Expectations of a Low Birth Society
—From the Perspective of Historical Demography—

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Abstract: Fertility in Japan has fallen under the population reproductive standard for the past quarter century and it continues to decline. The low birth rate has precipitated the demographic aging of Japanese society which has produced projections of a population decrease. Studies on the merits and demerits of a low birth rate vary, but the general concern is that a low birth rate is debilitating to both society and the economy and will lead to the eventual ruin of the country. This unprecedented transition is very alarming, but it is not necessarily an abnormal phenomenon in terms of historical demography. The objective of this presentation is to evaluate Japan’s low birth rate from a historical demographic perspective. Firstly, the long-term population wave over the past 10,000 year period, which is closely linked to systematic changes in Japanese civilization, will be discussed. Secondly, the trend toward late marriages and low child births that occurred during the latter half of the pre-modern Tokugawa period will be discussed. Lastly, if Japan achieves the status of a prosperous, aging nation with a low birth rate, its accomplishment will contribute greatly to resolving the global population, environmental, and resource issues.

Key words: Low birth society; Population decline; Demographic transitions; Civilization system; Historical demography

Presentation of the Issues

It is an honor to be present at this prestigious symposium and I am grateful for the opportunity to address the many academically renown colleagues assembled here today. However, despite this fact, I am slightly apprehensive that I may not be an appropriate speaker in terms of the paper I am presenting and I hope that my presentation will serve as a useful source of reference.

The first major underlying reason for my concern is that I am not a population analyst or an expert on economic issues. My field is historical demography, which is centered on research pertaining to the populations in pre-modern
society that predates the establishment of population dynamics or the population census that is characteristic of the study of modern demography. As one who is constantly viewing the history of populations from the standpoint of past societies, I am concerned as to what suggestions about the present and the future can be proposed.

Secondly, I view the low birth rate and the approaching population decline in a positive light. It is my understanding that I was invited to speak at this symposium because one of the trustees happened to read an article of mine that was published in a journal. The following quotation from that article largely summarizes my standpoint. “The national and the local governments are desperately trying to forcibly raise the number of births, but they do not have the time, revenue, nor the ideas to squander ... the time has come to seriously endeavor to formulate a plan on land usage and to create a social framework suited to the needs of a society with a declining population, in order to allocate production facilities and social capital prudently within limited financial resources. As one of the foremost nations faced with a low birth rate and aging population, establishing a prosperous society characterized by a declining population will be Japan’s contribution to the international community.” Therefore, I am afraid that by proposing that the low birth rate is a welcome phenomenon before my distinguished colleagues, whose energies are dedicated entirely to resolving the issue of Japan’s low birth rate, I do so at the risk of being tarred and feathered.

Japan’s fertility rate has continued to drop, which has driven the country’s low birth rate and aging population. Moreover, it has been predicted that a decreased population will become a reality within the next ten-year period. One of the series of transitions, which is anticipated to occur, is the debilitation of Japanese society and the ensuing ruin of the country. This unprecedented transition is most certainly very foreboding and studies on the merits and demerits of a low birth rate vary. But the overall consensus has been an emphasis on the negative aspects produced by this phenomenon; and this symposium is one means of addressing these fears and apprehensions for the future. However, this is not a phenomenon which requires our acknowledgment, denial, or our attempts to raise the birth rate.

Although the current low birth rate and decreased population is an unprecedented occurrence in recent Japanese history, it is not an abnormal phenomenon from the standpoint of historical demography. There has been a stagnation in population growth throughout different periods of human history. Additionally, the issue of population decline is a problem that is not restricted to Japan alone, but it is an issue that confronts most of the European nations as well.

