Childrearing in Japan from a Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This paper presents an overview of conditions and childrearing practices in Japan from ancient to modern times with an outlook on the future. Each era of history has added a layer of ingrained cultural understanding from the values of harmony in nature and society gleaned from the hunting and gathering age of the early history, through the values of loyalty and excellence in craftsmanship of the feudal era, to the educational enthusiasm that ensured the means of adaptation through succeeding eras. Japan today faces a paradox of placing a high value in principle on children and childhood juxtaposed a declining birthrate. The author suggests social and educational changes that rebalance the social focus and time, encouraging a new view of family and social life, still uniquely Japanese, which may lead to greater quality of life as well as population growth.

歴史的に見た日本の子育て

要約

この論文は、古代から現代にいたる日本の子育ての慣行とそれをとりまく状況を概観し、その結果を踏まえて未来を展望することをめざしている。歴史の時代ごとに、文化的な英知の積み重ねに新たな層が加わり根付いてきた。例えば、初期の狩猟採集の時代に少しずつ拾い集められた自然と社会の調和を重視する価値観や、封建時代の忠孝と職人の技を磨くという価値基準を経て、それに引き続き近代以降に適応していく手立てを確かなものとした教育熱などが積み重ねられてきた。今日の日本は、子どものしつけに重きを置き、子ども時代を大切にしている一方で、出生率の低下に直面するという矛盾を抱えている。著者は、家族と社会生活の新たなとらえ方を通して社会の関心事と時代の要請の均衡を回復しうるような社会と教育の変革を提案したい。その結果、日本人はそのユニークさをたもちつつ、生命と生活の質を高めるだけでなく、人口の増加をも望めるであろう。

Social Patterns from the Ancient Past:

Cultures grow from long experience with the environment and the social milieu that people find themselves in. Japan, an island country in a temperate climate with distinct seasons, began its history with not less than a 10,000-year period of hunting and gathering. The people observed nature's ways and cycles and adapted their lives as they developed a cosmology relating the many spirits (*kami*, or gods) that represented the forces of nature to them. To relate to these spirits, the people developed rites expressing worship, supplication, and gratitude for life's bounty while being profoundly aware of the capricious power of the natural order. Japan was occasionally subject to typhoons, earthquakes, famine or other natural disasters. Illnesses came and went. What were the early inhabitants to make of them? Perhaps to protect their emotional investments, children were viewed as belonging to the gods, simply a part of the natural world until the age of 7. Shinto (the way of the gods) set a special naming ceremony rite for a child at 100 days. Infant mortality rates were high and there was an emotional protection if an infant did not have so much as a name in this world before the gods decided to take it back. When the child reached three, five, and seven years parents presented their children at the shrine to pray for the child and to promise the gods and ancestors that the child would be cared for and raised in the best way possible.

Even today it is considered unnecessary to overly discipline children up to the age of 6 or 7. In general, most children are closely attended to by their mothers. The typical mother endeavors to nurture desirable habits by anticipating her child's needs and providing dutifully and in a timely manner food, clothing and suitable entertainment without the child asking. If the children are unhappy they may shout at or even hit their mother without punishment. The mother may reason with an unruly child, and plead with the child to behave better for his own sake. As far back as the 16th century, Portuguese missionaries noted that Japanese parents rarely hit their children (compared to parents in Europe). They were much more likely to use reason and persuasion. (Itoh, 2010) Japanese in those days raised children in the context of a village and the desire to keep harmony in the group over time outweighed short-term considerations of anger or blame. If the child crossed the line too far, the penalty would be to put the child outside the house (or outside the village boundaries in the worst case) and not allow him or her back until a willingness to cooperate was shown. There were extended family and neighbors to reinforce the social rules. Even today Japanese mothers of young children are far less likely to take defensive action, let alone punish a misbehaving child, than a Western parent would. The concept of *amae* (dependency) is nurtured from a feeling the child gets that the worst thing that could happen would be to be cut off from the bounty of his mother or family. While Westerners are pleased to see their children taking early steps toward independence, Japanese parents have traditionally worked to maintain their early sense of dependency. (Itoh, 2010)

Childrearing Patterns in Feudal Japan:

