

# SOME PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN JAPAN

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## 1. *Introduction: From Sweet Potato to Rice*

Contemporary Japan is relatively complex and unstable in the process of rapid and radical social change. Since August 1945 when Japan had to surrender and face her gloomy destiny, she encountered a great deal of change in every aspect of life which she has never experienced in her history. Immediately after the war the majority of the people have been compelled to dwell in hastily constructed, shabby huts or partially demolished houses living on sweet potatoes and their leaves due to the scarcity of rice and wheat. These conditions were caused by the devastation of war and later by bad economic inflation. We even had to come back to the barter system of remote ages. The exchange of garments and foodstuffs became for a while the usual form of barter. We ourselves called this sort of living "bamboo-shoot" living because it was like the bamboo shoots which shed their sheathes one at a time.

However in 1962, after fifteen years of such hard and miserable living, the situation has become quite different and much better so that the above statement seems to be an old and unhappy legend. Most families throughout the country, even in the remote agricultural and fishing villages are enjoying a rather affluent and happy life with abundant rice and other foodstuffs, having had good crops successively for several years.

The many houses in cities as well as countries are equipped with modern electric washing machines, refrigerators and television sets which are said to be three necessities of modern family life. The number of TV sets at present exceeds 10,000,000 in addition

to radio sets. Horses and bicycles are being replaced by motorcycles, small trucks and small cars as the major means of transportation even in the country villages. The cowploughs or horseploughs are giving way to the ploughing machines. Mechanization of agricultural implements is becoming the trend in most of the rural areas. In the urban areas many new buildings for business, factories, offices, schools and apartment houses subsidized by the national Government as well as local Government are going up incessantly. Now we can hardly see the scars of the terrible and unprecedented devastation suffered by the war. In the country as well, houses are being very greatly improved as a result of land reform programs which brought farmers independence, prosperity and self-assurance.

We must notice that, instead of rice and wheat which are the major foods, bread and butter, milk and cheese and various kinds of preserved foods and even instant coffee are widely being consumed. All sorts of synthetic fibre and chemical textiles are manufactured on a large scale and are distributed to all the classes of people. Plastic articles are also very popular replacing the metal and wood articles. Synthetic rubber is taking the place of natural rubber. Gas, electricity and petroleum are being used widely as the major sources of cooking and heating, and electric lights are shining even in mountain villages. Telephone systems cover all the land and buses and taxis are running all over the country in addition to major transportation such as railways steamships and electric trains. Though the traffic is now usually very much congested in narrow roads in cities, large scale construction programs for high-ways with motor vehicles and high speed trains that connect cities are under construction. The facilities for recreation and amusement are very much westernized and well equipped in the large cities.

As indicated by these examples Japan is proceeding on the road of peaceful revolution again which seems to be much

bigger than that of the Meiji restoration in 1868. All the aspects of political, industrial, cultural and psychological life are changing quickly in accordance with structural change of society as a whole. Concurrently, the mode of behavior, criterion of morality and the outlook of life and religious belief are also becoming quite different from those of the prewar period. As a matter of fact, we are now on the verge of the dawn of new life and new culture, a new mode of life under the principle of democracy.

### *11. Structural Change in Industry*

Whenever human society faces a great and rapid change it usually encounters inevitably many critical problems and tensions to be adjusted or solved later.

General D. MacArthur said frankly sometime ago that Japan is just in the state of a twelve year old and some Japanese themselves thought that Japan had declined to third or fourth rank in international society after the war. However this is not true in 1961. So far as national economy is concerned Japan came up to the seventh or eighth grade among forty free nations in the world only within the last 15 years since the end of the war. The industrial development is tremendous. The productivity, for example, reached next to that of the U.S.A., England and West Germany sitting in the same chair with France and Italy. Unfortunately, the average income per capita is still far behind, staying at one ninth of the U.S.A. and one third of England, France and West Germany. As to the average income as a whole Japan is in the rank of the eighteenth, mainly due to the dense population, among forty nations.

