

SOME PROMINENT CULTURAL – SOCIAL ISSUES OF JAPAN IN THE FIRST DECADE OF 21ST CENTURY

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The first decade of 21st century has witnessed a turbulent period in Japanese politics and the vicissitudes of the economy of this country. Along with the change in political - economic life, Japanese socio - cultural life also has certain changes. These changes are both positive and negative. The socio-cultural factors that were affected by the economy, but in turn, they impact back on the economy and the future of Japan. Deeply aware of the power and influence of Japanese culture to the world, the leaders of this country has made adjustments in socio-cultural policy to take advantage of the positive cultural impact Japan's overseas for "refresh" the image, invigorating for the development of Japan.

The article will mention the prominent socio-cultural issues of Japan in the first decade of 21st century in relation to the changes in consciousness, the value of the Japanese lifestyle, family, work and social relationships.

1. The size of family reduce, low reproduce rate and aging society

Japan's population and household numbers are rising today, compared with

the population growth rate of 1.2 times since 1970 to now, the growth rate of total households rose 1.8 times in the same time. Population boom in Japan was in 1970, then population growth rate gradually decreased. The average number of people in a household of Japan fell continuously; if in 1960 provided an average household size is 4.14 people in 1970 decreased to 3.41 people in 1980 was 3.22 people in 1990 was 2.99 people, by 2005, only 2.5 people/household. Singles households (1 person household) accounted for 1/4 of households in Japan, up to 27.9% (see: 1, p.29).

Consider the changes of population structure by age, we can see the rate of children (14 years old and under) had significant losses, from 24% of the population in 1970 to just 13.5% in 2008. In contrast, the number of people over age 65 has increased rapidly during this period, from 7.1% to 20.1%. In addition, the average life expectancy of men and women in Japan have increased

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by 10 years, from 1977 to now, Japan maintained the position as country has the highest life expectancy in the world.

Regarding to the birth rate, in 1970, averagely one Japanese woman gave birth to less than 2.08 children during her life cycle. Many people said that if birth rate continue to remain at such low status will lead to reduce population, but in fact, because the average life expectancy of the Japanese continue increasing, the population is increasing. Since late 1950s to the first half of 1970, the average birth rate remains stable at around 2.08 children/woman. But since 1975 it has reduced to 2.0 children/woman, and until 2005 the rate was 1.26 children/woman. And so, declining birth rate leads the Japanese society enter the serious aging condition (see: 2).

The most worrying issue is the awareness about “not giving birth” is becoming popular in Japan. In 1990s, the rate think that “it is necessary to have baby” was quite low 54%, up to 1998, the rate was 48%, and since 2003 amount of people think that it is unnecessary to give birth is higher than the other (see: 2)

We can see that, the root of the issue above is from the change of social structure, family, living style, values of Japanese after high economic growing rate. In turn, such issues interact to become reason together, keep becoming more serious in first decade of 21st century.

On 03/11/2011, large earthquakes ever (9 Richter scale), accompanied by a tsunami occurred in the Northeast Japan.

Two small cities near the epicenter are Kesenuma and Rikuzentadaka suffered up to 10m high tsunami, more than 50% of the population here died or missing. Ironically, most residents of the villages and small towns are older people who can not keep away. Northeast of Japan where less urbanized than other parts of the main island of Honshu, has witnessed the departure of young people to big cities in many decades. The extreme cold of the north makes this area an arable crop, while other regions may be cultivated from 2-3 crops a year, and that is why most young people here decided to leave their poor country to the big city for career. Young people leave, old people stay, the low rate of marriage birth has made the problem of "aging" more and more clarity in this area, and may be one of the causes worsen the last disasters.

2. Qualifications society and issues of education

High qualification society was formed in Japan for about 30 years. In the 1970s, every four Japanese there is one pass entrance exam to a college or university. However, the development of social degree, according to statistics, in 2005, each two people has one with a college or university degree and this rate continues to date. Specifically, from 1990 onwards, the percentage of education among women is quite high, up to 54% (the rate for men is 56%). The starting point of qualification society is during the high leveled economic development, Japan needed a workforce with high quality to work in companies, factories which are expanding

production at a dizzy rate. Companies, especially large companies are so thirsty for talent that they "look furtively" to all those college students at the 3rd or 4th university year at the prestigious university. University degree in the period 1960-1970, as Japanese, was as the "passport to get into large firms" which can guarantee them high salaries, comfortable life and a stable employment throughout life there.

