

# Comparison of Japanese and French political processes over family model change : Focusing on the reorganization of the welfare state

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## Introduction

There is a big difference between the family models adopted by social policy in France and Japan. In France, on the assumption that family and marriage forms are today extremely diverse, social policy systems have been developed on an individual basis rather than using a specific family form. On the other hand, in Japan, based on the existence of a specific family model, the system design of social policy has been continued until now, in units of households rather than individuals.

It goes without saying that the shape of the family is extremely diverse because of historical and cultural factors.. Especially in Japan, which was predominantly a rural society until the first half of the twentieth century, and in France, where gradual industrialization has progressed since the 19th cen-

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tury, the social environment surrounding the family is significantly different.

In France, strong individualistic values and their roots in society also have a major impact on family model. In contrast, in Japan, mother-infant close family relationships are still seen strongly. It can be said that the “Social withdrawal” problem, which is a very serious problem, is closely related to these cultures.

However, in the recent progress of globalization, despite the existence of historical and cultural differences, the family model assumed by social policy in each country is said to be converging. For example, intrinsic equality between men and women in the family and respect for self-selected individuals are becoming universal in the family model assumed by social policy.

I would like to consider some of the factors that make a big difference in family models assumed by social policy in France and Japan.

## 1 Thriving of feminism and change of family model

The first thing to consider is the effect of the feminist movement on the change of the family model assumed by social policy. The central task of the feminist movement until the middle of the twentieth century was to gain women’s common suffrage. In both Japan and France, the feminist movement has fallen for a while because women’s suffrage came to fruition after World War II. For example, in Japan, a large number of female members were born in the 1946 House election, in which women participated for the first time. However, this movement did not continue and the situation in which the number of women members was extremely low was maintained.

In France, in the 1960s the feminist movement was revived with the main goal of establishing legal rights for married women. The movement ap-

peared as a move to seek a revision of the civil code, which restricted the legal rights of married women from Catholic family perspective. Moreover, in France, in the movement of the objections of youth symbolized by the crisis of May 1968, in the 1970s the feminist movement grew rapidly and the movement for the legalization of abortion became a symbol of female independence. With regard to the legalization of abortion, opposition from the traditional Catholic view of the family was strong and deliberation in parliament was not easy. However, due to the energetic activities of Simone Weil, a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, who became the minister responsible, the bill on the legalization of abortion was finally passed by parliament. This triggered a major shift in the values of the family model.

In Japan, the revision of the Civil Code to provide legal gender equality and the legalization of abortion were already realized in the postwar reform led by the US Occupation Forces after World War II<sup>(1)</sup>. Therefore, the feminist movement activated in the 1970s did not make the revision of the Civil Code a major issue. At this time, the movement focused on the elimination of gender discrimination in the workplace and the existence of cultural gender bias such as the idea that boys should not cook at home. Therefore, the feminist movement in Japan during this period was hardly seen to reexamine the family model itself that social policy presupposes. Problems such as the review of the family system have been raised by the appearance of Marxist feminism since the 1980s, but it has no great influence.<sup>(2)</sup>

## 2 Departure from male earner-centered model

The second thing I would like to address is the relationship between employment systems and practices and family models. France and Japan were

once a typical male earner-centered model. It is considered good for women after marriage to concentrate on childcare and housework at home and the labor force rate of women was not high either. Especially in Japan during the period of high economic growth beginning around 1955, the labor force rate dropped sharply except for young unmarried women, and the proportion of full-time homemakers rose rapidly.

It was at the end of the 1970s that differences began to appear between Japan and France with regard to the female activity rate. In times of economic crisis in France, the participation rate of married women was gradually increasing to offset the decline in household income. The change in industrial structure has reduced the workforce in the factories and the diversification of employment opportunities, and the increase in the entry rate of women into universities has led to these changes. By contrast, in Japan, in the 1970s, the participation rate of married women did not increase easily. The background was that it was a single Japanese-style employment system in which the gender division of labor was internalized and based on the practices of long-term employment until retirement.

In France, from the 1970s to the early 1980s, it is considered normal for women not to be full-time housewives but to work to support the household budget, while in Japan, the male-centered income model did not collapse easily. One of the main reasons was the difference between employment systems and practices, including the minimum wage system.

