

Conclusions

A comfortable way of life for the Japanese people, founded on personal relationships

This White Paper examines relationships within the family, the community and the workplace, analyzes the anticipated role and state of these relationships, the recent changes, and the influence of the national lifestyle. A reconsideration of the points that have been raised follows below, and some thoughts are offered about what needs to be done to rebuild these relationships, based upon an investigation of the background factors.

Relationships are becoming brittle due to changes in the economic and social environment and people's attitudes

The shape of relationships at home, in the community and at the workplace, are all changing significantly. At home for example, the behavior of family members is becoming more individualized, and in the community people are becoming estranged from their neighbors, with many people playing very little part in the activities of neighborhood or resident associations. Relationships outside of work are also declining in the workplace, and the extent to which people identify with the company they work for is starting to recede.

There are many possible sources for these changes, and it is safe to suggest that the transformation in the economic and social environment is one such factor. Increases in the numbers of employees and single households are weakening community ties, and changes in traditional Japanese employment practices are weakening ties in the workplace.

Improvements in quality of life and convenience are another factor. With one television set per person and the evolution of home gaming machines, it is possible that family members are becoming more individualized. It is also likely that the progress of information technology such as e-mail is leading to more chances for people to work alone.

Another factor is the changes in people's attitudes. Whereas people once sought extensive relationships within the community and workplace, the recent tendency is to want relationships that are conducted to a less intrusive degree.

It is possible that this weakening of relationships may affect people's satisfaction with their lives, and the economy and society

It is thought that this weakening of relationships is exerting a variety of influences on the national lifestyle. The effects that relationships bring about are diverse, but they can be grouped broadly into two. First, there is the type that brings spiritual comfort and a sense of fulfillment, such as the peace of mind afforded by being with one's family, or the feeling of achievement at having participated in a community activity. Second, there is the effect of creating a certain set of values sought by society

through help and cooperation with other people. These include disciplining children, guarding against fires and crime with other local people, and making a concerted effort with one's colleagues to complete a project at work.

It is feasible that the weakening of ties now prevents people from enjoying the effects of relationships that existed in the past. Though there has been an emphasis on spiritual well-being in recent years, people will not feel any richness in their daily lives if they are unable to obtain mental comfort and a sense of fulfillment because of the weakening of relationships. There is also the effect that losing the values created by relationships may have. If, for example, discipline in households is inadequate, it is possible that this will affect the personalities and abilities of the next generation; if communities' ability to provide the expected education, parenting support, crime prevention and safety are impaired, this may also have an impact on the quality of life of the local people. In the workplace too, it is possible that people will feel more stress and that companies' results—and thereby the nation's economic vitality—will suffer unless there is adequate mutual help and communication.

Twin directions for rebuilding relationships

Considering the fact that the weakening of relationships is impacting on people's lifestyles in various ways, the relations have to be rebuilt in order that the public can adequately enjoy their benefits. Two broad directions toward this end can be considered. The first is to remove the restrictions on maintaining relationships. Though some people may not be seeking relationships that are as deep as they once were, a considerable number would like to have relationships but simply cannot. This suggests that the reality of relationships is even weaker than people are aware. If the limitations placed upon relationships—the reason, in other words, that people cannot enter into relationships even if they want to—can be removed, there is a hope that relationships can be improved overall.

The other direction is devising ways for relationships in harmony with the current situation to be created, within families, the community, and at the workplace. Changes in the economy and society and improvements towards better quality of life and greater convenience are factors in the background of these weakening relationships, but it is unrealistic to expect these contemporary trends to abruptly change. This means that wisdom that can help to strengthen relationships has to be expended, even in the midst of these current trends.

The analyses made in this White Paper raised the following two restrictive factors regarding relationships. The first factor is time restrictions. With the working hours of fathers, the time children spend on after-school studies and the long periods they occupy in front of the television set, the behavior of family members is becoming individualized, and they are able to enjoy less time together. Salaried workers, whose time is restricted, are becoming particularly distanced from community activities. The second factor is the inadequate provision of opportunities to form relationships and

events in which people are inclined to actually participate in. Though there is an increasing awareness about contributing to the community, many people abandon the idea of taking part because of a lack of opportunities and information about participation in activities. Furthermore, even if part-timers and temporary workers want to have relationships outside of work with their colleagues, this simply is not possible for many of them, suggesting that there is a lack of opportunities for people working together to interact.