Half of the population in Japan before the war was made up of small holders of land or poor tenants but their number decreased to 40%. The great number of medium and small or petty enterprises were the characteristic of Japanese industrial structure and the ratio of light industries overwhelmingly dominated heavy

and chemical industries by two to one. However present Japan is approaching the first rate country of heavy and chemical industries. We can see now many modernized factories on a large scale equipped with the most up-to-date machines, mechanical facilities, conveyer systems, assembly systems and automation, and superb engineering and laboratories, etc. Manual labor is gradually withdrawing from the scene because of the rapid invasion of modern machines with neat young men watching nervously the various meters of automatic operation.

In other words, industries in general and industrial capacity are reaching the level of the first class nations but unfortunately the standard of living as a whole remains in the third grade. No doubt there is a great gap or unbalance between the progressive industrialization and the living conditions of the nation.

One of the characteristics of industrial society may be said to be the plural framework. By plural framework of society I mean here the coexistence or polarization of the small number of big industries on the one side and the countless number of medium and small or petty enterprises on the other side. On the other hand, the situation in the agricultural country is somewhat different. The feudalistic landlords of the former time were fortunately doomed to disappear due to the enforcement of the Land Reform Act by the instruction of Occupation Forces and all the farmlands owned by the landlords who do not cultivate it themselves were divided and distributed to the small farmers and peasants at nominal cost. Accordingly the structure of rural society and its culture underwent a revolutionary change. There is hardly seen the class struggles which existed between the landlords and peasants or tenants, and farmer's ideology and outlook are becoming really rather conservative in general because of the levelling of wealth and income among the farmers. It is noticeable the members of the Self-Defence Forces are recruited mostly from healthy young men in the country who contribute much to the

stability and growth of the Forces, preventing the intrusion of radical social thought,

Though in the cities the powerful financial combines or big business corporations (the Zaibatsu in Japanese) had to be divided or disorganized by law after the war and this program was realized to some extent, big business came back again to its former position after the withdrawal of the Occupation Forces and is gaining almost the same power as it had before. Their capital funds are boosted, becoming bigger and bigger and their organizations are becoming more powerful concentrating many industries under their control.

There are now 490,000 business corporations. The great number of them are so-called medium and small or petty enterprises, private and corporative, with a capital of less than ¥ 5,000,000. (approximately \$ 14,000.), a percentage of about 94%. Corporations with a capital of more than ¥ 1,000,000,000. (approximately \$ 278,000.) are 3,000, a percentage of about 0.58%. Corporations with a capital of less than ¥ 1,000,000,000. (approximately \$ 2,778,000.) are 415, a percentage of 0.3% and 200 among them are called big corporations with a capital of ¥ 5,000,000,000. (approximately \$ 138,889,000.), a percentage of only 0.08%. (Ministry of Finance, Business Corporation Statistics, 1960)

As indicated in these statistics, though we can see rapidly growing big business, we cannot neglect to look at the fact that there are also countless poor medium and small or petty enterprises. And a big number of the management as well as labor connected with the medium and small industries whose capital is small and labor conditions are not good, is exposed always to the danger or instability of their business. Moreover we must pay attention to the contrasts of living conditions between labor in the big corporations and that in the medium and small or petty industries. The latter is quite behind the former and there is seen a big gap or unbalance between them.

Though big business is attaining the higher standard of industrialization which may be compared with those of major countries in Europe and the U.S.A., Japan still lacks more or less the stability in national life as a whole, which might be the cause of growing unrest in the midst of relative prosperity. Incessant strikes, sabotage, wage raises and other social movements are the resultant of the phenomena.

From the above statement we can easily understand that Japanese society still has the plural framework of society under which many problems are arising and have to be solved or adjusted in the future.