The objective of my presentation is to assess the issue of a low birth rate from the perspective of historical demography and the study of civilizations. The report is divided into the following three sections. In section one, demographic transitions that occurred in the Japanese archipelago 10,000 years ago will be discussed. The close link between the wave of populations that have occurred over an extended period of time and the shift to a civilization system will be explained. The second section of the report will discuss the trend toward late marriages and a low birth rate that occurred during the Edo period. It is a well-known fact that population growth stagnated during the 18th century which proceeded an era of high population growth in the 17th century. The characteristics that distinguish this period will be described from the historical perspective of civilizations. Lastly, the low birth rate that characterizes contemporary Japan will be discussed from the context of historical demography.

A History of the Demographic Transitions in the Japanese Archipelago

The demographic transitions that occurred in the Japanese archipelago during the last 10,000
years are characterized by continuous growth followed by a period of population decline or stagnation. As shown in Fig. 1, population growth is seen in large waves. The first growth wave occurred during the Jomon period. The population grew from 20,000 people in the early Jomon period to 260,000 by the middle Jomon period and declined from a population of 160,000 in the latter Jomon period to 80,000 people in the late Jomon period.

The second population growth wave occurred during the Yayoi period (population 590,000) to the Nara period (7th century, population 5 million) and stagnated or declined from the Heian period (10th century, population 6 million) to the Kamakura period.

The third growth wave began in the period of the Northern and Southern Courts (14th century). Although clear population statistics from this period are nonexistent, it is hypothesized that it is linked to the population explosion that occurred during the early Edo period (17th century) when the population, estimated at about 12 million in 1600, grew to 31 million by 1721. However, as can be seen from the statistics obtained from a nationwide population survey taken by the Tokugawa government, the national population was only 32 million in 1846, which is indicative of a stagnant population growth which lasted for over 100 years from the mid-Edo era.

The fourth wave began during the early 19th century. From the final days of the Tokugawa government-Meiji Restoration period to present day Japan, the population has greatly increased. However, this large population growth rate, which occurred in tandem with modernization, was not permanent and was predicted to level off at the beginning of the 21st century. The underlying causes of this population growth wave are firstly, environmental changes, and secondly, contact with other civilizations which in turn, triggered the shift to a civilization system.

1. Environmental changes
The environmental changes which contributed to the fourth population growth wave will be explained very briefly. The large population decrease or devastation which occurred in the latter half of the Jomon period is attributed to climatic changes. In the aftermath of the glacial period, the early Jomon period was distinguished by a warm climate which reverted back to a colder climate by the middle Jomon period. The marked decrease in population occurred mainly in the Tohoku, Kanto, and Chubu mountainous regions. According to one theory, the population is surmised to have been drastically reduced due to contact with ethnic groups from China and Korea that contributed to the onset of new diseases.

The underlying cause for the static growth in population during the Heian and Kamakura periods is not known. It is said that the study of medieval Japanese history is presently in vogue and the prevailing concept promulgates “an illuminated medieval age” supported by an active populace. Unfortunately, from the standpoint of population history, the Japanese medieval period is categorized as the Dark Age. The static population growth rate of this period is not due to the advent of a cold climate, but a warm climate accompanied by dry weather, which is believed to have led to unstable conditions in rice cultivation. National management of the rice fields based on an ancient legal system was destroyed and the establishment of the

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![Fig. 1 Long-term Trends of the Japanese Population (Early Jomon period–2100)](image-url)
manor system may have also affected population growth. These climatic changes may have also indirectly caused the fall of the Taira government centered in western Japan and the victory of the succeeding Genji clan which moved the seat of government to eastern Japan.

Stationary population growth in the latter half of the Edo era may also have been affected by climatic changes. The period from the 18th to the 19th centuries is also known as the little ice age due global cooling. The three great famines which occurred from the 1730s to the 1830s stemmed from long, rainy spells in the summer, the lack of sunlight, lowered temperatures, and floods which devastated the rice crop. The situation was further compounded by the onset of disease. The atmospheric conditions that prevailed during the crop failure of 1993 were similar to the conditions that occurred 200 years ago.

Then why is the growth in population becoming static despite the continued onset of global warming? Because the static population growth in the past and the decline in population are not due solely to climatic changes.