Japanese families in the past worked, ate, slept and bathed together. Water is abundant in and around Japan. Purity rituals and cleanliness habits developed early for spiritual, social and practical reasons. Each family had a hierarchy with father or oldest active male as head of the household. But mother, while being subservient in attitude, generally maintained logistical and tactical control over food, finances, household routines and education. If the family was an extended family, the oldest son's mother held firm matriarchal reins whether the father was present or absent. Children grew into roles suiting their age levels. According to Itoh (2010), three goals for raising children in traditional Japan were (1) to encourage them to communicate well with others, (2) to realize their role in the hierarchy, and (3) to respect all persons in the hierarchy.

 After the age of seven children were vigorously trained in the specific arts or crafts of the occupational role they would be destined to play as required for the community's survival. As Japan moved from its hunting and gathering stage to agriculture and feudal mercantilism, the number of roles and their characteristics became more varied. Crafts and technologies began to be introduced by Koreans and Chinese from about 300 CE. They also introduced belief systems of Confucian meritocracy and a Buddhist sense of this world's transience amid a wider and more profound universal eternity. Children, in a Buddhist sense, were seen as heavenly treasures to be safeguarded and polished. Confucian style education emphasized competence and the virtues of excellence. The noble warrior class of Samurai that developed during the middle ages had a profound influence on the fundamentals of childrearing throughout all levels of Japanese society. Older children were sometimes sent away from home to be

raised by others for the sake of certain skill development or alliance building.

Interestingly, a Samurai destined for battle was not supposed to have the least regard for family, nor be swayed by the prospect of sacrificing his own child to the effects of war. (Turnbull, 1977) Yet a warrior's honor required that he provide for the education and training of his children even at great personal sacrifice. At any stratum of society whether it be farmers, merchants, craftsmen or nobility, developing properly trained children was considered a worthy gift to their lord. At the same time, if a ruler was displeased with some perceived treachery that took place in an area, an entire village or clan, including men, women and children could be killed at his whim. Confucian concepts of filial piety defined the duties of parents toward their children and children toward their parents in the context of the responsibilities all had toward maintaining and developing a stronger society that would survive any manner of natural or man-made misfortune. Characteristics of loyalty, precision, harmony and perseverance were highly prized.

Children, when they grew up, would be responsible for caring for elders. Filial piety demanded this especially of the eldest son. So people were careful not to create any long-term resentment along the way, nor would self-centeredness be tolerated. If a parent-child relationship went sour or the grown child showed any individualist tendencies that displeased the parents, they could be permanently disowned and their name stricken from the family registry as if they never existed. If a divorce took place, the party deemed most at fault would not be allowed to visit the family or see his or her children. (This is true even today and has become a topic of international criticism of Japan in regards to failed marriages between Japanese and non-Japanese. See Japan Today, 2010.) Therefore, grudges, if any, were either avoided or nursed privately until some socially acceptable opportunity for satisfaction arose in the course of time.

In feudal Japan, adulthood began about age 15 when most children left home to pursue some occupation. Marriages were often arranged so that the social harmony and balance could be maintained. Offspring were considered as property of the parents, so the young person's wish or view in these matters was considered quite secondary to the views of the parents and the perceived needs of the community. In some social classes children were sold into marriages or into occupational servitude and alternatives were rarely offered. It is likely that the average life expectancy up to the 20th century was about 40.

Transition to the Modern Era:

When Japan's feudal age came to a formal end in the mid-1800's with the Meiji Restoration, Japan opened up to the wider world with a desire to participate as an independent entity in the emerging global capitalist economy which then existed in the context of so-called Western Imperialism. The education necessary to support an informed and involved citizenry required expanded levels of knowledge. By 1839 there were 300 private academies and 3,000 temple schools (called *terakoya*) and Japanese literacy rates were comparable to those in the US and UK according to Ellington (2003). Following the lead of the West, Japan developed its first public school system, patterned primarily after the German system in the 1870's. Moral education, which was only secondarily promoted in schools, was primarily a family responsibility in the context of community life. The Emperor Meiji issued an Imperial Rescript, published in 1890, declaring the duties of all citizens toward their Emperor and society.

