabilization phase and the coming of aging society (1997-) [Fig. 1].

Fig. 1 Five phases of 70 years' change



The turning points of these phases were marked by several events: the establishment of the Liberal Democratic Party in 1955, the international currency crisis in 1971 and the oil shock caused by the fourth Middle East War in 1973, the Plaza Accord on the currency rate of the major developed countries in 1985 which ignited the bubbling economy in Japan, and the Asian Currency Crisis in 1997. The Liberal Democratic Party took the dominance in the parliament and seized the prime minister position for 38 years since its establishment in 1955. The international currency crisis and the oil shock in the early 70's changed the Japanese economic orientation from producing imitating products to the quest for high-quality products, The Plaza Accord strengthened Japanese Yen toward US Dollar which caused the low interest rate in Japan and over-investment on land and stock market called "bubbling economy" afterward. The strong Japanese Yen brought about the overseas extension of many Japanese companies. Economic recession after the collapse of bubbling economy pushed the restructuring labor system with heavily relying on part-time job.

The first phase of recovery quickly ended, partly owing to special procurement boom during the Korean War (1950-53). During this period the economic performance was quickly recovered to the level before the World War II. The democratic reform was led by the General Headquarters of Allied Forces, including the enactment of new constitution and land reform. In the first half of this period took place the post-war baby boom.

The second phase was characterized by the steady economic growth under the stable political hegemony of the Liberal Democratic Party. This growth resulted in gaining economic power capable of competing with the developed countries, although the export strategy of Japanese products in this period was criticized as flooding the cheap and easily broken products in the world market. The baby boomers who moved from the countryside to the industrial centers sustained the expanding economy.

The third phase gave Japan a particular character in the world market with a unique product such as Walkman and instant noodle. New pop culture such as cartoon and animation movies flourished and many of them were created and enjoyed by the baby boomers. The presence of Japan in the international community was further strengthened by the Plaza Accord which allowed to rise the currency rate of Japanese Yen toward US Dollar. The book titled Japan as Number One written by an American sociologist became best-seller and people invested money into land and stock market without hesitation. The strong Yen pushed the Japanese companies to build joint venture to produce products in targeted countries to overcome the weakening export power by the high currency rate of Yen.

The sudden and drastic drop of stocks in 1990 ended up the bubbling economy and led to a long economic stagnation. The adjustment phase of bubbling economy into normal one began in 1990 and ended up in 1997 hit by the Asian Currency Crisis, with the voluntary closure of one of the biggest financial securities firms, Yamaichi Shoken. During this period several restructuring trials were undertaken such as the introduction of the single-seat electoral district system which caused the increase of power of party and party leaders.

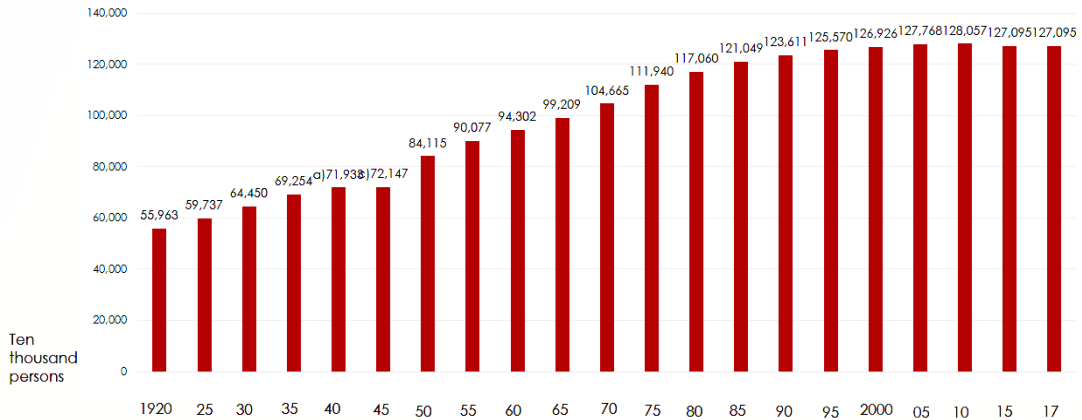
Then came the economically stable phase that continued until the disastrous era of Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. In this phase, Japanese population began to decrease from 2009. While the countryside areas suffered from loss of young generation, the political and economic concentration to the metropolis has more and more proceeded. The Covid-19 pandemic has presented the facing problems of Japan today more clearly, such as the population unbalance between older and younger generations and the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

3. Basic changes in the last 70 years

Japanese population showed the steady growth between 1920-1980, and it became twice during these years [Fig. 2].