Another reason of qualification society is Japanese economic life developed rapidly in the 1970s, plus the model nuclear family with parents and 1 or 2 children are developed, providing conditions for parents to up bring and take care of children, particularly economic conditions afford for children attending private classes, the "preparatory class for university" to "compete" in the severe examination from level 2 to level 3, level 3 on the prestigious university. A third cause, we can say it is the most important causes leading to the formation and development of qualification society as current time, it is the profound change in consciousness of the Japanese for higher education for children, equality of opportunity between men and women to education, and above all, is the ability to assert themselves in society.

However, emerging in a decade or so, there is a cause that higher education is a choice in terms of not having a suitable job; study in college or MA in Japan today is not very difficult, as the number of universities are redundant, but students are dwindling in the state of the aging population. And so, learning

more, with an advanced degree is not necessarily equivalent to actual academic qualifications, even if held graduate degrees, the bachelor is not necessarily find deserved job. The sad fact is that many students choose to work freely as lease sales, service at the McDonald fast food places after graduating, do things never relate to their professional training at university. This is related to the phenomenon of "freeter" and the phenomenon of "neet" which we will mention later.

Advance qualification society in a certain extent, also create useful factors to the development of society such as improve people's awareness, provide high-quality labor resources to meet development needs of industry in society, improve social quality. However, the downside is the "rush to learn," race examinations, formed an examination education, assessment of natural human capacity through the test, high pressure in study, children are stressed, prolonged stress leads to reactive as oppose to school, school violence, bullying, suicide rise among students

Meanwhile, serious issues like school violence, bullying, suicide still have no sign of decline, the number of students "not go to school" (absent more than 50 class in a year without reason is called "not go to school") continue to rise. According to the statistic of Japanese Ministry of Education, during the past 20 years, the number of primary students "not go to school" increased 1.9 times, the ratio in secondary school students increased 2.3 times, the number of

violence in school also increased: 1.7 times at the primary level, 1.4 times in secondary education (3). Thus, the core problem lies not only in the education system but also in lifestyle, culture and behavior, the concept of life, social issues such as relations between people and people are more untaught, the lack of exchange, lack of attention to children of society and family, families with few children make the loneliness, lack of empathy, sharing with others in Japanese children. If social problems are not solved thoroughly, the problems of education can not be solved at its root.

3. Change of job, recruitment structure, Neet, Freeter phenomenon

After the period of economic growth, labor structure in Japan changed dramatically. According to the results of a survey on the industry nationwide, the percentage of employees (over 15 years) in the industry in 1960 are: labor in agriculture (first industry) accounted for 33 % workers in third industry (service, entertainment...) accounted for only 12%. However, after half a century, in 2008, the labor rate in the first production only a mere 5%, while employees in the third industry rose to 67%, especially service, administrative and professional system, the professional, and technical works. Recruitment method is not limited to formal employment contract, that the employment contract of diversity as a part-time workers, a labor unofficial, labor by the hour... also increased rapidly.

Parallel to the restructure of domestic industries, traditional labor recruitment

mode with "lifetime employment contract" is gradually broken. Images of the employees commitment to work hard for a company where they are guaranteed a lifetime job has disappeared. In order to survive after economic bubble broken Japanese company must reduce its workforce, study the model of Europe and America in the diversification of employment patterns. According to a survey of the workforce conducted by the Ministry of Administration, postal and communications, the percentage of employees working part time, work under short term contracts, labor sent or appointed over total number of employees increased from 30.3% in 2003 to 34% in 2008.

A new social problems emerged in recent years is the emergence of a Japanese young people (from 15-34 years), almost all have university degrees but they do not like a fixed job, they choose the simple tasks like serving in restaurants, bars, sales in McDonald's, just to make money to pay for themselves as traveling, shopping... They are called "freeter" (freeter is a compound of the Free - in English and Arbeiter - workers in German). In 2004, the number of "freeter" in Japan reached 2.13 million people and continues to grow (4). The reason became "freeter" of majority Japanese youth is due to the concept of their work has changed. They do not want to "work hard in the strict traditional mass of the producing group until it is offset by the form of generous benefits," as older generations. Instead, they just want to "do as enough, fun as possible" (5).

Besides, now in Japan there is a part of youth "voluntary unemployment". The figure in 1994 was 400,000, in 2004 increased to 640,000 people, although it is not a big number, it contributes to the rate of 10% youth unemployment in Japan today. The phenomenon of "voluntary unemployment" is called "Neet" (which stands for "Not in Education, Employment or training") – means those who are no have a job, not in school and did not intend to seek employment. The cause of the phenomenon became "Net" comes from the psychological stress among the youth such as pressure at school or at work because they feel they are not fit to the chosen subjects, disoriented then they should drop out of school.

All these phenomena indicated that the cause is the change in the sense of labor and employment of the youth in Japan, in addition, the cause may lie deeper in the Japanese society with pressure and strict requirements in work or study, while there is lack of empathy between the members of the family and society.