Know ye, Our subjects:

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education.

Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth.

So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers. The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by Our Imperial Ancestors, to be observed alike by Their Descendants and the

subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is Our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence, in common with you, Our subjects, that we may thus attain to the same virtue.

　　October 30, 1890 (23 Meiji)

Twentieth Century Japan

In order to gain a recognizable place in the imperialistic global order, Japan began an energetic expansionist movement in the late 1800's moving into territories in China and the Eastern part of Russia. The early 1900's witnessed the rise of a militaristic spirit that swept Japan into a prideful imperialistic quest that precipitated war in the Pacific during the Second World War. Children (as all loyal citizens) were viewed as pawns to that grand militaristic design. If Japanese citizens, be they young or old, had any second thoughts about the glory of sacrificing themselves for the Emperor and Japan, circumstances forced them to keep it to themselves. While many a young son was sent to the battlefields, many younger children of the cities were sent off to the homes of relatives or friends in the countryside in hopes of sparing them the worst dangers of bombing or the dreaded American invasion they feared might follow.

One retired international businessman described to this author some years ago his experience at the age of ten or eleven in the mountains overlooking Hiroshima, where he had been sent to take refuge from the dangers in that target city. His teachers, by 1944, recognizing the futility of the war and mindful of the kind of future the young people would be facing, veered from the mandated curriculum to teach the children English and world geography. From a distant vantage point in the hills overlooking Hiroshima he was a witness to the mushroom cloud that rose over his city and destroyed his family home in August 1945. However, the firm hope and insightful vision of his teachers sustained him and his schoolmates, many of whom built successful businesses with global outreach over the course of their lives.

Under American occupation major reforms in Japanese education took place. Japan adopted an American-style system of 6 years of elementary school, three years of junior high school (all mandatory), with 3-year high schools and 2-year and 4-year colleges and vocational school opportunities greatly expanded. A system of private pre-schools also continued to develop and expand. During the initial implementation of public school systems in the Meiji era, around the turn of the century, Christian missionaries had begun to set up preschools for children from ages three to five or six. The Montessori approach found a great deal of resonance with Japanese philosophies of early childhood education. The methodology allows the young children a sense of freedom within the boundaries that attract them to hands-on practical experiences that prepare them for academic learning within a social context. Both publicly and privately funded preschools, based in varying degrees on the Montessori method combined with Japanese cultural foundations became popular and continue today to be an excellent source of early childhood socialization, enculturation, and support for parent education.

In the past 60-some years the public school system, under the centralized guidance of the Ministry of Education has assumed the role in providing the tone and structure of children's lives. As Japan emerged from its post-War period and focused on its economic recovery several imbalances influenced the lives of children. A loss of faith and fear of religious beliefs replaced the blind-loyalty to the Emperor system. The virtues of dedication and loyalty were directed at cultural and economic recovery. One journalist commented that the religion of Japan was being Japanese. However, it was not always easy for children or adults to discern exactly what "being Japanese" implied in terms of behavior and moral choices.

Community life became a shell of its former vitality as workplaces became the central focus of adult lives (particularly for fathers). It was not uncommon for men to work from dawn until late at night six or more days per week. Work-related transfers from place to place for economic reasons led to the break-up of extended families and nuclear families became the norm. Religious influences declined to the barest ceremonial and annual rites. Grandparents, who had been the transmitters of spiritual habits such as daily prayers before family altars, lived further away from their grandchildren. Large companies and government agencies transferred workers every few years. Wives and children would be uprooted to accompany transferred husbands until the children reached middle school or high school age when their education concerns became paramount. Then the father would be transferred away from the family on his own (*tanshin funin*), leaving full responsibility for adolescent children on the mother.

Without other adults to mediate, the discipline styles tended to rock between extremes of permissiveness and strictness, which sometimes turned into abuse and despair. In the 1980's mothers began to enter the work force to make ends meet or to overcome boredom as household tasks were simplified with automated devices and traditional roles were relaxed. More of the "parenting" was left to nursery schools, or the teachers, coaches and "professional" mentors such as cram-school teachers. School clubs and extracurricular study could easily fill the waking hours of youth to keep them out of trouble for the most part.

