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More "Parasite Singles", Fewer Children, and More Senior Citizens in Japan

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Statistics Bureau.

1 Introduction

The aging of the Japanese population has advanced at unprecedented speed for the last fifty years. Moreover, the total fertility rate has been decreasing even after it dropped below 2.1 during 1970's, the level necessary for replacing the population. Thus, Japanese society could be called a society of "decreasing birth rate and aging population". The life expectancy at birth has improved not only because of the decrease in the death rate among the aged but also among babies and infants. These phenomena transformed the Japanese population pattern from a "many births and many deaths" type to a "few births and few deaths" one. This paper reports the current status of the decreasing birth rate and the aging population in Japan and points out possible contributing factors such as the increase in "parasite singles" (young unmarried youths living together with and being dependent on their parents) so that we can consider how to cope with the society with impending decrease in population.

2 Current Status of the Japanese Population

The 2000 Population Census reports that the population of Japan is 126,930,000 persons. According to the report, "Population Projections for Japan," made by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in January 2002, the population will reach a peak of 127,740,000 persons in 2006 and then start decreasing to 126,270,000 persons in 2015.

If we look at the population by three age groups as shown in Table 1 below, we see that the proportion of the 0-14 year age group keeps decreasing. On the other hand, that of the age group of 65-year and above is increasing. By 2040, it is estimated that about one third of the total population will be 65 years old and above.

Table 1 Change in Population by Age Group and Rate of Increase¹⁾
(1950-2015)

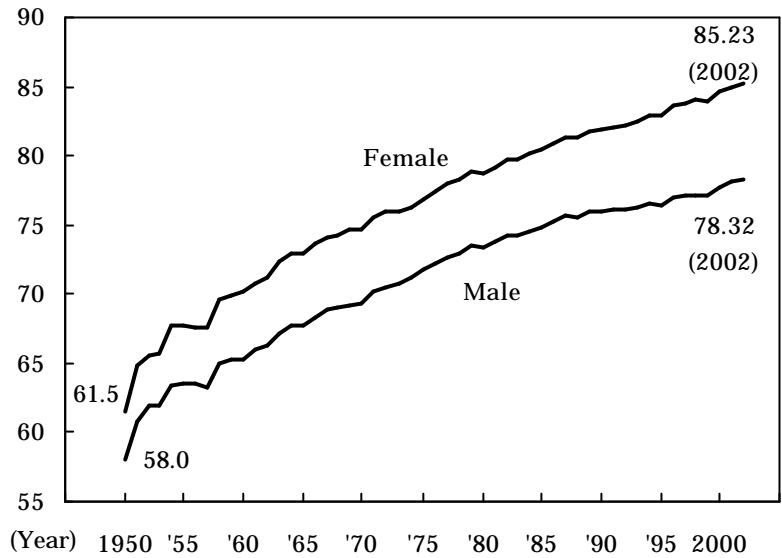
Year	Population (1,000)	Composition by age (%)			Increase over 5 years			
		0-14	15-64	65+	Number (1,000)		Rate (%)	
						65 year+		65 year+
1950	84,115	35.4	59.6	4.9	-	-	-	-
1955	90,077	33.4	61.2	5.3	5,962	631	7.1	15.2
1960	94,302	30.2	64.1	5.7	4,225	612	4.7	12.8
1965	99,209	25.7	68.0	6.3	4,908	838	5.2	15.5
1970	104,665	24.0	68.9	7.1	5,456	1,158	5.5	18.6
1975	111,940	24.3	67.7	7.9	7,274	1,472	7.0	19.9
1980	117,060	23.5	67.3	9.1	5,121	1,782	4.6	20.1
1985	121,049	21.5	68.2	10.3	3,989	1,821	3.4	17.1
1990	123,611	18.2	69.5	12.0	2,562	2,426	2.1	19.5
1995	125,570	15.9	69.4	14.5	1,959	3,366	1.6	22.6
2000	126,926	14.6	67.9	17.3	1,356	3,744	1.1	20.5
2005	127,708	13.9	66.2	19.9	782	3,386	0.6	15.4
2010	127,473	13.4	64.1	22.5	-235	3,343	-0.2	13.2
2015	126,266	12.8	61.2	26.0	-1,207	4,038	-0.9	14.1

1) Population Census; Same hereafter is not mentioned otherwise.

Source: From 2005 on wards, "Population Projections for Japan (January, 2002)" by National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.