The French historian, Braudel, who greatly influenced the study of history, claimed that the changes in population were the progressive outcome of a materialistic civilization and the foremost index that reflected progress. This definition aptly describes the long-term population growth wave seen in the Japanese archipelago. Japanese civilization is based on a cumulative 10,000 year history. It is comprised of at least four segments when analyzed in terms of the long-term population growth wave.

2. Transition to a civilization system

The civilization system refers to the human collective or community lifestyle and the term is used to signify culture or a living system. We devise tools, machines, buildings, customs, institutions, laws, and a variety of other components to help us create a life of comfort and convenience. These components have become the second environment for human beings. Just as we refer to an ecosystem to describe the relationship of an individual or groups of living organisms with the external environment, the relationship of human beings with all of the components that have been created by and surround human beings is called the civilization system.

The characteristics of the four civilization systems that developed in the Japanese archipelago in conjunction with the population growth wave are shown in Table 1. Various factors such as the largest population, population density, stage of civilization, the major energy resources that supported the society, and the predominant economic system that comprised each civilization system have been listed. Additionally, energy usage, the type of social community, and the predominant staple foods have also been given. Although there are many more factors which need to be reviewed, these are the factors that have been included in this paper.

The first population growth wave, known as the Jomon civilization system, was based on the natural environment and the basic activities were hunting, collecting, and fishing. The lives of the Jomon people were deeply linked to and greatly affected by the natural environment.

The second population growth wave spans the Yayoi, Nara, and Heian periods. Triggered by the development of the rice field farming system, it represents the transition to an agricultural society. A national legal government structure also developed in conjunction with the spread of rice field farming and a legal system, construction of capital(s), the family register, a government system of land distribution, a written language system based on Chinese characters, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and other institutions were introduced from China (T’ang dynasty).

The third population growth wave is believed to have occurred during the Northern and Southern Courts period. The period from the 14th to the 17th centuries was a major transitional period in the history of Japan comparable in significance to contemporary times. The advent of a socioeconomic was the underlying cause of this
transition in the civilization. A market economy, which grew within the framework of an agrarian society, accelerated productivity and triggered economic growth. This socioeconomic chain of events is called the making of an economic society. The impact of the market economy on the rural community created narrow areas of cultivated land, and established small farm management centered on family labor, which was an integration of labor intensive farming technology and diligent labor. Some researchers have called this phenomenon an industrious revolution.

Wrigley has referred to pre-industrial England as an advanced organic energy-based economy and Japan with its advanced socioeconomic fits this description as well. Although it was an agrarian society that was dependent on the land (natural environment), it was a society with high productivity and an advanced system of land usage. Japan’s mode of behavior, sense of values, and social structure underwent a major transition. The country was influenced by the Chinese, Portuguese, and Dutch civilizations. Japan’s traditional culture and many familiar aspects of the Japanese lifestyle evolved and developed at this time.

The fourth population growth wave occurred in tandem with the establishment of the industrialized system. In the 19th century, the population growth rate in Japan, which had remained static for about one century, gradually began to accelerate. During the final days of the Tokugawa government, the energy supply was nearly...
at a bottleneck in conjunction with a rise in living standards. The European and American system was introduced following the opening of Japan to the West and its entrance into the prevailing global system of that time. The Japanese economy which incorporated the framework needed for modernization began to industrialize at the end of the 19th century. However, like the three preceding population growth waves, the current growth in population is anticipated to become stationary in the future and industrialization is nearing maturity.

3. A static population growth society and a mature society

Let us assume that the population approaches the maximum carrying capacity of a society or civilization following a long-term growth in population. It gradually becomes difficult for productivity and the population to quantitatively increase based on the current system and technology. This type of society is defined as a mature society. When society reaches this stage of maturity, tension develops between civilization (living standards), the environment, and the population and it becomes vulnerable to climatic changes. A mature society at first glance is a static society. Certainly, development is difficult in a mature society since it represents the aftermath of an expanded population, cultivated land, residential areas, and productivity. It is also a period of prosperity and thriving culture.