The Ministry of Education initiated reforms every few years after the end of the Second World War in order to respond to the problems as they were seen to arise (Onishi, 1995). A formal moral instruction period was instituted in public elementary and lower secondary schools from 1958. At first, the purpose was to foster "students' morally desired habits, sentiments and ability to make moral judgment." In many schools the "moral education" hour focused on social equality issues in an attempt to overcome deep-seated class prejudices left over from pre-Meiji eras ("dowa-kyouiku"). Periodic revisions of the "moral education" curriculum were minor due to some tension between local and national boards of education and the trend toward "democratic" thinking. The question among local school administrators regarding the national government's right to be the "moral authority" meant that this curriculum was all but ignored in some instances and the hour used instead to beef up academic skills in preparation of proficiency tests that their students needed to pass to attain the next educational level.

With the question of moral authority tacitly ignored, and with attention of adults primarily on issues of academic and economic competition, children's individual moral nurturing or encouragement offered was often weak and impersonal. Then modern media, TV, pop-culture, "*manga*" (comic books of various genre), and "*anime*" (animated feature movies) began to fill the gap of adult contact in children's lives. As children were given more of their own money to spend, a generation emerged whose dreams, mores and fashions were more and more shaped by the commercial forces and fantasy images of the writers' or illustrators' imaginations.

At the same time a test-oriented and highly competitive school system was at once the pride and the bane of Japanese society. While a greater percentage of students aimed to enter higher education, little-by-little a "drop-out" rebellion occurred. "School refusers" (*tokokyouhi*) doubled and redoubled over the period from 1976 to 1989 (Katsuura-Cooke, 1991). Once the economic bubble burst, and the fabric of life-long employment unraveled in the '90's, the phenomena of NEETs (youth not in education, employment or training) and "*hikikomori*" (young people who became adamant recluses in their own rooms) arose with astonishing rapidity. The estimated numbers of "*hikikomori*" between the ages of 15 and 35 ranged in the tens of thousands even up to one million. (Higgins, 2006) There was clearly a crisis of meaning eating at the core of society. Bullying and classroom breakdown became common problems in up to half of all schools. Suicide rates for adults and even children are among the world's highest. Violence in the family also began to be a noticeable issue. The family, community and schools seem anxious that they may be unable to give children the balanced set of social skills that are needed to carry the society forward. The future that the post-war economic boom aimed to prepare students for seems to be turning out differently.

Childhood in Japan Today:

Today the once booming economy has stalled as Japan strives to find and maintain a viable niche in the emerging international economic order that has not yet found its balance or equilibrium. As manufacturing sectors have moved to cheaper labor markets Japan's unemployment and underemployment rates increased. Related to this instability, birth and marriage rates have been in decline. The Japanese population is decreasing while the average age and life expectancy increases.

Still the relative prosperity of Japan remains high and the education system continues to produce academic results that are measured within the top 10% worldwide. But the whip of competitive popular sentiment expresses concern that Japan is now "losing the academics race" to China and other Asian neighbors. The hopes for the future generations seem to be "a confused medley of dreams." Among the findings of research conducted by Japan's national broadcasting company (NHK) reported by Wilson (2009) "neither children nor parents have a long-term vision and purpose for their lives, but prefer to enjoy their present, everyday life." Yet, the challenges that loom for the future cannot be ignored. Nearly 50% of this year's college graduates will be unable to find suitable full-time employment upon graduation. As economic transitions create uncertainty, established companies are more prone to offer part-time and temporary jobs and fewer permanent positions with guaranteed benefits. It is more and more

common for young people to become "*free-ters*" – moving from one temporary job to another. Young people today are often dependent on their parents well into their mid-twenties and at times even beyond their thirties. Filial piety, once a societal bulwark, now shifts the burden of care to the 50 to 60+-year-olds and beyond, who may be aging themselves while supporting both slowly aging parents as well as a yet-to-be-fully-launched younger generation.

