

General Orientation

Japanese People and Society

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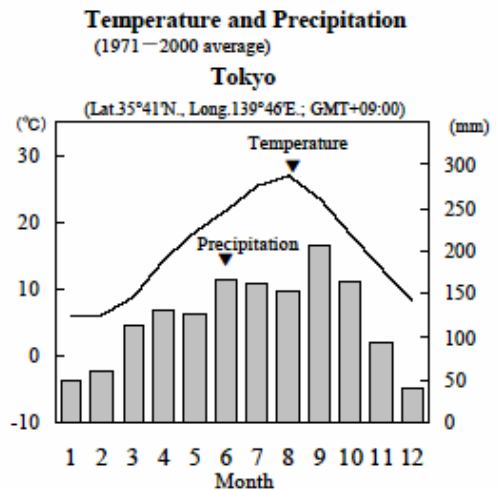
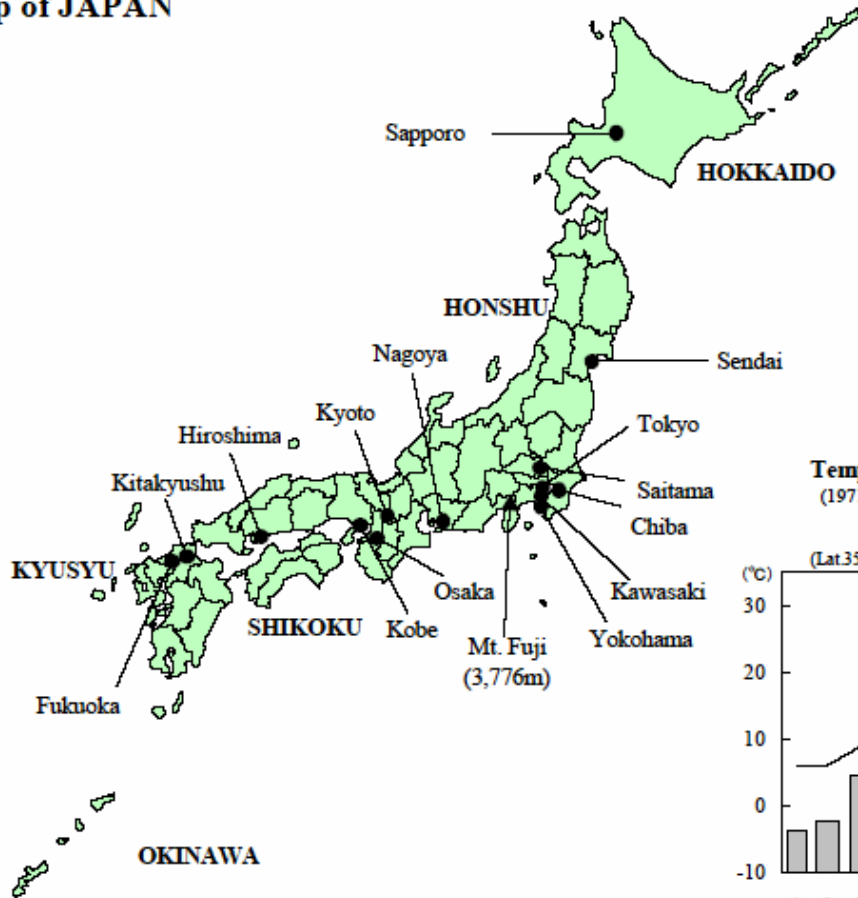
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Map of JAPAN



Source: Japan Meteorological Agency.

Map and climate of Japan provided by the Japanese government

Japanese People and Society

Japanese People: Image and Reality



Traditions and Religions (author's photos)



Ritsurin Park in Takamatsu on the island of Shikoku



Kukai, 9th Century Buddhist leader who studied in China



Shinto Shrine within the Buddhist monastery on top of Mount Koya

Japan developed for over two thousand years, isolated for long periods and sometimes borrowing from other cultures, so it has many unique traditions. All cultural properties are exquisitely preserved, but busy modern people have less time these days to participate in traditions except for occasional festivals.