In studying the Jomon culture of the Sannai Maruyama ruins, it has been deduced that the culture was based on a fairly advanced social structure and technology for a society rooted in the natural environment. The Nara period, which introduced the ancient legal codes, literature (Chinese characters), religion (Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism), and various other productivity related technology from China, has a strong foreign cast. In contrast, Japanese culture flourished during the Heian period when the legal system was more relaxed and less stringent. The kana writing system evolved and “The Tale of Genji”, the famous literary work, was written in this period; and in the area of religion, all Buddhist sects which developed after the Tendai sect were Japanized. This was truly an ancient mature era.

Japanese society in the Edo period around 1700 had become a stationary. This became a confirmed reality during the 1720s and population growth for the next 100 years or more remained static. Although the people were not materialistically blessed as today, the culture flourished — it was a time when artists exhibited their talents, the populace enjoyed the theater and hobbies, pleasure-seeking activities, trips, and other aspects of an active culture. Scholars and other intellectuals were earnestly engaged in absorbing knowledge from the West. The educational facility for the populace, the temple schools, increased from the 1780s and experienced an explosive boom during the final days of the Tokugawa government. In tandem with the rise in the literacy rate, there was an increase in the number of published books. The restaurant industry flourished in the urban areas of Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto and the populace enjoyed an abundant food culture. These social conditions are far removed from the image of a populace eking out a destitute living.

The Population in the Latter Half of the Edo Period

I would like to discuss in detail the latter half of the Edo period as exemplar of a mature civilization with a static population. There is an accumulation of historical demographic research findings on the population phenomenon of this period, based on the religious investigations that were conducted to contain the spread of Christianity, the death registry of Buddhist temples, and other sources of information.

The contradictions within the Tokugawa government are said to have erupted during the latter half of the Edo period, which is better described as the collision between the developing market economy and the prevailing economy based on feudal directive. The feudal lords who
were levied a land tax and faced with financial difficulties were drawn into the commodity economy. The situation was further compounded by bad harvests which caused a large number of farmers to starve to death, in addition to miscarriages and the practice of killing unwanted children which cumulatively contributed to the static population growth. The commonly held opinion is that static population growth was caused by a rising mortality rate and the functioning of what Malthus referred to as the positive check.

1. Analysis of the Malthus population theory

The year 1998 was the 200th anniversary of the publication of “An Essay on the Principle of Population” by Malthus. In this paper, Malthus advocates that the population is constantly striving to increase, but the limited production of living resources inevitably produces social confusion such as famine and war which leads to a rise in the mortality rate and static population growth. In view of the life ethics and technological limitations of that time, the solution was to restrict population growth through restrictive measures such as marrying late or remaining single throughout one’s life, in order to prevent the occurrence of war, famine, and other tragic events. It is self-evident that if population growth was disregarded, living standards would fall to survival levels.

When Malthus’s essay was published in Europe, Japan was recovering from the aftermath of the volcanic explosion of Mt. Asama and the great famine of the 1780s. Farmland was devastated and population growth was at rock bottom levels. The conditions matched the criteria described by Malthus. In addition, climatic cooling began in the 17th century. However, the impact of bad harvests ended within a relatively short period of time and population growth continued to be sustained. In contrast, when the population surpassed 30 million in the 18th century, the carrying capacity within the Japanese archipelago had reached its limits, thus producing static population growth. Excessive development caused by economic growth had debilitated the capacity to absorb unexpected traumas. The cooling climate raised the population carrying capacity which triggered the occurrence of tragic events.