### *III. Trend of Population*

The recent trend of population reflecting some aspects of change in Japanese society is also noticeable. Japan registered in 1961 the lowest crude birth rate in her history. It has been known also that there is a great difference in fertility between urban and rural areas but it is approaching the same rate according to an official estimate of population in 1961. 1,570,000 babies were born and the birth rate marked the lowest, 16.7 per 1,000 population though the increasing tendency of marriage rate among young people is seen continuously since the end of the war. This birth rate is now almost the same as those of Sweden (14.1), Denmark (16.3) and England (16.5) as reported in the U.N. demographic Yearbook of 1959. Actually during the short period of the baby boom after the war, the crude birth rate was 33 but it has now dropped to half of that.

With regard to the mortality rate, the total number of deaths in 1961 was 697,000 and it was 9,000 less than that of 1960. That is, the crude death rate for 1961 was 7.4 per 1,000 population which was approximately the same rate with those of 1959 and 1958 though this rate is 0.2% lower than in 1960. (Ministry of Welfare, Vital Statistics, 1961)

The fact means that the crude death rate in the past three years has been almost stationary. The slow decline of it is mainly due to the increased mortality among the aged instead of a trend of decrease in infant mortality rate and this is remarkable.

Infant mortality rate dropped to 23.3 per 1,000 in 1961 and it was the lowest. The lowest infant death rate was 21.6 in Tokyo and the highest was 47.5 in Iwate Prefecture, the northern part of Japan. This differential rate seems to be reflecting mainly the regional differences in the standard of living, sanitary conditions and medical facilities and also the prevalence of higher education, etc.

In the investigation of the causes of mortality, we see here a great deal of change. The major causes of death in 1961 were as follows: apoplexy and other troubles developed in blood vessels related to the central nervous systems were 156,800 (22.5%), cancer, 96,000 (13.8%), heart diseases, 67,700 (9.7%), senility, 55,500 (8%) and various sorts of accidents, 41,100 (5.9%). It is noted that death due to accidents increased to the fifth place in 1961 for the first time in Japan. Particularly, death due to automobile accidents increased tremendously from 3,000 (9.3%) in 1950 to 14,500 (35.4%) in 1961 due to the congested traffic of many cars in the narrow streets. On the other hand death from pneumonia, gastroenteric disorder and bacterially caused disease which were prevailing in the prewar period has diminished remarkably corresponding with the changes in economic life, sanitary and medical conditions and the improvement of social security and nourishment.

Thus we can now easily understand that the trend of population is quickly moving along the line of pattern of low-birth-rate-low-death-rate instead of high-birth-rate-high-death-rate. The longevity for both men and women must be counted as the natural result of this pattern. Men's longevity was 65 and women's 70 in 1961 which may give rise to the serious problems of the aged in the future.

#### *IV. Development of Educational System*

Epoch-making change in the educational system has been executed during the period of the Occupation Forces. If it had not been established by law, it could not be changed so radically. We introduced and adopted the so-called 6-3-3-4 educational system which is prevailing in some of the States in the U.S.A. This system is 6 years in primary school and 3 years in junior high school, both of which are compulsory for children who are eligible to these schools, 3 years in senior high school and 4 years in colleges and universities. Some of the colleges and universities have graduate schools for the degrees of master or doctor or both of them.

Particularly it is significant that a great number of colleges and universities as well as junior colleges have been newly established and they opened their doors to men and women as well as the rich and the poor offering them equal opportunity for higher education. Thus the new co-educational system from the kindergarten to the university was formulated.

Before the war the number of colleges and universities were small as in European countries. There were only 47 including national, prefectural or municipal and private ones. Accordingly the number of students in total was 72,192 including 1,678 in graduate schools, 41,965 in undergraduate, 27,920 in high schools (prep. schools), 3,377 in professional schools, 2,461 in other schools in 1941, the year just before the Pacific war broke out. After this year the educational systems became very much confused until 1946 due to the successive enlistment of students for the army navy and air force as well as young men all over Japan.