One of the reasons for the decrease in the death rate in the population of 65-year and above is the improvement of medical technology and care. The life expectancy at birth has been increasing since the World War and Japan has now the world's longest life expectancy (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Life Expectancy at birth by Sex
(1950-2002)



Source: "Life Table" and "Abridged Life Table" by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

The standardized birth and death rates, which are calculated while adjusting for the change in the age composition of the population, continue to decrease. Since 1975, the total fertility rate which shows how many children a woman bears in her lifetime has remained below 2.1, the rate necessary for replacing the population, and is still decreasing. Nevertheless, the total population has been increasing by compensating the decrease in the younger population with the increase in the aged population, but it will switch to a decreasing trend with a 30-year lag (Table 2).

Table 2 Change in Standardized Vital Statistics Rate and Total Fertility Rate (1950-2000)

Year ¹⁾	Standardized vital statistics rate ²⁾ (‰)			Total fertility rate ³⁾
	Birth	Death	Natural increase	
1950	25.5	11.0	14.5	3.65
1955	16.9	7.7	9.2	2.37
1960	14.7	7.0	7.7	2.00
1965	15.7	6.0	9.8	2.14
1970	15.3	5.2	10.1	2.13
1975	14.3	4.2	10.1	1.91
1980	12.8	3.6	9.2	1.75
1985	12.5	3.1	9.5	1.76
1990	10.7	2.7	8.0	1.54
1995	9.9	2.6	7.3	1.42
2000	9.5	2.4	7.2	1.36

1) For 1950-1970, excludes Okinawa prefecture.

2) Calculated using the age composition of population for 1930 when the structure of the population was closest to that of the stable population.

3) Sum of age-specific birth rates of 15-49 year females.

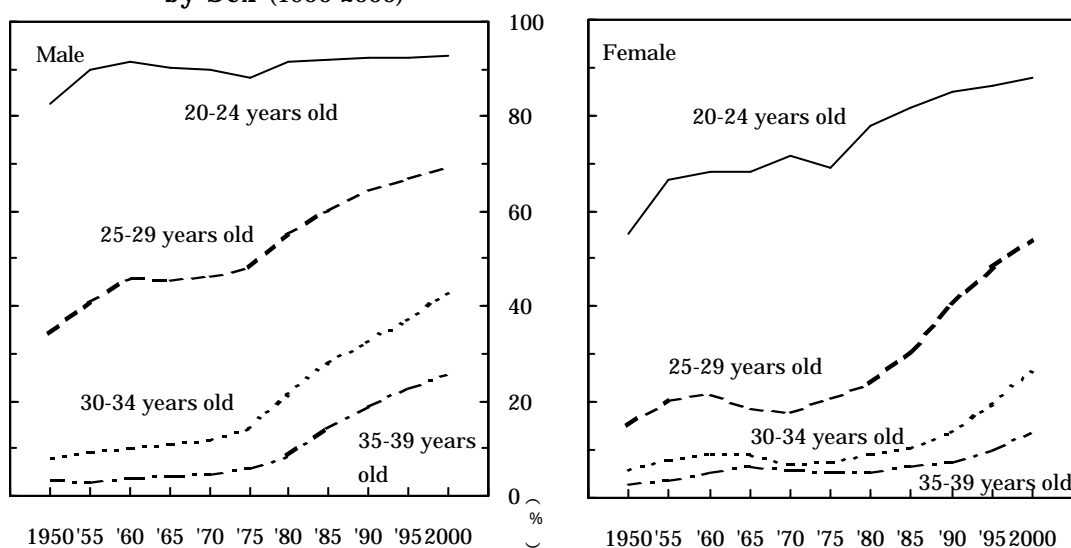
Source: "Latest Demographic Statistics 2003" by National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.

3 Increase in the Proportion of Unmarried Persons

In Japan, the proportion of births given by unmarried women is small, below 2%, and the attitude that marriage should precede childbirth is prevailing. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss why the number of youths who are not married is increasing in order to delve into the problem of the low birth rate.

Figure 2 shows the change in the proportion of unmarried persons by 5-year age group. It is clear that the proportion has gone up, especially among the 25-34 year age groups, which are said to be the most marriageable age groups in Japan.