Moves towards rebuilding ties

In order to provide people with the sort of relationships that they are seeking, the restrictions indicated above must be removed, and devising ways for relationships in harmony with the current situation to be created is paramount. Though they are still only partial, moves to recreate these ties are in fact under way.

Work-life balance

In order to support a balance between working and parenting, some companies have introduced work-life balance programs such as childcare vacation schemes and shorter working hours. The introduction of systems to support balance such as these are now recognized not only as being helpful in securing more time to devote to child-rearing at home, but for leading to reviews of how jobs are carried out in the workplace, and in the long term, to an atmosphere in which colleagues help each other, to a deepening of people's attachment to their company and workplace, and as having a favorable effect on employee's sense of unity. There are also examples of cases in which encouraging people to take paid vacations has reduced the restrictions created by long working hours, and enabled them to secure more time to spend with their families.

Creation of attractive new relationships

New forms of relationships suited to the current economy and society, and to contemporary lifestyle patterns, are also starting to be created. There are examples of homes being designed in ways that prevent family members from becoming isolated, and provide them with chances to spend more time with each other in a natural way, and efforts to heighten families sense of solidarity according to their individual conditions. In the community, local activities that include the participation of salaried workers who cannot take part on weekdays or during working hours can also be observed. At the workplace too, some companies are offering those with a will to learn—regardless of their employment status—with opportunities for self development, and providing chances for employees to mingle with each other, in order to encourage the vitalization of better working practices and communication.

Elsewhere, efforts are starting to be made to involve the community in child-rearing and care, rather

than leaving these tasks entirely to families, and there are also some companies that are supporting parenting through work-life balance programs. Moves to meet the demand for essential services are underway through measures such as these.

Use of Information Technology (IT)

The growth of IT is removing the limitations of time and distance, and contributing to the provision of opportunities for new relationships. For example, people living far away from home can share information using mobile phones and e-mail, thus feeling a sense of togetherness with their families. In the community too, there are cases in which the use of social networking services (SNS) and other services is enlivening local activities. Though the use of IT is in some cases leading to a decline in face-to-face communication and less dialog, much is to be expected from its effective use as a tool for encouraging a range of communication.

The need to create an environment in which relationships can be maintained

Relationships between people will not be formed unless individuals make their own choices. The type of relationships that people choose in order to enrich their lives is, in the final analysis, an individual choice. The government must not try to foist particular types of relationships upon people.

However, since there are people who would like to but cannot have relationships, the government should put the following measures into practice, and create an environment in which it is easier for people to maintain the relationships that they need.

The first measure is the creation of an environment enabling the full promotion of work-life balance. Some companies are already making efforts towards work-life balance, but there is a need to prepare policies regarding the employment environment and promote the raising of awareness and provision of information regarding ways of work and various life plans, so that these efforts become common practice throughout the whole of society.

The second measure is to try to provide opportunities to meet and information about new types of relationships to those who want them. Particularly in the community, it is highly likely that the latent number of people wishing to participate in activities will increase greatly as the baby-boomer generation approaches retirement age. Currently, however, many older people who want to take part in local activities are not actually doing so because of barriers to participation such as lack of friends to join in with or inadequate information about the details of activities. In order to achieve the participation of older people in local activities, it is important that they are given opportunities to gradually build up relationships in the community before they approach retirement age. At the same time, it is now doubtless desirable that efforts are also made in the community to eagerly provide older people with information about activities and create an environment in which they can feel free to participate. Against a background of increasing healthy life expectancy in the future, it may

appear that this is just a case of making more and more time for older people to freely participate in activities, but if all those who wish to do so become involved in community work it may lead to the realization of communities that are even more attractive and in line with the needs of residents.

The third measure is raising the Japanese people's awareness about relationships. In many cases, it is only when they enter into relationships that people first realize their true values. It is possible that some people have yet to realize the value of relationships and are reluctant to enter into them. It is therefore essential that steps are taken to raise awareness and enable people to appreciate the value of relationships. It was with this in mind that the *New Measures for a Society with a Decreasing Birthrate*, decided upon in June 2006 by the Council on Measures for a Society with a Decreasing Birthrate, specifies the need, taken from a long-term perspective, of a national movement to restore family and community links, and to cherish children and life throughout the whole of society. There is much to be hoped for from the progress of citizen-based movements in the future.

