

The Causes and Consequences of Depopulation in Japan

Toshihiko HARA Sapporo City University, professor emeritus

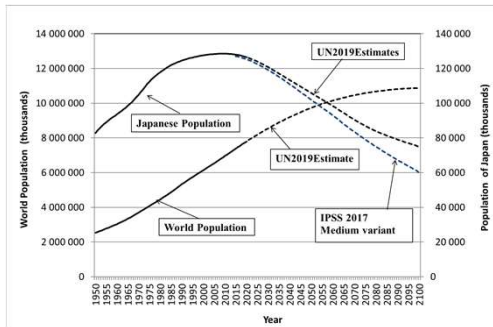


Background and Purpose of Study

This study focuses on Japan as a precursor case of the worldwide depopulations expected in the near future, looking for causes and consequences of demographic transition I and II in a long term perspective.

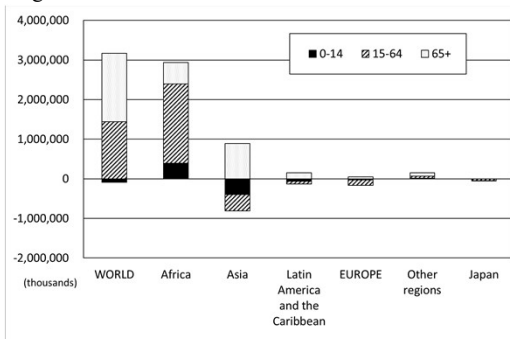
Japan as a Precursor Case of Depopulation

Fig.1 : Long term Population development of Japan comparing with World



The UN projected that the world's population is expected to grow from 7.7 billion in 2019 to 10.9 billion in 2100 (a 40% increase) (United Nations 2019). (Fig.1) However, if we take a closer look at this growth, most of the increase (about 80%) is expected in Sub-Saharan Africa. In most other regions, population growth will continue but only the elderly (65+) will increase, while working-age adults (15-64) and children (0-14) will decrease. (Fig.2)

Fig.2: Population Changes in the Next 3.1 Billion by Age Group and Regions



Demographic Transition in Japan

Fig.3: Long-term transition of Natural Dynamics : Japan 1873-2018

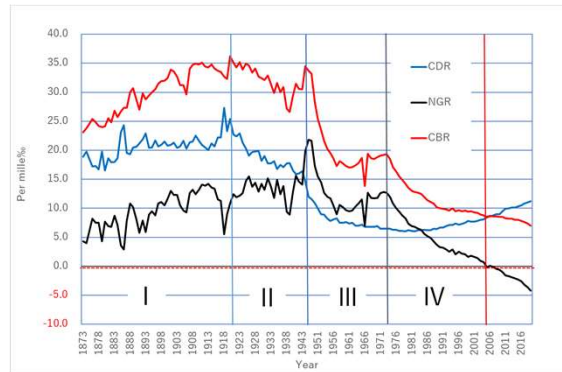
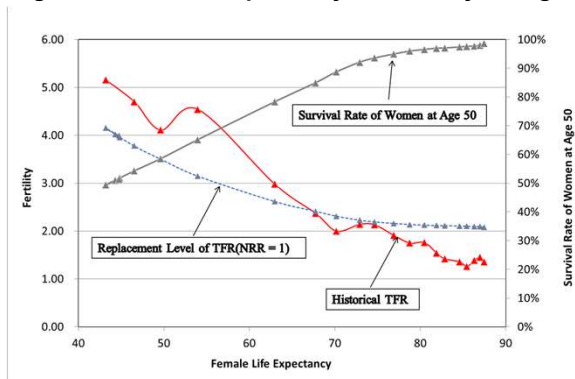
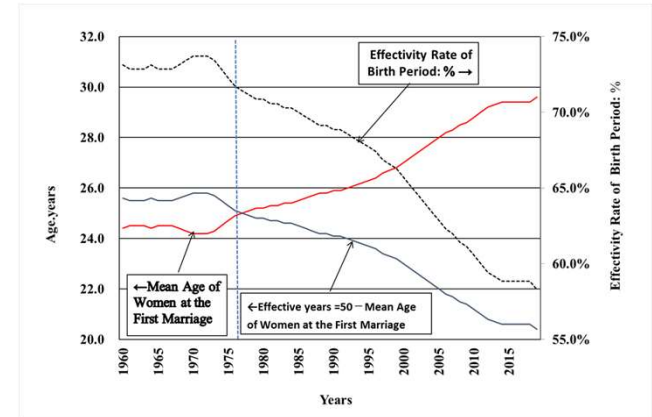


Fig.4 Women's life expectancy and fertility change



FDT in Japan started with modernization from the Meiji Era and continued to the mid-1970s. The growing social capital and social product extended the average life span of women from 50 to over 70 years, thus the survival rate of women at the end of their reproductive period rose from 50 % to nearly 100 %. As a result, fertility was reduced from 4 to 2 children as the higher risk of having many children promoted birth control, i.e. it reached mere replacement level fertility

Fig.5 Effects of late marriage and late childbearing



The SDT in Japan was caused by the shift of reproduction to a higher age. With the liberalization of marriage behaviors*, late marriage and late childbearing was promoted. Above all, the social norm on marriageable age (Kekkon Tekireiki in Japan, which pressured women to marry before 24 years old), evaporated. The reproductive period of women was cut back and, as a result, marriage became rarer, and more couples became childless or with only one child. The multiple child household is vanishing..

Conclusions

What Japan's demographic transition suggests is that human society, in its pursuit of affluence and freedom, has increased its longevity through the rapid development of its productive forces, while at the same time expanding its freedom to control its own fertility. And we are losing to control the balance of interests between Individuals and society.

Depopulation and its related problems in Japan will continue for a long time because they are consequences of a demographic transition as a historical process.

We could not stop this demographic process and should not try to stop it abruptly. Instead, we need to adjust our social, economic, and political system gradually to manage a decreasing population.