Population growth is caused by the change of birth and mortality rate. According to the Japanese government statistic data source, the birth rate in Japan was high (30~35 babies per 1,000 persons) since 1899 until 1950, then rapidly decreased to be less than a half in 1960 (15~20 per 1,000), maintained the rate till 1972, then dropped again to be less than 10 per 1,000 persons in 1990 and is still decreasing. The mortality rate shows the similar curve, but continued to be lower than the birth rate until 2008 when the population decrease started. The gap between the birth rate and mortality rate caused the steady population growth of modern Japan in the first half of the last 70 years, and contributed the steady increase of work-force and consumers.

Fig.2 Population growth

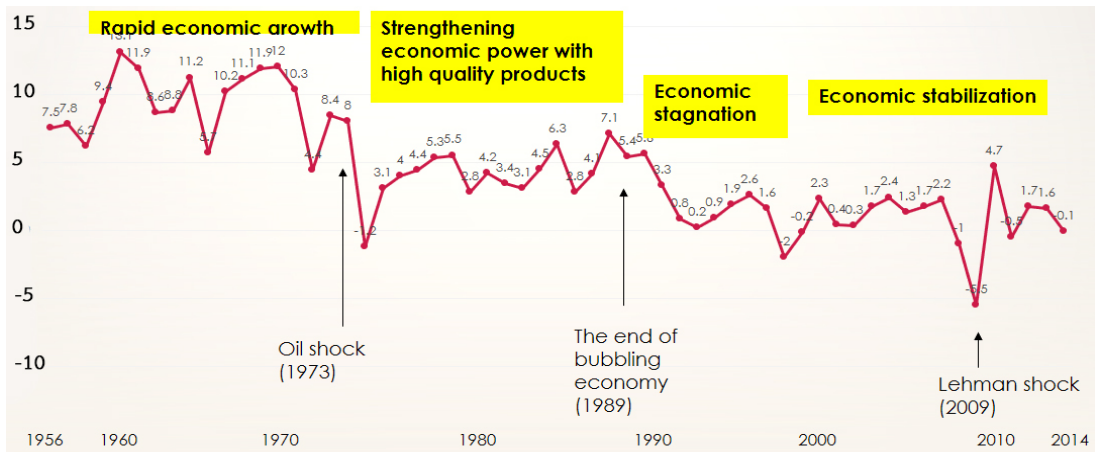


In political domain, we can find three major phases, that is, the fundamental reform for democratizing Japan under the reign of the Allied Forces (1945 -1952), the Liberal Democratic Party’s dominance for 38 years since 1955, and politically unstable governance since the introduction of the single-seat electoral district system in 1994. The reform led by the Allied Forces set up the fundamental structure for democratizing Japan. The new constitution (1946) declared the people’s sovereignty and placed the Emperor in the symbolic status. It granted the right of election for women firstly realized in the general election in 1946. The Labor Union Low (1946) liberated worker’s union. The land reform (1946) was successfully carried out, and resulted that tenanted farm decreased from 54% to 14% and tenants from 28% to 8%. Local Autonomy Law (1947) realized the general election of prefectural governors. Education Law (1947) prescribed primary and junior high school as compulsory education (total 9 years). The 38 years’ reign by the Liberal Democratic Party sustained the steady economic growth. The introduction of the single-seat electoral district system contributed to realize the change of the dominant party in parliament.

When we see the economic growth rate graph we can observe three phases again, that is, the high pace growth (1956 -1973), the moderate growth (1974 -1990), and the very low growth (1991-) [Fig. 3].

Industrial structure has drastically changed through the last 70 years. The agricultural sector occupied the highest number of workforce until 1950, then the number constantly decreased. The industrial sector shows the increase of workforce from 1950 to 1970 along with the economic growth but stabilized after then. The sales and service sector shows the high-pace increase of the number of workforce since 1950 until now.