4. Forming poor class in Japan

One problem, not yet become severe but began to exist and showed signals of its rise in few years - rich and poor discrimination in Japanese society.

There is an interesting phenomenon in Japan, from late 1990s, early in 2000s, it is Japan's massive appearance of small shops selling the same price 100 yen (equivalent to 1 USD at that time) including food, vegetables, stationery and small essential items in the family is, except for electronics and large furniture (beds, wardrobes...), everything

needed for daily life can be purchased at the store system at 100 yen. The emergence of low-cost 100 Yen shops caused from many reasons such as increasing the "one people family" need to buy a small quantity, the usability of these types of stores in accordance with rush life in Japan, the "economical" in stagnation situation of Japan's economy continued, and another reason is the number of the poor who can buy cheap food and material in Japan is increasing. In the past, the Japanese have always loved shopping at supermarkets and luxury department stores, now 100 yen shop is also very crowded by all kinds of buyers: young, middle-aged single, the elderly and even homeless. From about five years up to now, the new QQ's shop system appears, which is 99 yen stores, targeting to objectives who are single and poor in society. Food here is not fresh as in the supermarket, the goods are not high quality and fair, but it survived and developed rapidly, perhaps by its specific object is increasing

One other phenomenon that the presence of the poor classes in Japan, it's "net cafe refugees", the new type of homeless people in Japan, mainly the youth. The number of these is not large, but it has proved the germ egg of a society where the gap between rich and poor will become more profound. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan, January 7/2008, approximately 5,400 net cafe refugees in Japan (6, p.33). "Residents of net cafe refugees" is defined "as those without stable jobs, work and paid by the date, low income, can not afford the monthly

house payment, no social insurance, almost live through the night at the internet cafe". A cheap system for the poor has also been formed in Japan: cheap restaurants, cheap luggage box, cheap refuge and of course a simple task with low wage. If the dark cloud of the Japan's economy remains stagnant and aging society continues to devolve along with its problems, then the gap between rich and poor in Japan will become more deeply identity

5. Globalization and traditional culture

Along with the trend of globalization, more than 10 years up to now, foreign culture was introduced in Japan strongly and influence deeply and widely to lifestyle and habits in daily life of Japan.

. Looking on the surface, the gaudiness and business of cities in Japan is no different than other Western cities. Western culture has crept in every corner of life, habits of living and food in Japan. American fast food style outlets like McDonald systems appears everywhere and attract most of the young Japanese. Dress of the Japanese people today has Westernized, the traditional Kimono dress rarely occur, the Japanese it is, only wear it on special occasions such as holidays in a human life (the step at age 20) and wedding Silhouette of the traditional Kimono only subtle a little in the Yukata dress (summer Kimono, much simpler and cheaper cost as tens of times the actual kimono) are worn on festive occasions such as summer Obon holidays, days of the sea...

Daily living habits of Japanese people also changed, such as the preparation of Japanese-style breakfast, box rice-ball (onigiri) prepared by the mother in early morning for her husband and children, is now replaced by Western-style breakfast with bread and coffee with milk, rice-ball can also be purchased immediately available in supermarkets and 100 yen shops, just put it a few minutes in the microwave are edible. Fast-food restaurants is also a favorite choice of teenager classes.

On the occasion of long holiday such as the golden week (beginning in May), Obon festival, Tet, the habit of returning home to visit parents and relatives gradually fade, replaced on the tour to foreign countries to take a rest and recreation. Even a traditional habit of the holidays is go to the Onsen hot spring, relax at the Ryokan (inn) in Japanese style, enjoy the food and the traditional houses in Japan have lost gradually.

According to the Asahi newspaper, at the beginning of 2010, across the country leaving only about 55,000 Japanese Ryokan (inn), down more than 1/3 compared with 80,000 inn 10 years ago Ryokan is a traditional culture of Japan typically exist today. Resting at the Ryokan, guests will enjoy excellent services in Japanese style, enjoy traditional cuisine and relax in rooms with tatami mats layout as every few centuries ago. Price of staying in Ryokan is expensive, per night range from 3 to 5 thousand yen (approximately 300 to 500 USD), a price no less than 5 star hotels. However, if you want to taste the lifestyle of traditional Japanese

Ryokan you are impossible to not go to Ryokan. But the sad thing is, lately there are many Ryokan bankruptcy because there is no successor. The young Japanese today do not want to be Okami (tavern hostess) as their mother - who has a gentle demeanor, elegant voice and food service attitude said out of ink, and the underlying charm after a deep understanding of their traditional culture. Ryokan inn also is losing customers because its price is too expensive in the difficult economic situation today, and also because young Japanese no longer feel the charm of traditional culture to enjoy again. Some Ryokan, to compete and survive, are forced to reduce prices and this will mean cutting services to its perfection, and so on, Ryokan will not be a "Ryokan" anymore. Recently, the movement arose that wealthy Chinese buy Japanese Ryokan for business, launched the cheap system Ryokan. The "popularity" if Ryokan Ryokan run bay Chinese broken the beautiful traditional culture of Ryokan, or the new entertainment and consuming habits of Japanese broken it.