Figure 2 Change in the Proportion of Unmarried Persons, 20-39 Years Old, by Sex (1950-2000)



The increase in the proportion of unmarried persons is attributable to the increase in never married persons and late married persons. In Japan, the mean age of the first marriage is rising for both sexes, that is, the late-marriage practice is advancing. For males, the proportion of unmarried persons at the age of 50 (regarded as the "proportion of lifetime unmarried persons") exceeds 10%, that is, the non-marriage practice is increasing (Table 3).

Table 3 Proportion of Lifetime Unmarried Persons and Mean Age of First Marriage by Sex (1950-2000)

Year	Male		Female	
	Lifetime unmarried rate ¹⁾ (%)	Mean age of first marriage (year)	Lifetime unmarried rate ¹⁾ (%)	Mean age of first marriage (year)
1950	1.46	25.9	1.35	23.0
1955	1.18	26.6	1.46	23.8
1960	1.26	27.2	1.87	24.4
1965	1.50	27.2	2.52	24.5
1970	1.70	26.9	3.33	24.2
1975	2.12	27.0	4.32	24.7
1980	2.54	27.8	4.58	25.2
1985	3.82	28.2	4.24	25.5
1990	5.38	28.4	4.28	25.9
1995	8.69	28.5	5.15	26.3
2000	12.96	28.8	5.71	27.0

1) Proportion of unmarried persons at the age of 50. It is obtained by taking the average of the proportions for 49 year olds and 50 year olds (for 45-49 year age group and for 50-54 year age group prior to 1975).

Source: Mean age of first marriage; "Vital Statistics" by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

4 Reasons for the Increase in Never- and Late-Marriage

Various factors could be pointed out for this phenomenon. This paper describes three of them.

(1) Effect of women's higher education on the timing of marriage

In the old days in Japan, the prevailing practice was "men in workplaces and women at home". In such male dominated society, most women were educated only up to the junior college level. But in the last two decades, more women entered the labour market, and the proportion of women who went to college/university or postgraduate school increased greatly, that is to say women's educational level went up (Table 4).

Table 4 Population of Females 15 Years Old and Above, by Education (1980-2000)

Education	Population (1,000)			Percent distribution (%)		
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000
Total females ¹⁾	46,040	51,842	55,721	100.0	100.0	100.0
Graduate from school ¹⁾	42,031	46,870	51,437	91.3	90.4	92.3
(a)	17,692	15,615	13,116	38.4	30.1	23.5
(b)	18,609	22,147	23,993	40.4	42.7	43.1
(c)	3,385	6,030	8,643	7.4	11.6	15.5
(d)	1,304	2,329	3,862	2.8	4.5	6.9
Attending school	3,791	4,825	4,182	8.2	9.3	7.5
Never attended school	218	147	103	0.5	0.3	0.2

1) Includes "Type of last school completed not reported".

(a) Elementary school, junior high school or high elementary school(old)

(b) Senior high school or middle school(old)

(c) Junior college or higher professional school

(d) College, university or graduate course

Table 5 shows the proportion of unmarried persons, 15-49 years old, by sex and the highest education attained. Up through the 25-29 year age group, the higher the education level the higher the proportion of unmarried persons, both for men and women. This trend continues for women to higher age groups while, for men, the trend reverses: the higher the education, the lower the proportion of unmarried person. Hence, for women, the higher education level increased the proportion of unmarried persons, possibly resulting in late marriage.

Table 5 Proportion of Unmarried Persons, 15-49 Years Old, by Sex and Highest Education Attained (2000) (%)

Age (five-year groups)	Male			Female		
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)
15-49 total	43.9	49.7	36.9	27.0	37.1	40.6
15-19	98.2	-	-	96.0	-	-
20-24	89.3	92.2	96.3	79.9	90.7	95.6
25-29	64.4	67.6	75.5	45.1	56.5	69.3
30-34	41.7	41.6	40.0	22.6	27.1	33.2
35-39	26.8	24.9	22.2	11.9	14.1	18.1
40-44	19.6	16.4	13.4	7.2	8.6	11.4
45-49	14.4	11.6	9.3	5.1	6.8	9.2

(a) Senior high school or middle school(old)

(b) Junior college or higher professional school

(c) College, university or graduate course

(2) Increase of "parasite singles"

Recently in Japan, there are an increasing number of youths who are said to be "parasitic" on their parent(s), and they are causing a social problem. They are called "parasite singles" because "they are single persons who enjoy their life styles depending on their parents' housework and resources". It is said that the increase in such youths has resulted in a measurable increase in non-marriage and late-marriage proportions. (Note 1)