Fig. 3 Economic growth rate



4. Changing household structure

The drastic change of life style after the World War II brought about the change of the ideal as well as actual household building, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIPSSR)'s data shows that average age of first marriage rose from around 26 for male and 23 for female in 1945 to 27 for male and 25 for female in 1955, then kept that level until 1975, and after that the age began to rise up to 32 for male and 29 for female in 2005, partly because of the prolonged education.

Giving birth pattern has also changed. According to Japanese government data, in 1947 when baby boom was on its peak, the birth rate was higher than the following years among all mothers of different ages. The highest was at the age of 25-29, but the mothers of 30-39 years old also showed the high rate of giving birth. The statistic figures in 1960 and 1970 display a high peak at the age of 25-29 and sudden decline at the age of 30-35 which means the concentration of giving birth at twenties. The figure in 1990 shows the more gradual curve although the number of children was smaller than those in 1960 and 1975. The figures after 2000 indicate the peak's shift from 25-29 to 30-35.

The unmarried men and women also have increased. The government data show that in 1970 the unmarried men and women aged more than 30 years old were less than 10 %, while in 2005 the rate increased in the whole age grade, and the unmarried men of 35-39 years old counts 30%. NIPSSR 's data show that marriage rate suddenly declined from 1972 to 1977, and then was stabilized around 6 per 1,000 persons, while divorce rate has gradually increased since 1966 though the rate is still low.

The favored process of spouse finding also has changed. According to the data from NIPSSR, arranged marriage declined after the World War II while love match increased to reach

to almost 90 % in around 2000. The cross point of these two curves was in around 1965 when baby boomer began to marry. Most of arranged marriage until the war period was the one in which the final decision was in the hands of the brides' parents, while after the war the brides gradually gained the right to agree or deny.

The number of children a mother would give birth influences household composition. Atoh (1982) found that those who were born before 1915 had more than four children on average. These mothers are considered to begin to give birth before the war period. Those who were born after 1921, on the contrary, had just a little bit more than two children on average. Most of these mothers must have begun to give birth after the war. Among those who were born between 1928-1947, having two children occupies 50 %. This indicates that a family with two children became a household standard after the war until 1972 after which the birth rate began to decrease further.

Not only the number of children of a family but also the household composition has been changing after the World War II. The typical Japanese *ie* (household) is a stem family composed of three generations including grandfather and grandmother, father and mother, and children. The number of this household type has not been decreasing significantly. The enormously increasing type is nuclear family household, due to the increase of younger generation who moved to industrial cities to have their own households separating from the parents' home in countryside. Parent's households in countryside also tend to become nuclear family without children because the younger generation's moving out. Then, if one of an old couple die, the household become a single type containing only one person. This type includes that of a lonely old man or woman left behind by his or her spouses and children, as well as bachelors living alone. This type has been enormously increasing, too.

The birth rate began to decline from 1973 and the population decrease started from 2008. While the traditional stem family households still remain, those of old couple and of a lonely single person has been increasing not only in countryside but also in and around big cities. The aging society with decreasing younger generation is one of the most serious problems to be responded.