After the 1968 crisis in France, the uniform national minimum wage system (SMIC) was adopted from 1969 with the aim of a minimum standard of living. In contrast to this, the minimum wage system in Japan was originally defined as the wage at market prices by region and sector, regardless of the

minimum standard of life, and the minimum wage without skills or specific qualifications could not live with this salary. <sup>(3)</sup> Therefore, in Japan, even if the labor force rate of married women increases, most of them are extremely low compared to long-term employment male wages and was not considered to support the center of the household budget. This trend continues even now, and the highest incomes among Japanese households are not the ones in which the couple is working together, but the ones with high level income men and full-time homemakers.

In Japan, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in 1985, and prohibited the differential treatment of men and women in the workplace. However, it has not changed that the core element of the Japanese-style employment system, and there has been no significant change in gender division of labor. After all, the change seen in Japanese society in the 1980's was that some female employees were only required to work in the same way as men until now. Furthermore, in a booming economy so-called the bubble economy in the late 1980's, the long working hours became common in many companies, and it was no longer a working environment compatible with housework and childcare. As a result, in Japan in the 1980s, Japan was restructured into the male earner-centered family model.

### **3 Reformism and Conservatism, reconstruction of family care model in social policy**

The third factor that has led to changes in the family model adopted by social policy from the 1970s to the 1980s was the element of the political process, particularly the presence or absence of the change of government.

With the end of global economic growth and recession in the mid-1970s,

recession and the deepening of inflation and financial crisis, some countries sought to restructure welfare-state systems in line with the transformation of industrial structure. In France, the policy of industrialization led by the national technocrat has been adopted since the administration of de Gaulle, but although it has achieved economic growth, criticism has increased because they have caused various social problems. Finally, the victory in the presidential election of 1981 brought about a change of power of Mitterrand.

The Mitterrand administration has implemented various social policy reforms, which were also the promise from the beginning. These included the expansion of public pensions and public assistance, social security system reforms such as the resurgence of labor-dominance at the social security board of directors, and shortening of working hours. Although these social security reforms and shortening of working hours were aimed at overcoming the economic crisis by lowering the unemployment rate and increasing the redistribution of income, as a result these economic policies were not sufficiently effective. However, a series of reforms have led to the expansion of the scope of freedom of individual choice in men's and women's right and work life, such as the improvement of the workforce of young people and women, and consequently the effect of exploring diverse family models.

On the other hand, in Japan from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s, social security reform took a completely different direction from France. The LDP administration in the late 1970s suffered drop in approval ratings and election defeats in large metropolitan areas one after another, but it was overcoming them through public investment such as large-scale civil engineering projects. Large-scale public investment rapidly expanded the fiscal deficit, and tax increases were inevitable. However, the fact that the

prime minister referred to the possibility of tax increase in the 1979 general election was considered the largest cause of the election defeat of falling below a majority. Therefore, the LDP administration has sought to reduce fiscal spending instead of raising taxes. LDP was advocated at this time to pursue policies to curb growth in social policy spending, rather than to seek new resources in this financial crisis, and to avoid tax increases and social insurance premium increases. It was "Japanese-style welfare society theory".

This "Japanese-style welfare society theory" was argued that realization of a high level of welfare service was possible in low public social expenditure. Focusing on the high proportion of elderly people living with their children (estimated at 69% in 1980) and the well-being that companies are offering to their employees, it claims to be a "inclusive asset" of society. And such characteristics of Japanese society are considered to have cultural and historical background. LDP's policy recommendations to rely on such in-family care and corporate welfare have been criticized as ideological claims but not realistically feasible policies. However, in the early 1980s, public opinion claiming inefficiencies in public assistance and medical insurance was strong, and voices calling for the enhancement of social policies that inevitably increased taxes and social insurance premiums did not grow. Rather, not only the management group but also the labor unions avoided tax hikes, and rather than expanding social benefits, there was a stronger movement to expect an increase in real incomes, such as the expansion of household income deductions from housewives.

In this way, in Japan in the 1980s, social security spending was curbed by reducing public assistance and raising the burden rate on medical insurance. In addition, various reforms were carried out to favor unemployed house-

wives under tax and social insurance conditions. As a result, in Japan in the 1980's, a conservatism reform was promoted, which should be called a "re-family basis" model of social policy that "family" should solve all problems like caring the elderly. These reforms did not receive strong political resistance, but rather contributed to the recovery of LDP's approval ratings.

The economic crisis since the late 1970s has made it possible to reveal social problems that were not seen during economic growth, and to move forward with reformation of social policies accompanying a change of government like France, but in Japan the rise of conservatism has made them some tasks to be solved by the family, especially in strengthening the traditional gender role of women.