To investigate the status of the "parasite singles", let us look at the population data by relationship to the head of household obtained from the 2000 Population Census. The population of "children" or "grandchildren" consists of 40,890,000 persons (21,780,000 males and 19,110,000 females), of which the unmarried are 38,060,000 persons. In the 20-39 year age group, 11,990,000 persons (34.1%) out of the total of 35,100,000 persons are unmarried persons who live with their parent(s) (or grandparent(s)). They belong to the so called "parasite singles". (Note 2)

This means that about one third of the 20-39 year age group population are "parasitic" on their parents. Since the total population of Japan is 126,930,000 persons, it also means that about one tenth of the people residing in Japan are "parasite singles". By age groups, the "parasite singles" proportion exceeds 60% in the 20-24 year age group for both sexes. In the 30-34 year age group, about one fourth of males and one sixth of females are "parasite singles".

"Parasite singles" have been steadily increasing since 1980. In number, they increased 1.6 times from 7,510,000 persons in 1980 to 11,990,000 persons in 2000. By sex, males increased 1.5 times from 4,220,000 persons in 1980 to 6,350,000 persons in 2000, and females increased 1.7 times from 3,300,000 persons in 1980 to 5,640,000 persons in 2000. By age groups, the increase in "parasite singles" is larger for higher age groups for both sexes: about 3.2 times for the 35-39 year age group of females, and about 4.4 times for the 35-39 year age group of males.

As for the "parasite singles" proportion, it increased by 10 percent points in the 25-34 year age group, and by over 8 percent point in the 35-39 year age group. This means that the number of youths who do not choose to marry but choose to live with their parents has been steadily increasing these twenty years (Table 6).

"Parasite singles" are those youths "who do not marry", and at the same time, "who do not feel the need to marry" under parents' protection. While the increase in parasite singles symbolizes Japan's prosperity through economic development, it has also brought about the increase in never married or late married youths, contributing greatly to the declining birth rate.

Note 1: The "parasite singles" are generally defined as "those unmarried men or women 20-34 years old who live with their parent(s)" regardless of what they are engaged in: studying at college, working, etc.

Note 2: In the Population Census, a household is defined as a group of persons "who share their house and livelihood". Therefore, a household member is regarded as living together with his/her parent(s) if his/her relationship to the head of household is "child" or "grandchild", and hence "children" or "grandchildren" who are unmarried and 20-39 years old could be expediently treated as "parasite singles". Note that the age scope of "parasite singles" has been expanded to include the 35-39 year age group in this paper, considering the fact that the phenomenon of never married and late married persons is expanding to the older age group.

Table 6 Number and Proportion of Parasite Singles by Sex, Age, and Year: 20-39 Years Old (1980-2000)

Sex and age	Number ¹⁾ (1,000)					Proportion ²⁾ (%)				
	1980 ³⁾	1985 ³⁾	1990	1995	2000	1980 ³⁾	1985 ³⁾	1990	1995	2000
Both sexes										
20-39 total	7,513	8,507	9,791	11,634	11,986	20.4	23.8	29.1	33.6	34.1
20-24	4,329	4,875	5,467	6,297	5,285	55.2	59.4	62.1	63.6	62.8
25-29	2,146	2,260	2,747	3,324	4,028	23.7	28.9	34.0	37.8	41.1
30-34	815	915	1,032	1,364	1,806	7.6	10.1	13.3	16.8	20.6
35-39	223	457	544	651	867	2.4	4.3	6.0	8.3	10.7
Male										
20-39 total	4,216	4,720	5,244	6,139	6,350	22.8	26.1	30.9	35.0	35.7
20-24	2,139	2,377	2,621	3,076	2,618	54.0	57.1	58.7	61.0	60.8
25-29	1,407	1,403	1,552	1,780	2,134	30.9	35.5	38.1	40.0	43.0
30-34	547	648	697	847	1,057	10.1	14.2	17.8	20.6	23.8
35-39	122	292	374	435	542	2.7	5.4	8.3	11.0	13.2
Female										
20-39 total	3,297	3,788	4,547	5,495	5,636	18.0	21.3	27.3	32.2	32.6
20-24	2,190	2,498	2,846	3,220	2,667	56.4	61.9	65.7	66.3	64.8
25-29	739	857	1,195	1,543	1,894	16.4	22.1	29.9	35.6	39.3
30-34	268	268	335	516	750	5.0	6.0	8.7	12.9	17.3
35-39	100	165	170	215	324	2.2	3.1	3.8	5.6	8.1

1) Unmarried persons 20-39 year old whose relationship to the head of household is "Child(ren)" or "Grandchild(ren)".