The agrarian society of the Edo period was dependent on agricultural products. Due to the nonexistence of modern scientific technology to prevent disasters, disease and insect damage, Japanese society was strongly affected by the natural environment. It was not a society that had an adequate system of information, transport means, and policies to cope with famine and other disasters. Subsequently, some regions in Japan were case examples of the gloomy prognoses made Malthus. In cities where the population density was high and the social capital was inadequate, the mortality rate was high in contrast to a low birth rate. As a result, population growth could not be sustained and there was a constant need for a population inflow from the rural areas. This is known as the grave-yard theory in Europe and the United States and the ant lion theory among Japanese researchers.

2. Late marriages and a low birth rate

Contrary to common opinion, the comparatively high living standards that prevailed during the latter half of the Edo period are attributed to what Malthus called the preventive check, namely the existence of a population control factor that lowered fertility. In contrast to general supposition, the mortality rate was declining and the average life expectancy had risen. Improved nutritional intake, easy access to physicians and medicine, a higher public awareness of child care, and other factors reflected a higher living standard. One underlying cause of the drop in the fertility rate in conjunction with a lower mortality rate was the trend toward late marriages. This became especially pronounced when women became engaged in sericulture, weaving, domestic help, and other non-farming activities, thus raising their importance as income earners. As a result, women
were prolonging their marriages by three years throughout the nation. Another underlying cause was a lower marital fertility rate — women were having fewer children. The number of children that a woman had throughout her lifespan averaged six to seven children throughout the 17th century when the annual population growth rate was near 1 percent. But this figure dropped to five or less in the middle of the 18th century with the advent of a lower infant mortality rate, since there was less need to have added children to replace the male heir in the event of death. The increased population in the 17th century also reduced the area of cultivated land per household, thereby curtailing the fertility rate of branch families with lowered economic prospects. Nonetheless, both in the East and in the West, the practice of fertility control was essential. Unfortunately, in addition to long-term breast-feeding and abstinence, miscarriages, abortions, and infanticide were also practiced. However, this situation can also be assessed from a different perspective. Thomas Smith, who conducted his research on a village in Nobi Plain, and others have raised the high possibility that abortions and infanticide were conducted systematically based on such factors as the balance between the genders and the scope of available resources.

Susan Hanley has called the high qualitative living standard that prevailed during this time as “the Tokugawa legacy”, namely the rich culture, effective utilization of resources in the form of recycling, adequate nutritional intake relative to the Japanese physical constitution at the time, and a respectable life expectancy for a preindustrialized society. This high qualitative living standard was realized through planned fertility control, which was a vital precondition to Japan’s modernization. By the early 19th century the components of popular society, specifically mass production, mass consumption, and mass advertising, were already evolving. The energy crisis that would inevitably result from the pursuit of national wealth by the clans and the populace’s aspirations for wealth was narrowly avoided through recovery of the forests due to a warmer and more humid climate, population control, recycling, and economization. The decision to open the country to the international community and pave the way to a free economic system was timely and occurred just before the ecosystem’s equilibrium was destroyed by the economic growth of the Tokugawa period. The immediate start of Japan’s industrialization saved the country from the restrictive civilization system of the Tokugawa period.

**Expectations of a Low Birth Society**

1. **Conditions in Japan**

In the aftermath of the oil shock, the Japanese government published the white paper, *Japanese Population Trends*, in June 1974. The subtitle, “Aiming for a Stationary Population” left an indelible impression. The term, stationary population, refers to a population that neither increases nor decreases and maintains a consistent size and a zero population growth rate. During this time the fertility rate, which was rapidly dropping, showed slight signs of increasing. It also coincided with the period when the baby boomer generation was marrying and entering parenthood. The developing countries were in the midst of a population explosion. Under the consignment of the Rome Club, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology had just published the “Limits to Growth” in 1972 which propounded the theory that countries would face shortages in food and resources stemming from increased populations and economic growth; and warned of the potential devastation of civilization. The oil supply was precipitously decreased at this time as part of the tactics related to the Fourth Mideast War that occurred in the fall of 1973. Oil prices skyrocketed and the global community was forced to confront the reality of limited growth. The total fertility rate (TFR) was barely able to sustain the population size at this time and the net reproductive ratio was near 1.0. However, just as
it is difficult to instantaneously stop the speed of an ongoing giant oil tanker, it is estimated that it takes approximately 40 years for population growth to actually cease. Meanwhile, the mass media was propounding in unison a zero population growth rate. Although I do not know whether this was an effective factor, the fertility rate began to fall from that year and continued its downward slide. The 1.57 fertility rate, that shocked the nation, occurred in 1990 and Japan’s TFR has recorded new lows annually from that year.