#### 4 Population decline problem and social benefits

The fourth point I would like to consider is the relationship between the family model assumed by social policy and the political response to population policy, especially the problem of declining birthrate.

In France, raising the birthrate and overcoming population decline have long been policy issues, so the family allowance system, which also aims to encourage birth, has a long tradition. The family allowance, which originally began as part of the company's paternalism, recognized as public allowance in the development of the social security system in the 1930s, and has become a national agreement as the most important feature of French family policy. In other words, in France, the provision of family benefits as universal social benefits has become a core element of family policy that aims to restore the birthrate.

However, in France, the policy issues of family policy began to change

since the 1980s. While there has been no change in the national agreement on universal family benefits, the main issue of family policy was to shift from encouraging childbirth to social integration of socially and economically distressed family.<sup>(4)</sup> With the changes in the circumstances surrounding the family, such as the revision of the Civil Code mentioned above and the increase of immigration without a Catholic cultural background, several policy programs have been explored to include various people in French society.

The RMI system was established in 1988 under Mitterrand's administration as new income compensation system with public assistance. This RMI was aimed at preventing the social exclusion of people who struggle to maintain a minimum life and actively participating in social activities such as working. There have been various debates about the policy effects of this system, and from 2009, it was converted to the RSA system. However, it can be considered that the national agreement has been reached for providing social benefits in order to achieve independence among young people and women with children.

From the debate over the new allocation system, regardless of family types, it is the responsibility of the Republic to provide social support that can be independent as individuals in order to ensure social stability and sustainability. Even in France, the family model assumed by social policy was a major political issue, but the expansion of universal social benefits was forced to assume the existence of diverse family forms.

In Japan, the problem of declining birthrate was not recognized until the 1980s, but rather population control continued to be an issue.<sup>(5)</sup> One of the factors that led to the legalization of artificial abortion mentioned above in the late 1940s was that in Japan where all colonies were lost due to the defeat,

population control was considered an urgent task. In Japan after World War II, the family structure that was modeled in developing various social policies was a nuclear family consisting of couple and two children for many years, and this was regarded as a standard family. And the tax system and social security system were designed to be optimized in this model.

In fact, however, the family system in Japan has been changing dramatically since the late 1970s. The total special birth rate continued to decrease every year from 2.05 in 1974 to 1.26 in 2005, and the lifetime unmarried rate also increased rapidly since the 1990s.<sup>(6)</sup> Nevertheless, at this time in Japan, the issue of declining birth rate was hardly noticed except for some experts, and socialization of parenting never turned into a political issue. In Japan, it is strongly thought that social benefits will be limited only to specific people such as people with disabilities, and it is not familiar with the idea of applying universal policies such as childcare support by social benefits.

The socialization of childcare support has not become the serious problem. The medical care and care problems of the elderly have been the focus of social security system reform since the 1990s, but the public's interest has been concentrated on the public pension system. Childcare support did not become a political issue until the JDP administration introduced child benefits by the change of government in 2009.

## Conclusion

Summarizing the preceding discussions, it is thought that the remarkable differences between the family models assumed by social policy between France and Japan can be explained by three main reasons.

In France, the rise of feminism since the 1970s has become a political

movement calling for various institutional reforms, such as the amendment of the Civil Code and the acceptance of abortion. This resulted in the formation of a social consensus on the existence of various family forms. In Japan, on the other hand, the feminist movement since the 1970s aimed at eliminating gender discrimination in the workplace and overcoming women's economic dependence within the existing family system. As a result, the feminist movement did not advance to the review of the family model itself.

Following the birth of the Mitterrand government in 1981, a revision of social policy has become a major political issue in France and a national debate has also been launched on the family model adopted in social policy. On the other hand, in Japan from the end of the 1970s, LDP faced with the problem of fiscal reconstruction will advocate "Japanese-style welfare society theory". This policy was fancy and acrobatic claim that despite low public spending, rich welfare service would be achieved by mutual support within the family. However, with the recovery of LDP's support rate in the 1980s, this ideological claim had great influence. As a result, in Japan, in the 1980s, institutional reforms called "re-family basis" model of social policy progressed, and it was assumed that various kinds of social care would be handled exclusively by the family.

