

Extended Abstract: Non-traditional family-related attitudes in Japan: Increase and plateau 1994 to 2009

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In the aggregate, attitudes represent the normative orientations in which individuals conduct their lives. At the same time, behavioral changes, often in the context of new economic opportunities, may contribute to changes in attitudes towards those behaviors. Using identical attitudinal measures across the three national surveys, this study tracks changes, or lack thereof, in attitudes relating to the centrality of marriage and childbearing, employment and the family, and non-traditional family-related behaviors in Japan.

Like many countries in the West, Japan has experienced profound changes in family relations and behavior, including decreases in marriage rate, increases in divorce rate, rising cohabitation, and declines in fertility to below-replacement levels, which have been frequently termed the "second demographic transition". These family-behavioral changes have occurred in the context of changing normative orientations pertaining to marriage and the family in the face of the expansion of market economy. Although the relationship between value orientations and family behavior is clearly complex and likely reciprocal, accumulating evidence suggests that value change that accompanied industrial development was a factor in changing family relations and behaviors.

As the only non-Western country that had industrialized by the 1950s, Japan provides an important case study of the interplay of traditional cultural values and changing social and economic circumstances in structuring family-related attitudes. Japan's Confucian cultural heritage contrasts with the individualistic orientation of the U.S. and Western Europe. Traditional Confucian values place heavy emphasis on obligations to family, leaving little room for self-interest. Though weakening in the face of industrial development and economic globalization, these traditional cultural values are likely to linger in Japan today.

Beginning in the 1990s, Japan experienced a prolonged economic downturn, and the types of jobs available have changed dramatically as employers moved away from the lifetime employment model, a long prevalent feature of the Japanese labor market. The prolonged economic stagnation and decreasing employment security have likely influenced attitudes of Japanese men and women toward marriage, family life, and gender roles.

Changes in Family Behaviors and Economic Opportunities: Despite a strong Confucian cultural heritage, Japan has experienced most of the behavioral changes considered as features of the second demographic transition in the West. Marriages have been markedly delayed and non-marriage is increasing in Japan in recent decades. Perhaps one-third of Japanese marriages will end in divorce, a level that falls in the middle of the distribution of European countries. Both the extended periods of young adulthood lived outside of marriage, and an increased uncertainty about the permanence of marriage, may affect attitudes of Japanese men and women towards the relative advantages of marriage and family life.

Once rare, cohabitation in Japan had increased to over one-fifth of women age 24–34 in 2004 and our data indicate a continuing increase since then. Combined with delayed marriage and the earlier initiation of sexual activity, cohabitation may be facilitating the increasing acceptance of sexual relationships outside marriage. One aspect of demographic change which sets Japan from the West is the persistence of little childbearing outside of marriage.

Underlying these family behavioral changes is an expansion of women's economic opportunities including increasing educational attainment and paid employment. Similar to Western countries, and concomitant with economic growth, educational levels have increased rapidly in postwar Japan, and such gains have been especially dramatic for women. Increasing educational attainment of young women may be chiefly responsible for delayed and fewer marriages in Japan after the mid-1970s.

As much of the industrialized world, women's employment has increased markedly in postwar Japan, and increases among women at peak childbearing ages are especially rapid. Japanese women are still likely to leave the labor force upon marriage or the birth of their first child, but this is weakening as over a third of the mothers of preschool children, and three-quarters of all mothers of school age children, were employed in 2009.

It is essential to place our analysis of changes in family-related attitudes in Japan in the context of trends in non-Confucian societies. A number of studies in Western countries have documented long-term trends towards nontraditional attitudes such as those observed for Japan. However, several recent studies have found that these increases in non-traditional attitudes have stalled, at least temporarily, in some Western countries including the U.S. and Australia. We find this stall in Japan as well, and this raises the question of whether common causes may be at work in these two very different family cultures.

Data and Measures: We use data based on persons aged 20–49 from national sample surveys in Japan collected in 1994, 2000, and 2009, and examine 9 attitude items covering three dimensions of attitudes (See Table 1). *Centrality of Marriage and Childbearing:* whether a woman/man can have a full life without marrying or without having children. *Employment and the family:* whether the man should earn the living and the woman stay home, a working mother can have a warm relationship with children, and whether preschool children of working mothers are likely to suffer. *Non-traditional family-related behavior:* whether it is all right for an unmarried woman to have sex and whether, for the sake of their children, parents should not divorce.