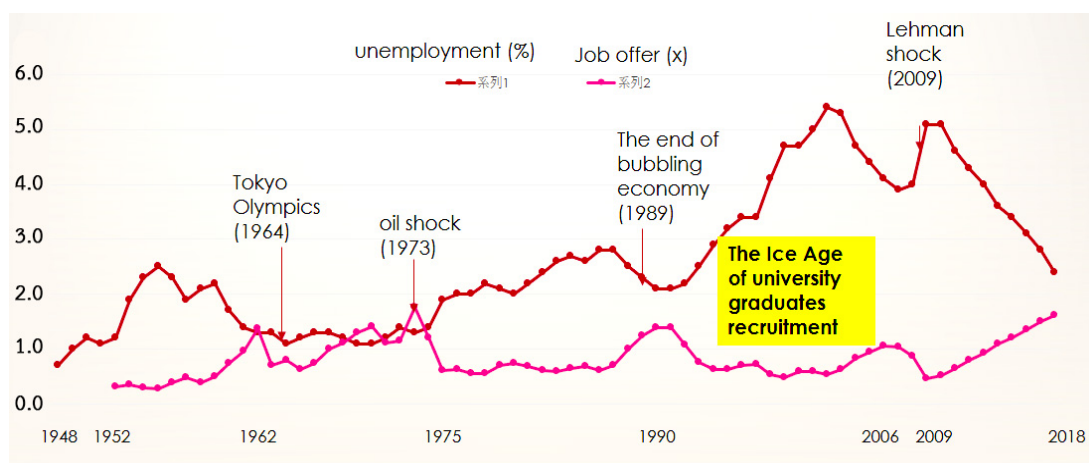
5. Changing life course

The life expectancy of the Japanese people has increased dramatically after the War. Japanese government statistic data show that starting from 50 years in 1947, it quickly rose to 65 in 1965, and surpassed 70 in 1975 and 80 in 2015, Men and women working in industrial section enjoy, or have to fill, the long period after retirement from companies and offices. How to use such period is another serious question in Japan today.

In line with the increase of life expectancy, the needed term for education has been prolonged. The Education Law in 1947 prescribed 9 years compulsory education, and the advancing industry required more higher education. The government data shows that the advancement ratio to senior high school increased from less than 50 % for men and less than 40 % for women in 1950 to more than 90 % in 1975 for both men and women. Women’s desire to graduate a senior high school reached the same height with men at 1960. The university entrant ratio among 18-years old cohort rose from 12 % for men and 2 % for women in 1960 to 40% for men and 12 % for women in 1975, then stabilized until 1990, and increased again up to 50 % for men and 36 % for women in 2005. The prolonged education term may be one of the reasons of the delay of first-marriage age. For the women who advanced to higher education, pursuing professional career became an option for their life.

The future life course of the younger generation depends on the job offer condition of the time. Fig. 4 presents the change of the job offer ratio and the unemployment rate after the World War II. During the restructuring period of Japanese economy in which the labor disputes frequently took place for wage hike and against dismissal, the unemployment rate was high while the job offer ratio was low. During the economic growth period (1955-73) the job offer ratio maintained high rate to absorb the young labor force coming from countryside. A decade after the end of bubbling economy (1990-2000) experienced a very severe job offer opportunity for university graduates, and many of them had difficulty to obtain permanent job. After 2000 the condition became improving.

Fig. 4 Unemployment rate and job offer ratio



While the women’s aspiration for higher education has increased, they still have difficulty to maintain permanent job after marriage and giving birth. The government data shows that while the un-regular staffs ratio for men of 35~54 years old was under 10 % in 2000s, that for

women of 25~34 years old was around 40 % and that for 35~54 years old rose to 55 %. Considering the poor support system of health and pension assurance by private companies for un-regular staffs, many of Japanese female workers are in a very vulnerable condition.

Kenji Hashimoto, a Japanese sociologist, presents a very interesting data concerning the Japanese social stratification based on the national survey of Social Stratification and social Mobility (SSM survey)[Hashimoto 2013: 270]. He divided the sample households into new middle class and worker's class, and calculated the household income based on the wife's job condition [Fig. 5]. In all cases (full-time working wife, part-time working wife, and housewife) the income of the new middle class household fairly surpasses that of worker's class household. The new middle class wives who have full-time job show quite high ratio of higher education (69.8%), and the other wives of the same class also show higher ratio than those of worker's class. The worker's class households with part-time working wives and housewives show significant poverty rate. High income of the new middle class assures the chance to give higher education to their children. Thus the economic gap between the new middle class and the worker's class tends to be fixed.