The situation of religion is unusual in the world because most Japanese belong to two religions, Shinto and Buddhism. At the same time, they are not very religious in daily life. The Shinto religion is ancient and animistic, today used for celebrations and wishes. The Buddhist religion from the Asian mainland, originally philosophical and ethical, today serves mainly funerary purposes. About 1% of Japanese are Christians, while people from foreign countries can of course practice their own religions. The Constitution of Japan guarantees freedom of thought and religion while promoting international peace.

Population Trends and Foreigners in Japan

In the period after World War II many children were born and built up the economy to be second in the world by the 1960s. Most of them are living long and healthy lives with secure pensions while fewer and fewer children are born these days. The population has peaked at about 125 million and is projected to go down below 100 million this Century. So while they have enjoyed the harmony of about 98% of people being of the same race and culture, mostly middle class economically, they are starting

to realize that they need more foreigners in the future because of the large proportion of elderly retirees.



Academics and business people in downtown Tokyo

Demographic data provided by the Japanese government:

10. Population of Major Cities

[As of October 1, 2000]

City	Population (1,000)	Population density (per km ²)	City	Population (1,000)	Population density (per km ²)
Japan	126,926	340	Nagoya- <i>shi</i>	2,172	6,652
Sapporo- <i>shi</i>	1,822	1,626	Kyoto- <i>shi</i>	1,468	2,405
Sendai- <i>shi</i>	1,008	1,287	Osaka- <i>shi</i>	2,599	11,743
Chiba- <i>shi</i>	887	3,261	Kobe- <i>shi</i>	1,493	2,716
Tokyo- <i>to</i> (23 wards (<i>ku</i>))	8,135	13,093	Hiroshima- <i>shi</i>	1,126	1,518
Yokohama- <i>shi</i>	3,427	7,839	Fukuoka- <i>shi</i>	1,341	3,953
Kawasaki- <i>shi</i>	1,250	8,759	Kitakyushu- <i>shi</i>	1,011	2,089

Source: Statistics Bureau, MPHPT.