Results:

(1) Trends. Responses to all of the attitudinal items are found to be significantly more nontraditional in 2000 than in 1994 and the differences are generally large. For example: agreement with the statement that "a woman can have a full life without marrying" increased from 26 percent in 1994 to 38 in 2000, and agreement with that "it is all right for an unmarried woman to have sex" increased from 29 percent to 39 percent.

In contrast, with one exception, nontraditional responses increased at a much slower pace, or even declined, between 2000 and 2009. The exception was that approval of sex for an unmarried woman continued to increase from 39 percent to 54 percent over this period.

The trends we observe show an interesting contrast among items. On one hand, attitudes on items that involve children's well-being such as "parents should stay together for the sake of children" remain quite traditional. On the other hand, non-traditional views on items involving gender roles in general such as "working mother can establish just as good a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work," "It is alright for an unmarried woman to have sex," and "a woman can have full and satisfying life without having children" show the largest increases between 1994 and 2009.

(2) Gender Patterns . Women are found to be consistently more nontraditional than are men on all of the items considered here, with the exception of one item ("A man can have a full and satisfying life without marrying"), where there is no gender difference. For example, in 2009 the proportion agreeing that a woman can have a full life without marriage is 38 percent among women and 29 percent among men. The proportion supporting that a working mother can have a good relationship with her children is 66 percent among woman while the corresponding proportion among men was 56 percent. The proportion agreeing that it is all right for an unmarried woman to have sex was 58 percent among women compared to 49 percent among men. Differences by gender increased between 1994 and 2009 for most questions.

(3) Cohort Replacement. While cohorts aging into the 20–49 sample in 2000 or 2009 were generally quite more nontraditional than those aging out of this range, most of the difference is shared with the changes experienced by cohorts represented in both time periods being compared (aging and/or period change). The most dramatic exception is again for the item concerning acceptability of unmarried women having sex. Among men and women born in 1951–1974 (the cohort observed in both 1994 and 2000) the agreement increased by 6 percentage points (from 33 percent to 39 percent), whereas 12 percent of the cohort aging out of the 1994 sample (those born in 1945–1950) agreed, compared to 49 percent of the cohort aging into the 2000 sample (born in 1975–1980).

The full paper will describe the data, methods, and results in greater detail, and will provide a more detailed introduction as well as more information on Japan in the past 20 years.

Conclusion and Discussion: Why the long-term trend towards non-traditional family attitudes halted or plateaued in the West is a puzzle for which we have only partial answers. We can only speculate why a similar stall has occurred in Japan. One point raised by several studies is the possibility that values of independence (including freedom from family constraints and more equal gender roles) have run up against the realities of an abiding high value placed on family life, the desire for children, and the realities of the finiteness of time in the reconciling of work and family. The long employment hours of Japanese men, the increasing insecurity of employment, economic uncertainty, high levels of employment among Japanese women, and the persistent extreme gender division of labor, all make this seem all the more likely in Japan.

Table 1. Trends in percent reporting non-traditional attitudes (Total sample)

	Year		
	1994	2000	2009
A. Attitudes about centrality of marriage and childbearing			
A1. A woman can have a full and satisfying life without marrying. (A)	26*	38	34*
A2. A man can have a full and satisfying life without marrying. (A)	18*	24	27*
A3. A woman can have a full land satisfying life without having children. (A)	24*	38	38
A4. A man can have a full land satisfying life without having children. (A)	24*	33	34
B. Gender role attitudes related to wives' employment and the family			
B1. It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family. (D)	10*	26	26
B2. A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.(A)	47*	58	61*
B3. Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother works. (D)	16*	25	30*
C. Non-traditional family-related behavior			
C1. It is all right for an unmarried woman to have sex.(A)	29*	39	54*
C2. Parents should stay together (not divorce) for the sake of their children. (D)	15*	18	14*

Notes: 1. (A) indicates that the agreement is considered as non-traditional attitude and (D) indicates that disagreement is considered as non-traditional attitude.

2. * indicates that the difference from 2000 is statistically significant at 5% level.

Figure 1. Percentage of men and women with non-traditional attitudes in 2009, age 20-49