Fig. 5 Economic Condition base on household types (Hashimoto 2013)

wife's employment	New middle class household			Worker's class household		
	full-time	part-time	housewife	full-time	part-time	housewife
percentage	7.7	10.9	19.2	9.0	22.2	20.4
higher education ratio	69.8	28.7	39.6	13.4	11.2	15.0
husband's income*	624.0	656.4	664.1	393.4	398.2	413.0
wife's income*	382.1	100.8	19.9	227.6	104.4	22.9
total income*	1071.6	821.7	723.2	681.3	568.3	488.5
poverty rate**	0.0	1.1	3.6	4.3	10.4	22.9
wealth rate***	29.2	13.0	9.6	1.4	1.6	2.8

* ten thousand yen
 ** yearly income under 1,606,000 yen (half of the average yearly income in 2002: 3,212,000 yen)
 *** yearly income more than 6,424,000 yen (twice of the average yearly income in 2002: 3,212,000 yen)

6. Cultural homogenization

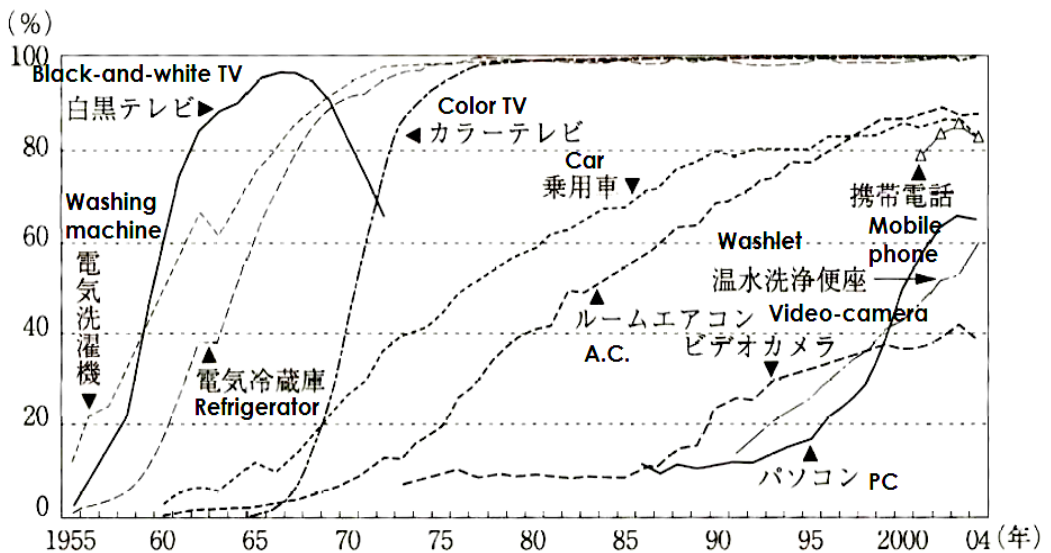
Through the continual change during last 70 years the national level cultural homogenization has proceeded. The homogenization was mainly caused by the increasing inter-local migration of younger generation for pursuing higher education and job, rapidly spreading electrified house utensils, and advancing national broadcasting system.

During the economic growth (1955-1975) a huge number of labor force including new graduates from junior high school and off-season peasants came from countryside to big cities such as Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya to sustain the increasing construction work and industrial

production. It was repeated at the bubbling economy period in smaller scale, but this time only Tokyo area absorbed such migrants.

In line with the steady economic growth, the new electronic home utensils rapidly spread into Japanese households to contribute to homogenize family life style [Fig. 6]. The Japanese families with increasing income were very eager to purchase new durable consumer goods to realize modern westernized family life, and such demand sustained the enduring economic growth.

Fig. 6 The spread of enduring consumer goods



Since the end of the World War II the new tools of mass media entered the field one after another. Until the post-war recovery period the main tools of mass media were newspaper and radio. Along with the economic growth television quickly spread to take over the role of radio and became the main tool of information and entertainment. In 1969 started FM radio broadcasting to enrich a music entertainment. In 1990s started to spread personal computer and internet and began to replace newspaper and television as information tool. The spread of smartphone is quite rapid and has caused the fundamental change not only in communication and access to information but also in style of entertainment.