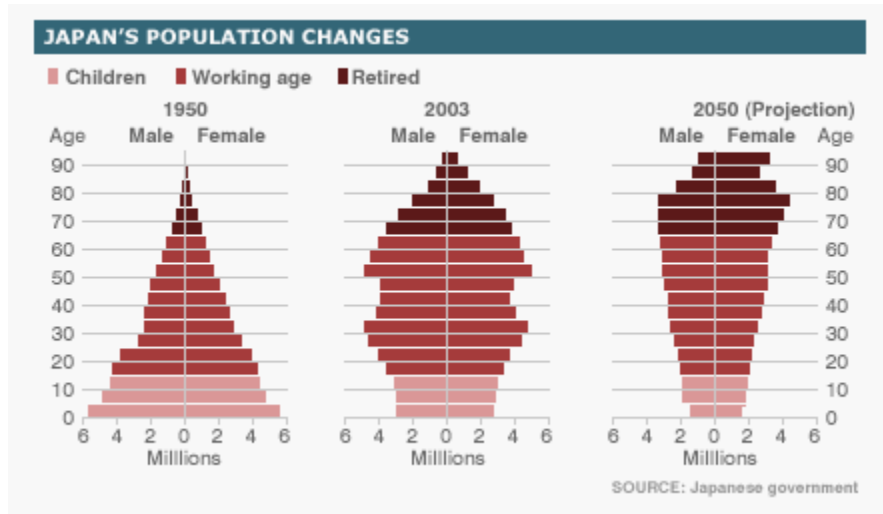
11. Vital Statistics

Item	1970 1)	1980	1990	1995	2000	2002
Crude live-birth rate (per 1,000 population)	18.8	13.6	10.0	9.6	9.5	* 9.2
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	6.9	6.2	6.7	7.4	7.7	* 7.8
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	13.1	7.5	4.6	4.3	3.2	* 3.0
Total fertility rate 2)	2.13	1.75	1.54	1.42	1.36	* 1.32
Mean age at first marriage: groom	26.9	27.8	28.4	28.5	28.8	* 29.1
bride	24.2	25.2	25.9	26.3	27.0	* 27.4
Crude marriage rate (per 1,000 population)	10.0	6.7	5.9	6.4	6.4	* 6.0
Crude divorce rate (per 1,000 population)	0.93	1.22	1.28	1.60	2.10	* 2.30
Life expectancy at birth: male (years)	69.31	73.35	75.92	76.38	77.72	78.32
female (years)	74.66	78.76	81.90	82.85	84.60	85.23

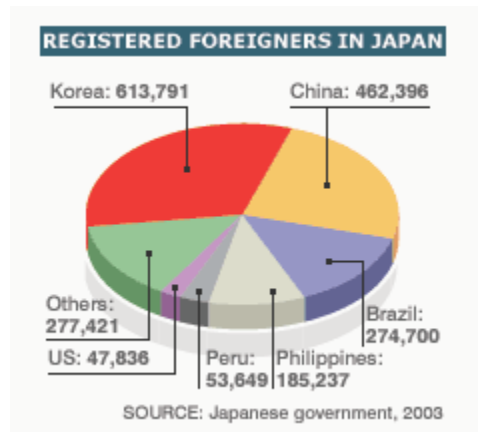
1) Excluding Okinawa Prefecture. 2) The sum of the live birth rates by age for women aged 15 to 49; the average number of children born to a woman over the course of her lifetime, assuming a consistent live birth rate by age in the future.

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

The following chart provided by the Japanese government in 2003 shows the dramatic demographic changes from the past to the present and projected to the future:



In an interesting article that is available online (see the References section), BBC reported that “an ageing population is forcing people to reconsider attitudes to immigration” (Buckley, 2004). The article reported that foreigners in the labor force are 0.2% of the population in Japan compared to, for example, 9.1% in Germany. The Japanese government provided the following details on foreigners as of 2003:



More details from the Japanese government on foreigners in Japan and movements of Japanese as well as foreigners:

12. Registered Foreigners in Japan

[In thousands. As of December 31]

End of year	Total						
		Korea 1)	China	Brazil	Philippines	Peru	U.S.A.
1990	1,075	688	150	56	49	10	38
1995	1,362	666	223	176	74	36	43
2000	1,686	635	336	254	145	46	45
2002	1,852	625	424	268	169	52	48
Percent change, 2001-2002	4.1	-1.1	11.3	0.9	8.1	3.4	3.7

1) Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea.

Source: Ministry of Justice.

13. Japanese Living Abroad

[In thousands. As of October 1]

Year	Total				
		U.S.A.	Brazil	U.K.	China
1990	620	236	105	44	8
1995	728	264	91	52	17
2000	812	298	75	53	46
2002	875	316	72	51	64
Percent change, 2001-2002	4.4	1.0	-1.6	-2.0	20.1

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

14. Persons Legally Entered or Departed from Japan

[In thousands]

Year		
	Japanese departed from Japan	Foreigners entered Japan
1990	10,997	3,504
1995	15,298	3,732
2000	17,819	5,272
2002	16,523	5,772
Percent change, 2001-2002	1.9	9.2

Source: Ministry of Justice.

Report on Women and Men in a Declining Population

A think tank recently studied the situation for Japanese women and men in a declining population, summarizing the report as follows:

Leonard Schoppa of the University of Virginia notes the lack of an organized female 'voice' to press for better job conditions which would make having both a career and children easier. Robin LeBlanc of Washington and Lee University describes the pressures facing Japanese men, which have led to their postponing marriage at a higher rate than women, while Keiko Yamanaka of the University of California, Berkeley, reluctantly concludes that Japan is not seriously considering immigration as an option to counteract its declining population. Jennifer Robertson of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, focuses on a uniquely Japanese technological solution to possibly resolve the problem of a declining population: robots. (Mohr, 2008)

So Japan, with its long history of traditions and a stable social order, tends to change only gradually, and technology may play an important role in future developments.