6. Entertainment culture and "culture export" strategy of Japan

Being one of entertainment culture of Japan, Manga (Japanese cartoon) and Anime (Japanese animated film) has developed rapidly from 1970s and impact strongly on entertainment culture of the world recently. Manga (includes two words: Man - no purpose, improvisation and Ga - paintings) refers to the comic style of Japan. Now, with the 2.26 billion copies a year (average of

17 volumes/person), Manga has about 40% of the edition of books, newspapers and magazines in Japan, and on average each year one Japanese spends approximately 3,777 yen (approximately 40 USD) to buy the Manga. Revenue from the Manga publishing industry was 481 billion yen.

Also a "hot" factor in cultural entertainment as Manga, Anime (Japanese animation) began to appear in 1960s and quickly gained the Japanese people and the world love to take on today. Anime is a term invented by the Japanese, based on Animetion (cartoons), to just imply Japanese cartoon-style. Anime is closely related to the Manga, because most of the anime script is adapted from the works of best selling Manga. Many Japanese Anime movie won the Oscar for "cartoon." Anime's revenue in 2006 was up to 94 billion yen, mainly income from best selling Anime DVD.

Manga and Anime now has a large fan base, known as Otaku, available in worldwide. Otaku organize quite diversified festive activities, particularly three major annual events: Comiket, Otakon and Anime Expro. Comiket is a specialized international fairs for Manga and Anime, held in Japan two times a year, with over 20,000 booth. Expro Otakon and Anime Festival is held in the U.S., with many participation, and an opportunity for manufacturers of Anime promote their products to the world.

Besides the Manga and Anime, Japanese fashion is a field of cultural influence in the world. Currently, the Kawaii fashion line has become popular and Kawaii and

has become one of internationalized word, like karaoke or sushi ... Image of this fashion may encounter in any country, Europe or Asia, Japan or America, even in Vietnam. A survey by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Japan conducted in February 2010 with the name "Map of consumer trends in Asia" (7), mainly to investigate consumer fashion, cuisine and way of lives of four major cities in Asia which are Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok (Thailand) and Mumbai (India). The survey showed some unexpected result as Kawaii is known quite large, accounting for 50% proportion of respondents in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangkok. The amount of people who love Kawaii also up to 40% in Singapore and Bangkok, Hong Kong is 30%, Mumbai is 10%. Thus, we can say, Kawaii fashion reflects the trend to internationalize the Japanese culture today.

The strong development of Japanese culture and its deep impact on the cultural life of the world today has become a topic discussed in the Government, and the idea of "exporting Japanese culture" abroad outlined as plan to become one of the country's development strategy in the new era On 8/6/2010, the Japanese Ministry of Economy announced strategy to build "The beauty of Japanese culture" (Cool Japan: Cool - stands from kakkou ii, that is pretty, cute, modern...), to develop cultural industry of Japan, including areas such as comic books (Manga), animation (Anime), fashion and food culture of Japan ... abroad.. With the support of the Government, Japanese

cultural festival will be held in many countries, to bring awareness about a rich Japan in cultural creativity, attract talents in the field to the authoring environment in Japan. Besides, for the emerging markets in the region, especially China, the Japanese government also plans to conduct market surveys in this cultural industry, and open the Culture Division "Cool Japan" at the important local and support for Japanese cultural companies to penetrate this market. It can be seen within the next 10 years, the Japanese government considers the development of cultural industry in foreign countries is one important policy in national development strategy.

7. Conclusion

National character and culture of Japanese behavior itself was a valuable cultural asset to be celebrated in the world for decades, and recently, once again demonstrated its strong vitality. When the great earthquake, tsunami and nuclear incidents occurring simultaneously in Japan, no chaos, no looting, no pillage people here still hold on the order of a society where the united as one, joint efforts to overcome difficulties has become the common qualities of all members of society. As Thomas Lifson (12), in Japan, "shame culture" become even more heightened than "guilt culture" The actions of each person to be bound by the assessment of those around them rather than the acceptance of the customs. One can not feel happy while those around him is miserable. The patience, try to work in a discipline such as those around them and joint efforts to achieve common goals is

the method of Japanese behavior. They succeeded by a regime that operated in the maintenance of social order and good behavior. This is a powerful vitality helped Japan rose from the ruins after World War II, and the last great disaster may eventually become a boost to help revive Japan's strong growth.

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