Perhaps due to this somewhat unpredictable and unappealing look into the future, for young people today the marriage rates are about half what they were in the 1970s (about 5 per 1000 population as contrasted to 10 per 1000 each year). The average age of those who do choose to marry is over 28 years for females, and over 30 for males. The mean age for first childbirth is nearly 30 years (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2010). To encourage population growth, families now receive government stipends to help offset the cost of raising children. But it has been reported that fully half of the Japanese population lives alone. Japan faces a projected future where within the next 20 years less than 10% of the population will be under 15 years, while more than 30% will be over 65. Japan boasts the longest life expectancy among all of the countries of the world. Culturally developed habits of modest diet, sanitation and generally good primary health care serve it well. But the challenge ahead is continuing and sustaining the society and the population as a whole. Government agencies concerned with health and welfare are already hard at work considering how to care for the expanding population of people who have or will have no family to depend on in their old age.

Looking toward the future:

The long-term answers will require a new look at the value of human life, a rebalancing of the educational experience for children and youth, and a long-term revision of the economic system in order to make a balanced and sustainable social system going forward. First, there must be a clear recognition that the future of Japan is inextricably linked with the wellbeing of the entire population of the globe. Economic outreach and relations with other cultures must be viewed in the light of reciprocity and harmony, not in blind exploitation. Human geography and history courses could offer an overview of cultures that includes the history of the human family in its diverse cultural settings and belief systems. This would prepare young people better not only for cultural exchange, but enable them to appreciate their social roles in their own moment in history.

Second, as education is needed not only for the body and mind, but also the spirit and heart, the entire balance of educational curricula needs to be reconsidered. How do we raise children so that they will be positive contributors to a sustained and sustainable global future? The collaborative effort of the home, school and community is required. Based on several studies done by researchers at Yamaguchi Prefectural University over the past several years (Aihara, 2005, Higgins 2008, Wilson, 2009, among others), while Japanese children appear to have positive home environments, and schools in general support children's academic and social needs to a degree, on the whole children are missing a sense of purpose and active roles that build a sense of being a valued part of an advancing community. The data collected shows that few children have regular exposure to spiritually nourishing experiences related to religious communities, volunteer or social service activities, or creative activities such as the arts. These particular deficits suggest that children are missing important emotional development experiences in their formative years. Dry academic achievements as a token of competitive dominance alone do not provide children adequate experience-based skills, "richness of mind" or emotionally satisfying reasons for carrying on a society.

There are, of course, positive and reflective movements attempting to meet these challenges. Currently, the goals of the national Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) focus on preparing children for a future of competition as well as contribution on the international level. The goals include improvement of academic skills, improvement of teacher quality, cultivation of "richness of mind," and encouragement of English ability among the Japanese. (MEXT, 2010)

The present objectives have grown out of the "Human Resources Strategy" proposed by MEXT Minister Toyama in 2002, which aims at "cultivating the spirit of Japanese people to carve out a new era – from uniformity to independence and creativity." The proposed objectives include developing "vigorous Japanese who think and act on their own initiative;" cultivating "top-level talents who will lead the Century of Knowledge;" raising up Japanese "who will maintain and create a spiritually rich culture and society;" and Japanese "who are educated through living in the international community." (MEXT, 2010)

The concepts of independent thinking, spiritual richness and extending the view of the Japanese to becoming active in the

international community are new and challenging ones. Yet, the MEXT documents reiterate MEXT priorities that "the first is to develop academic ability…" The inevitable pull back to the comfort zone of standardized academic testing does not allow for easy or uninterrupted forward progress in more creative areas. One former member of the Ministry of Education who is familiar with the entropy of Japan's education system has raised questions of how the current teachers who have been educated in the era of strict uniformity to follow the "cookbook-style curriculum" will develop the creative power and richness of mind in order to pass on such qualities as individual initiative to the coming generation (Tsunoi, 2007). Teachers themselves need more creative nurturing. This point was well evidenced in the recent experiments with a "*yutori*" curriculum that was meant to allow for more flexible use of time and creative teaching, but was regarded as a failure due to the dip in test scores before many teachers even had a chance to learn how to make beneficial use of integrated education projects. Both pre-service and in-service teacher training need to be reviewed and enriched. But even if the schools persist in their focus on academic skills and wrestle with the challenges of an expanding curriculum, perhaps the call to "richness of mind" and "spiritually rich culture" could be answered in the other important domains of education – the community and the home. Families and communities can also consider changes in focus.