Creating a comfortable way of life for the Japanese people through relationships

In a society in which each and every citizen enjoys pleasant relationships, these relationships make it possible for people to relax and spend their lives in comfort. Interaction with the family can bring tranquility to people; in the community too, ties between people and activities can provide services that precisely meet the needs of residents, and this surely brings safety and peace of mind. Furthermore, if the relationships and communication sought after in the workplace are achieved, people will probably be able to continue working with a renewed vigor.

In a society in which those who wish to have children and bring them up can do so with an easy mind, it is vital that families cooperate in raising children, and that an environment in which communities support families is created. Such an environment cannot be nurtured without relationships between people. In other words, the maintenance of attractive relationships between people could change the course of the declining birthrate, and lead to the healthy growth of the children and young people who will form the backbone of future generations.

Changes in the economic and social environment, and in people's attitudes, have led to a weakening in the ties between families, community and the workplace; it is considered that people and society in general are not sufficiently enjoying the values of these ties. However, it is also thought that creating an environment in which people can have the relationships they want, and sharing the importance of relationships, could lead to a stemming of the trend towards their attenuation—and moves towards this are already underway.

If in the future it becomes possible for people to enjoy attractive relationships by halting the trend towards their attenuation, and by spreading the movement toward the rebuilding of relationships

across society, people will be able to lead pleasant and comfortable lives. And it is to be hoped that this will lead not only to enjoyment of life, but to the creations of a society that is rich in vibrancy and kindness.

Past Issues of White Paper on the National Lifestyle

No	Publication date	Title (subtitle)
1	June 26, 1957	The reality of the transformation in the national lifestyle
2	September 25, 1958	The current state of the national lifestyle
3	December 11, 1959	The national lifestyle during economic recession
4	November 28, 1960	Structural changes in the postwar national lifestyle
5	December 20, 1961	The state of the national lifestyle by occupation, and the progress of reform
6	November 27, 1962	Regional differences in the national lifestyle and their causes
7	December 13, 1963	The national lifestyle in a period of economic adjustment, and current lifestyle reforms
8	April 10, 1964	White Paper on the National Lifestyle The trend of better and more evenly spread consumption
9	April 9, 1965	(No subtitle)
10	May 13, 1966	Towards an economy serving lifestyles
11	June 27, 1967	(No subtitle)
12	July 16, 1968	(No subtitle)
13	July 8, 1969	Towards putting a priority on lifestyles
14	June 26, 1970	Creating a harmonious human environment
15	July 20, 1971	Blueprint for a prosperous society
16	August 15, 1972	The Japanese and their society
17	July 31, 1973	Life and its quality in Japan
18	October 1, 1974	Beyond the years of anxiety
19	October 28, 1975	Changes in consumers' behavior and generations
20	September 28, 1976	New undercurrents in people's lives
21	October 18, 1977	Towards new affluence in lifestyles
22	October 31, 1978	New life and solidarity consciousness in the community
23	November 2, 1979	Towards improving the foundations of living and expanding opportunities
24	October 31, 1980	The changing society and how people are facing it
25	October 27, 1981	In search of a good quality of life
26	November 9, 1982	Household economy under low growth and changing regional life
27	October 28, 1983	In search of greater latitude in the household economy and a new image of the family
28	November 9, 1984	For latitude and stability over an 80 year life span
29	November 1, 1985	40 years since the end of World War II: on the threshold of the age of maturity
30	October 24, 1986	In search of an affluent society open to the world
31	October 23, 1987	The higher yen and creation of affluent infrastructures
32	November 18, 1988	The increasing diversity of the Japanese lifestyle and public attitudes
33	November 10, 1989	Creation of wealth in a 700,000 hour lifetime
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35	November 19, 1991	Tokyo and the regions: diverse choices for affluence
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40	November 19, 1996	Rethinking safety and security for a new national lifestyle
41	November 4, 1997	Working women - the need for a new social system
42	December 4, 1998	The middle-aged: their fears and hopes
43	December 10, 1999	Towards a society with a better quality of life and flexible job opportunities
44	November 10, 2000	Volunteering enriches society
45	March 26, 2002	Family life and structural reform
46	May 30, 2003	Deflation and lifestyles: young job-hoppers today
47	May 21, 2004	Changing regional and lifestyle bonds: towards a new public sector
48	August 12, 2005	Perceptions and lifestyle of the child-rearing generation
49	June 20, 2006	Towards a society in which a variety of challenges are possible
50	June 26, 2007	A comfortable way of life for the Japanese people, founded on personal relationships