The decline in fertility is an issue that is shared by the advanced industrialized nations. European nations have fallen under the population reproductive line since the 1970s. The fertility rate has also fallen under 2 in North America as well. The fact that the fertility rate, which indicates the number of children one woman is expected to have throughout her life, continues to fall under 2 for an extended period of time signifies that population growth is declining. Perhaps this phenomenon represents the first step toward the realization of a society with a static population that was touted during the oil shock. The fact that this goal is about to be realized 25 years later has been a source of national apprehension.

2. Global conditions

In contrast, the fertility rate in developing countries remains high. In particular the TFR in Africa continues to be over 5. However, in contrast to the fertility rate which exceeded 6 in the latter half of the 50s in Southeast Asia and other developing countries, the rate is steadily declining. This is due to successful economic growth and the spread of education. Another important factor is the active national policy adopted by many developing countries to control the fertility rate.

In view of these conditions, the United Nations has adopted lower figures in their revision of future population statistics recently. For example, the average estimate of the world population in 2050 in 1992 was 10 billion, but the revised statistic projected in 1998 for 2050 was lowered to 8.9 billion.

However, the situation is not optimistic. The average statistics are in anticipation of the gradual decline of the fertility rate to below the population reproductive line (2.05). If the fertility rate does not change (high statistics), the population is estimated to reach 10.7 billion. If the world population increases according to the average statistics projected by the United Nations, the population will have nearly doubled to 10 billion by the end of the 21st century.

3. Global population capacity

Will the earth be able to support a world population of 10 billion people? American demographer, Joel Cohen, addresses this question in his book, “How Many People Can the Earth Support?”, published in 1995. He introduces and evaluates more than 65 theories regarding the potential population capacity which the earth can support. The methodology used to support these theories are very diverse and include unfounded theories to system models. The majority of the theories support a maximum figure of 8 billion to 16 billion, the minimum figures were concentrated in the 4 billion to 8 billion range; and the maximum average estimate was 12 billion and the minimum estimate was 7.7 billion people, which was similar to the highest estimations of the world population for 2050 given by the U.N. in 1992.

But this does not mean that the population will continue to be sustained without undue problems. Firstly, there is no guarantee that the world population will remain at 12 billion people. The high estimations given by the U.N. signify that the world population will exceed this figure.

Secondly, there is no guarantee that the estimated global population capacity will remain permanently at sustainable levels. The Medows, et al., system model which includes population, food, industrialization, nonrenewable energy resources, and the environmental pollution variable, postulates that a global population of 7.7 billion people can be sustained. However, even
the most elaborate statistic guarantees sustain-
ability only until the year 2100. According to
the supplementary studies of other researchers,
the population and economy will be destroyed
before 2300.

Thirdly, an universally accepted, standardized
concept regarding the global population capac-
ity does not exist. When oil imports ceased fol-
lowing the 1974 oil shock in Japan, the popula-
tion capacity of the Japanese archipelago was
debated. According to one calculation, if all
level land was converted to rice fields and cul-
tivated without pesticides, fertilizers, or farm-
ing machinery, the land would be capable of
sustaining a maximum population of only 40
million people. This is comparable to the popu-
lation of the latter half of the Edo period. Will
we be able to tolerate a situation where the
majority of the population had to be engaged in
food production activities? If we want to enjoy
an urban lifestyle with an abundant supply of
meat and fruits and to enjoy sports and nature,
an immense amount of land is needed. Accord-
ting to this definition, many countries, including
Japan, clearly support an excess population at
present and it would not be inaccurate to state
that the global population will shortly exceed
the limit.