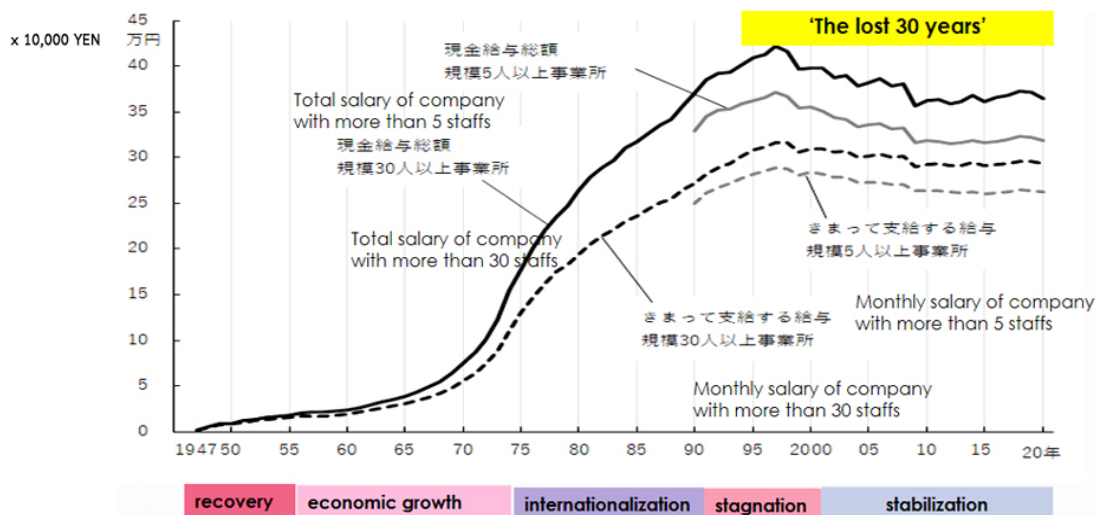
The rapid change of main tool for information obtaining caused the generation gap of cultural style. The government statistic data in 2016 shows that those who are more than 50 years old still rely on TV as major news source, while the younger generations obtain information mostly from internet. During the last 70 years changes the local cultural differences has diminished, although the generational cultural differences seem to appear.

7. “The Lost 30 years”

The sudden and drastic fall of stock price took place in 1989-1990, and the following decade can be seen as the closing phase of the Japanese rapid economic growth since 1955. During this period a series of natural disaster such as Mt. Unzen-dake eruption (1990, 1991) and Hanshin-Awaji great earthquake (1994) struck Japan physically as well as mentally. And finally in 1997 one of the biggest financial securities firms, Yamaichi Shoken, decided to choose voluntary closure, symbolizing the cleanup process of bubbling economy. After entering the 21st century Japanese economy gradually showed the recovering sign, although the increasing pace was not stable and sometimes hit by worldly crises such as Lehman shock (2009) and Covid-19 pandemic (2019~) and also by natural disaster such as Tohoku great earthquake (2011).

During these 30 years the average salary has remained stable [Fig. 7]. Consumer price also shows a similar stable level [Fig. 8]. Japanese mass-media call these 30 years as “the lost 30 years”, reminding the loss of economic glory in 1980s.

Fig. 7 The transition of average salary



This economic stagnation was initiated by the Plaza Accord in 1985 which asked the Japanese government to allow the rise of the currency value of Japanese Yen toward US Dollar. After that the rate of yen toward US\$ fell drastically [Fig. 9]. The strengthened Yen made export of Japanese products difficult. To such situation the Japanese companies responded through overseas extension, that is, by setting up joint venture in the targeted countries to produce products there. The strong Yen pushed such strategy.