Children in Japan

In an article available online, it was observed that:

Japanese youngsters spend significantly less time outdoors than previous generations. ... several factors have influenced young people's distant relationship with the environment. These range from an urbanised lifestyle with its emphasis on consumption and few opportunities to spend time outdoors, to Japan's notorious cram school system. ...author Alex Kerr [who was raised in Japan] says Japanese prefer things to be neat, orderly and convenient rather than natural. (Johnston, 2004)

Electronic technologies play an increasing role in everyday lifestyles. Computer use in Japan may not be as much as in other advanced countries because nearly everyone uses mobile phones, most of them with access to the Internet. A concerned parent recently wrote:

Here in Japan, as of August 2008, there were 104,426,900 cell phone subscribers, meaning that many adults have two devices and most kids of school-going age also have one. Indeed, around 30% of elementary school students, 58% of middle school students, and 96% of high school students now have a cell phone. ... pre-teens and teens in particular live on their cell phones and will easily use them for hours a day if not supervised properly. Family plans and other flat-rate pricing schemes have exacerbated the problem, and for an average kid going to a cram school until 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening, adequate supervision of their phone usage by their parents is not very likely. (Lloyd, 2008)

There is a common phrase *kodomo no tami ni*, which means for the sake of the children. The post-War generation knew hardship, built up the Japanese economy, and gave their children a better life. Whether the past two generations of young parents and children have been spoiled or simply treated well, only time will tell as they determine the future of Japan.

The Japanese Personality

The author's Presentation Handout on "Japanese People and Society" outlines many characteristics that were discussed in the lecture. There is the combination of the traditional and the modern, Japanese and Western styles, and gradual change in a large and stable society. Beneath the globalization and technology there are still many traditional ways of thinking and social behavior oriented to others and groups (especially peer groups such as those in the same school class or working section). There are cultural influences from Asian religions, such as Buddhism (仏教) in the stoic or fatalistic way of thinking and Confucianism from China (儒教) in the social system of interpersonal relations.

One general characteristic of the Japanese personality is reserve. There is a sense that it is more elegant not to show all that one could say or do. They have a saying that a hawk does not show its claws. A person who is not flashy but humble and understated is especially admired if his or her competence is shown only indirectly through actions or the reactions of others. They are keeping much of themselves in reserve, which may seem mysterious to people from different cultures. But as a result of some of these virtues, even among other Japanese they find it difficult to meet strangers without a formal introduction or belonging to the same organized group, and it can be difficult for foreigners to get to know Japanese people well enough to consider them a friend. Yet they are reliable, and their affection

is also kept in reserve, so foreigners can try to accept that Japanese are undemonstrative or reserved. The quality of their interactions is of a similar level to the reliability of their manufactured goods. Their honesty is not of the verbal but rather behavioral kind, such as returning favors or correct change. Similarly, their sincerity in sparing others from negativity reflects their putting others first by carefully considering the feelings or reactions of others before speaking or taking action.

Websites on current events in Japan

Japan-U.S. Discussion Forum: <https://japanforum.nbr.org/scripts/wa.exe?A0=LIST>

The Japan Times: <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/>

Japan Today: <http://www.japantoday.com/>

News on Japan: <http://www.newsonjapan.com/>

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Lloyd, T. (2008, November 27). Cell phones and cancer: What's the link? *Japan Today*.

Mohr, M. (Ed.) (2008, November). Japan's declining population: Clearly a problem, but what's the solution? The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Retrieved November 27, 2008, from http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Asia_141.pdf