In France, where concerns about declining birthrate and population have long been recognized as important social problems, a social agreement on social support for childcare was concluded very early. With the diversification of family types since the 1980s, various social benefits to support childcare services were to be maintained on an individual basis rather than at the household level. In Japan, on the other hand, Japan's declining birthrate was not yet recognized as a political issue in the 1980s, and child-rearing support

was derived not from the expansion of social benefits but from the tax deduction in the form of dependents. Therefore, the standard family model was the most income-friendly and falling birth rates did not drive reform in promoting family model diversification.

As a result, instead of adapting the family model to the social environment that has changed a lot since the 1980s, Japanese society have defined a specific family model as normative and have continued to apply a quasi-divergent regulatory policy. These factors have contributed to the downward trend in the birthrate and marriage in Japanese society. In order to plan various social policies in the future with the aging of the population and the declining birthrate, France has succeeded in restoring the birthrate by diversifying the family model, and Japan, which has failed to overcome the declining birthrate.

For Asian countries that are expected to have rapid decline in the birthrate and major shift in population composition in the future, France and Japan's experience will give many suggestions.

## Notes

(1) The democratization of Japanese society developed under US occupation did not reflect the state of American society at the time. Rather, it was based on the expectation that the ideal figure of people involved in the occupation policy called New Dealer would be realized in Japan. This issue of democratization in each society layer was shared in Japanese society for several years after the Second World War, but it would change dramatically from before and after the establishment of the 1955 system. In particular, the school education system aimed at forming the leader of a democratic society was

greatly modified, with the aim of returning to the pre-war education system, and the school board and PTA organization were also modified. In Japanese politics, it is undeniable that education policy ended up in an ideological battle between promoting democratization and defending authoritarian values. This has resulted in the difficulty of policymaking from a long-term perspective on family and child-rearing in Japan.

(2) This is largely related to the fact that the movement of radicalism, symbolized by the school conflict from the end of the 1960s in Japanese society, did not lead to social reform and eventually led to a resurgence of conservatism. After the frustration of the student movement, instead of seeking social system reforms, the tendency to demand for the fulfillment and stability of private life became stronger, and the momentum for radical family system reforms such as civil law revisions was difficult to be born.

(3) There are many discussions about the transition of the minimum wage system in Japan, but here are two reasons why the minimum wage amount is not linked to the minimum standard of living. The first point is the peculiarity of Japanese employment contracts that do not clearly define their duties, as symbolized by the collective recruitment of new graduates. Jobs and wages do not correspond, and there is no basis for the principle of equal pay for equal work. The second point is that the wage level has been completely separated from those corresponding to the minimum living standards such as public assistance. During the period of high economic growth, public assistance has become a peripheral area of the social security system and was intended only for inactive households, such as the elderly and those responsible for long-term care.

(4) The displacement of the main objective of family policy in France from en-

couraging childbirth to poor families is linked to the changing role of the state in the social security system. Since the Social security system reform based on Laroque plan, the French social security system was based on the principle of autonomous management by workers and management, limiting the involvement of the State. However, due to changes in the economic situation, the ratio of taxes to financial resources has to be increased, and the role of the State in the operation of the social security system is being strengthened.

(5) The reason why the declining birthrate was not recognized as a policy issue in Japan until the 1980s can be attributed to the following factors other than the remaining effects of population control measures taken during the post-war reconstruction period pointed out in the text. In the 1980s, the birth rate had already been declining, but during this period, the second baby boom in the early 1970s caused an increase in the younger population and the increase of school classes was an urgent issue. Although the decline in the birthrate was finally an issue since the 1990s, the central political issue at that time was the aging issue such as the introduction of long-term care insurance, and the declining birthrate issue did not become a major political issue. One of the reasons why the declining birthrate problem was not recognized as a political issue is that Japanese social customs that childbirth and child-rearing are private matters in the family and are not adapted to social intervention are also greatly influenced. However, in the recent drastic changes in the circumstances surrounding Japanese families, these customs have become a major factor leading to child abuse and poverty.

(6) The reason that lifelong celibacy has risen sharply in Japan since the 1990s is that despite changes in economic and social conditions, the traditional conception of family and marriage has hardly changed. The family formation

model based on the gender role division created by the modern society has become difficult to continue as the end of income growth accompanying economic growth and women's social advancement. Therefore, in France and other European countries, various family models are being sought by separating intimacy and economic stability, which are the two main roles expected of marriage and family formation. However, Japanese society believes that marriage must remain faithful to the modern family model and play both the role of intimacy and stability. In addition, even under the circumstances of women's social advancement, the fact that many women do not change their tendency to seek more income from their marriage partners is a major factor in the rise in the unmarried rate.

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### **Postscript**

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