Fig. 8 The transition of US\$-Yen exchange rate

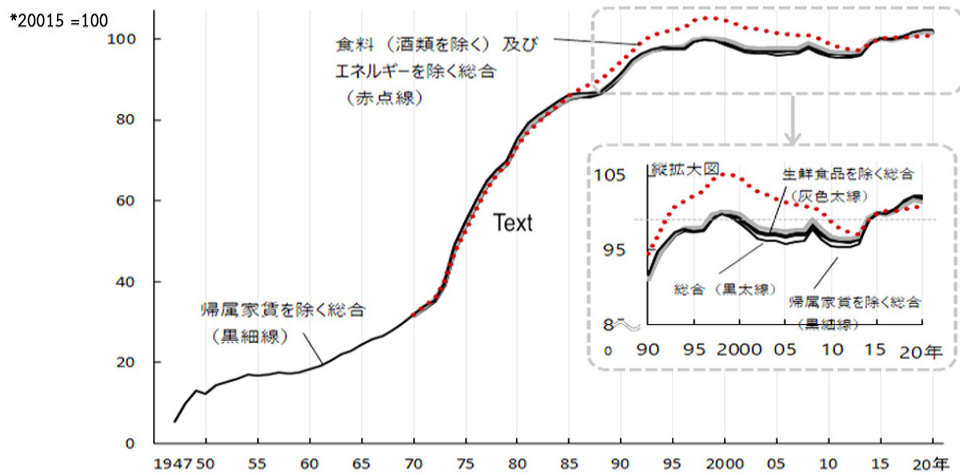
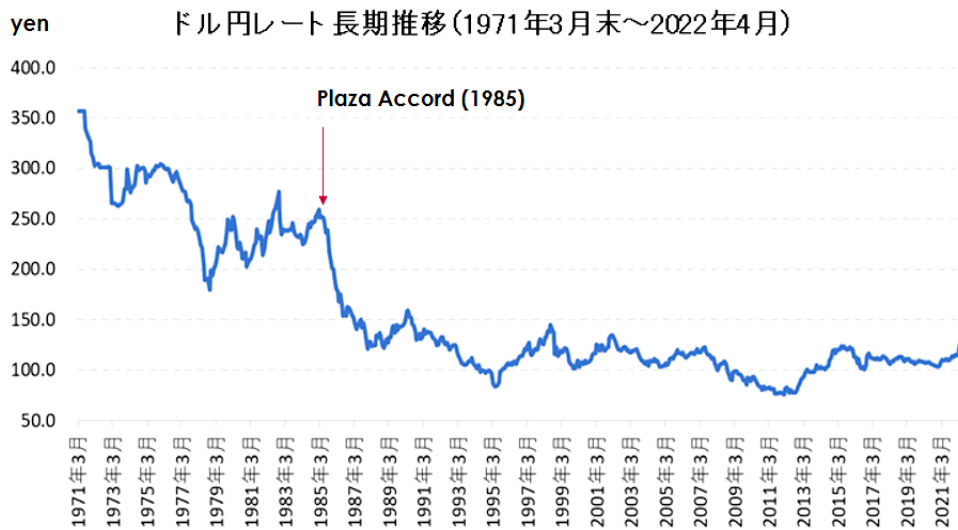


Fig. 9 The transition of consumer price



The strong Yen also invited people to invest money into land and stock market, which caused over-investment called “bubbling economy” afterward. Then the stock price suddenly dropped in 1989 and started the economic stagnation.

The stagnation accelerated the Japanese companies’ overseas extension to find the low-wage labor countries to produce low-cost products to be imported into Japan. Another Japanese companies’ strategy to suppress the producing cost was to rely on the part-time workers. Thus came the period of economic stabilization with not rising salary and not rising consumer price.

The stable condition of average salary and consumer price seem to indicate the relatively satisfying living condition of the Japanese people. In this seemingly affluent society, however,

the division between the rich and the poor tends to be fixed and deepened, low-wage labors are avoided by the Japanese and are pushed onto foreign workers, and the stable economic condition discourage the challenging trial for innovation.

8. Foreseeing future Japanese society

Now Japanese people live in technologically advanced society but grows more and more aging with decreasing child birth. They have to find sustainable social system. Family life style has also changed drastically, and the family bond seems to weaken and be replaced by other kinds of social bonds. They have to search a proper place of family in future society. Community itself is concerned to disappear in countryside because of the decrease of residents. They have to find a proper division of role between city and countryside, and also to reconsider the merits and demerits of the concentration of politics and economy in metropolitan area. The social gap between the rich and the poor has become more conspicuous and more fixed than before. The policies to bridge the gap are required. Because of the development of mass media, the Japanese way of thought has become homogenized, while the rapid spread of internet has caused the information gap between older and younger generations. They have to reconsider the meaning and the importance of cultural diversity.

All of these tasks depend on the possibility to draw a promising future life, especially for younger generation. To make them plan their future life more freely, older generation has to give them more chance and support for trying creative innovation.



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Statistic data source in the figures

Fig. 2, 3, 4, 6: Japanese government statistic data source

Fig. 7, 8: The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training Internet Homepage

Fig. 9: Financial Star Internet Homepage

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