Starting with the new educational system, the number of colleges and universities has tremendously increased and they reached 250 in total including 72 national, 33 prefectural or municipal and 145 private colleges and universities, and 290 junior



colleges of which there were 28 national, 39 prefectural or municipal, and 223 private in 1961. So far as the number of colleges and universities is concerned, Japan is next to the U.S.A. which has more than 1,300 colleges and universities. The number of students naturally increased and it came up to 670,192 in colleges and universities and 93,361 in junior colleges. Especially it must be noted that the percentage of students enrolled in private colleges and universities is relatively very high. Namely, the number of students in them is 439,660 (65.6%), national, 200,233 (29.9%) and prefectural or municipal, 30,299 (4.5%). In junior colleges the number of students is 93,361 of which the number of students in private junior colleges is 73,843 (79.1%). (Ministry of Education, Tentative Report of Statistics, No. 95, 1961)

These phenomena clearly show that the very important role of higher education in terms of number handled by private school corporations are increasing and the influence of government that held for many years the dominating power over the higher education is decreasing. This fact might be seen as one of the symbols of democratic process in Japanese society.

Moreover, though we have such a large number of colleges and universities as mentioned above, they are still short for the many applicants and they must pass hard entrance examination. On the other hand it is regrettable that because of the hard examination most senior high schools of good standing are becoming a kind of preparatory school for colleges and universities. At the same time we must not overlook the fact that the younger generations, men and women, are very eager to be educated in the higher educational institutions so that they may get better employment and security for future.

On the other hand, academic freedom or freedom of thought in the higher educational institutions secured by democratic principle are leading to the confusion of ideology and the arising of serious social problems which threaten the maintenance of social

order and the integration of society. It is true that the development of the higher education is absolutely necessary for the progress of democracy but it often leads on the contrary to mistaken notions that not only ignore the democratic concept of law, order and responsibility but also necessitate even the subversive actions. The problem of excessive freedom is becoming one of the important problems at present, though Japan as a whole is proceeding on the road toward a healthy growth of democracy.

#### *V. From Confusion to a New Culture*

In this short article I tried to pick up some of the distinguished phenomena in social change after the war. However it was really impossible for me to present the whole picture of rapidly and multifariously changing Japan. But I must add besides the above statement one thing that the labor unions were organized not only in the industrial organizations but also even in the educational institutions and hospitals. They are very powerful working as major factors for the change and renovation of Japanese society as a whole, affiliating mostly with socialist or communist movement.

In such a chaotically developing society as this, it inevitably involves uneven growth and naturally so many diverse problems that have to be adjusted and solved. Accordingly, on the one hand we have grand hope in building up new Japan and a new culture but on the other hand we shall have to face great difficulties and tensions adjusting and integrating the various factors of change in the society in the future.

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## Résumé

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The social structure and the mode of life in general after the war underwent a great and rapid but rather chaotic change which Japan has never experienced in her history. Particularly the structural changes in industries and agriculture as well as political structure seem to be revolutionary. The democratic principle with deviation and variation is gradually penetrating and affecting every aspect of Japanese life but the feudalistic tint of life is still rich. Despite the tremendous growth and progress of her industries there exist a great number of medium and small-scale or petty enterprises which are very much lagging behind, and they are making plural framework of the society.

On the other hand, farmers who became owners of the land due to the enforcement of Land Reform Act are enjoying rather better and more stable life. However the uneven growth, characteristic of such a rapidly and chaotically developing society as this is inevitable and many serious problems are arising to be adjusted.

In connection with the above changes, the trend of population is described. Japan registered the lowest crude birth rate as well as the lowest death rate and the longevity was 70 for women and 65 for men in 1961. These phenomena indicate the better living conditions but at the same time the problems of aged persons will soon replace the problem of overpopulation.

The radical change in educational system is another important factor in terms of social change. The new educational system opened their doors for men and women as well as for the rich and

the poor the equal opportunity of higher education increasing the number of colleges and universities and also junior college. On the other hand, academic freedom and freedom of thought in the educational institutions secured by democratic principle are on the contrary making some problems against the social order and integration of the society.