**Establishing an Prosperous Society
with a Reduced Population**

Recently, the burden of a low birth rate and
aging population on the Japanese economy and
society has been accentuated and debates cen-
tered on raising the fertility rate have been promi-
nent. It is indeed a fact that an increased popu-
lation in the developing countries has contrib-
uted to food shortages, poverty, population
movement across international borders, and
environmental destruction. Additionally, mass
production, mass consumption, and mass dis-
posal that occurs in advanced countries with
high living standards can not be ignored as well.
Stopping the population growth in developing
countries and decreasing the population growth
in advanced countries can be likened to the hero
Kandata who sought his salvation from a spi-
der’s thread.

Simon Kuznitz has defined modern economic
growth as the simultaneous, sustained increase
of per capita income and population growth.
However, when the economy and population
growth become stationary, it does not automatic-
ally mean that per capita income and living
standards become static. Advanced countries
with an industrial civilization that has entered a
maturation stage must abandon the idea of an
economy where growth is expected and taken
for granted. Post modern economics must em-
brace the concept of a stationary political econ-
omy aimed at establishing a high living stan-
dard within a decreased population.

Since the end of the Tokugawa period, Japan
has taken economic and population growth for
granted. However, the country is entering an
age when a population decline will be a com-
monplace reality. Both the national and local
governments are desperately and forcibly try-
ing to increase the birth rate, but do they really
have the time, budget, and ideas to dedicate to
this endeavor? In conjunction with a decreased
population, the population distribution will also
greatly change. In a breakdown of the popula-
tion statistics according to the urban and rural
prefectures and metropolis (May 1997), a popu-
lation decline is predicted in 33 urban and rural
prefectures from 1995 to 2025. In order to allo-
cate production facilities and social capital from
limited financial resources, it is now the time to
seriously build a social organization and to uti-
lize the land in ways that are suited to a society
with a declining population. As the front run-
er nation in terms of a low birth rate and aging
population, Japan’s contribution to the interna-
tional community is to establish a prosperous
society with a declining population.

**Conclusion**

Stationary population growth is another char-
acteristic of a mature society. A society with a
static population growth rate is not necessarily a poor society. The issues which we must address is how to guide the population toward a certain living standard and to determine what kind of mature society should be built. The foremost issue is not the fact that the population will decrease. The average life expectancy during the latter half of the Edo period was 36 or 37 years of age, but the average life expectancy of contemporary Japanese has doubled. A nationwide life expectancy of 50 years was realized only after WWII in 1947. The majority of Japanese children born after WWII live to see their 61st birthday and become senior citizens. The Japanese of today live very different lifestyles from their counterparts 50 years ago and it would not be erroneous to state that they have evolved into a different species of people. There are many problems that must be resolved and building a new social system and fostering new perspectives and values will take time. But we should remember that in every era, changes in the civilization system were realized after much painstaking effort. We should strive to be prudent, while optimistic and remain modest and confident in our endeavor to achieve simple prosperity.

Former Prime Minister Obuchi advocated the need to make the change in our perspectives by figuratively referring to a glass of water in his inaugural speech in January 1999. Fortunately, economists have begun to advocate the view that if measures are taken to build a society that qualitatively adapts an aging, declining population and a low birth rate, regaining balanced economic growth is not an impossibility. When tadpoles evolve into frogs, their gills and tails disappear. Similarly, in order to change an existing system, apoptosis, a resorption of unnecessary organs, is also required for human society to undergo a transformation in civilization. We should not emphasis the pessimistic negative aspects of a low birth society, but look to the positive aspects as well; and confront the reality that was forecasted 25 years ago with strong convictions.

REFERENCES