2) Proportion = Number of Parasite Singles / Population

3) Based on the 20% sample tabulation.

(3) Change in the attitude towards marriage

Another factor affecting the increase in never married or late married persons at the marriageable age and the increase in the proportion of unmarried persons is the change in unmarried persons' attitude towards marriage, that is, "they do not think they have to marry" (Table 7).

Table 7 Proportion of People 18-34 Years Old Who Do Not Think That They Have to Marry (1992-2002) (%)

Sex and age	1992	1997	2002
Male			
18-24	41	41	44
25-34	31	33	34
Female			
18-24	44	45	43
25-34	30	35	34

Source: "Japanese National Fertility Survey" by National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. In this table, those unmarried persons are included who answered that they did not have to marry when asked why they remained single.

Table 8 on the attitude towards marriage shows that regardless of sex, the number of people who feel that "they can get benefit from marriage" is decreasing, which could be a factor bringing about the increase in never married persons. Moreover, the number of females who think that "they will not marry unless they encounter an ideal partner" is increasing, possibly bringing about the increase in late married persons (Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8 Proportion of Unmarried People who Believe in the Benefit of Marriage, by Sex and by Year (1987-2002) (%)

		1987	1992	1997	2002
Do you think it beneficial for you to marry now?	Male	69.1	66.7	64.6	62.3
	Female	83.0	83.6	82.7	79.8

Source: Same as the Table 7.

Table 9 Will Not Marry Unless Encounter an Ideal Partner (1987-2002) (%)

Attitude towards marriage	1987	1992	1997	2002
Will marry before a certain age	54.1	49.2	42.9	43.6
Will not marry unless encountering an ideal partner	44.5	49.6	56.1	55.2

Source: Same as the Table 7.

5 Decrease in Births

As a consequence to the increase in the people in the "never married" and "married late" categories, the household composition has changed. Looking at the change, from 1985 to the present, of the composition of nuclear households with husband and wife the proportion of "no child" or "one child" is increasing, while that of "two children" or "three children and more" is decreasing (Table 10).

This means that the number of births given after marriage is decreasing, which, along with the increase in the number of "never married" or "married late" persons, is contributing to the declining birth rate.

**Table 10 Number and Proportion of Nuclear Family Households Where
Wife is between 15 and 59 years old, by Number of Children
(1985-2000)**

	1985 ¹⁾	1990	1995	2000
Number of households (1,000)				
Total	14,630	13,868	13,267	13,153
No child	3,428	3,730	4,157	4,439
Having child(ren)	11,202	10,138	9,110	8,714
One child	2,717	2,513	2,560	2,713
Two children	6,319	5,613	4,731	4,361
Three or more children	2,167	2,012	1,820	1,639
Proportion (%)				
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No child	23.4	26.9	31.3	33.8
Having child(ren)	76.6	73.1	68.7	66.2
One child	18.6	18.1	19.3	20.6
Two children	43.2	40.5	35.7	33.2
Three or more children	14.8	14.5	13.7	12.5
Number of child(ren) (1,000)				
Total	22,152	20,049	17,736	16,590
One child	2,717	2,513	2,560	2,713
Two children	12,637	11,226	9,461	8,722
Three or more children	6,798	6,310	5,714	5,155
Number of children per household (persons)	1.51	1.45	1.34	1.26

Note: "Households having children" excludes those whose youngest child is 18 years old and above.

1) Based on the 20% sample tabulation.

6 Conclusion

As was seen in this report, the number of youths who don't feel the need to get married or who are "parasite singles" who remain unmarried and live with their parents is increasing in Japan. Furthermore, the number of births given after marriage is decreasing. Such numerous factors are contributing to the decreasing birth rate and the aging population.

Whether getting married or having children or not is individuals' choice or discretion, and of course the decision cannot be forced by society. However, we need to reevaluate the reasons why more youths are choosing to stay single and why they choose the path of remaining "parasitic" to their parents being dependent on them. If there are feelings of burden to becoming independent, or to marriage, child-births, or childcare, then we have to remove those obstacles. Japan has not reached the point when such phenomena change society, but the time has come when we should discuss seriously what measures we need to take and how to cope with the problem of declining birth rate.