Comparing Japan culturally to other countries, using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (2010), Japanese seem to value competition over compassion or caring and the roles between men and women are more rigidly separated and defined. This sets up some false dichotomies in current social systems. In a test-oriented education system, women do well. Women in Japan, who are now the educational equals (if not superiors) of men, no longer view themselves in unpaid or low-return caregiver roles. This is a cultural sticking point when it comes to creating flexible family roles and family communications in the modern world. As women choose to take competitive roles in the marketplace, caregiver roles are more shunned by both men and women. In addition, Japanese score high on the "uncertainty avoidance index" which means that compared to people in other countries, if faced with a situation that may seem risky, the average person in Japan will wish to avoid making a decision to enter into what may be a social situation that could fail.

Asian cultures in general often show a tendency to take a more long-term outlook than other cultures. However, one wonders if this is still true in Japan. Traditionally, the parents and community all but forced young people into marriages (whether they wanted to go or not). Now, there is a reverse trend toward leaving it almost entirely up to the young person to decide. Women used to be forced out of the workplace in order to marry by a certain age. This is no longer true. Although the expectation that women will leave the workplace once children come along is still quite common, the inequity of social support and traditional promotion or seniority systems often means that the choice to raise children will be a life-long economic sacrifice born primarily by women. An increasing number of young women decide to forego having children altogether because it does not seem either socially or economically a "sure thing." To the government's credit, in its attempts to recognize the need for family time, and added financial supports for families with children, child-care leave is now offered to men as well as to women (although most men are loathe to take it for similar fears of falling behind in career goals). Gender equity in the workplace and recognition of the need for fathers to spend more time at home are, however, becoming more prominent in the consciousness of society as a whole.

But one wonders if the time spent in the workplace could be rebalanced all across the board. Might it be possible for jobs to be redefined such that young marrieds, both women and men in child-rearing years, would work about 20 hours per week or so, while a 40-hour work week could be pursued by singles or those with older children up to the age of about 50? From ages 50 to 70 or even 80, if people are healthy, they might drop back down to 30 or 20 or fewer hours of work per week to avoid unhealthy physical stress of longer hours and enabling them to be more generous in the time they spend supporting family and community development as valued elders. Such an approach might help to even out the economic dilemmas of people with no job unable to raise children because of no money, and those with jobs unable to raise them because of no time. Death from overwork "*karoshi*" that has become all too prevalent would also be reduced.

Another of the "choke points" for young people today considering lifestyle decisions such as whether or not to marry or have children include the fact that their academically-focused education left little time for experiential learning of life skills and relationship-building. Could family-life education programs be built into the school curricula so that children and youth have knowledge, skills as well as experience that prepare them and encourage positive views of child-rearing, family and community tasks?

New approaches to community-oriented recreation could also be considered. Recreation time in the past few decades has

largely been taken up in solitary games played either in game centers or on personal electronic devices. Isolation and loneliness has become a way of life – a comfortable cocoon that is hard to escape. This tendency often continues into the workplace where too-long work hours, role-to-role relationships and over-focus on the "bottom line" work tasks allow insufficient time for nurturing social relationships and community connection that contribute to long-term development of the society. Social engineering of recreation areas that promote social interaction could help.

Meanwhile, the power of the media could be reviewed and made better use of. The literature of the pre-teens and teens — "manga," music and animated films — has begun to convey an entirely new mindset that is at once uniquely Japanese and yet expressive of the hunger for "richness of mind" and deeper meaning moving like a current of creative expression beneath the story lines. The characters, forms and subliminal messaging of Japanese animation arts are becoming popular in countries around the world, and are, surprisingly, contributing positively to Japans overall economic growth and image in the world. (Kelts, 2006) Yet, the images often convey a skewed vision of an adolescent world with little positive connection to roles, relationships, concepts, or life tasks that empower growth beyond that narrow age-range. At one end of their spectrum of themes they seem cute and innocent, but benign or inane. At the other end of the scale are those that delve into and glorify subjects that ultimately degrade the human spirit. Only recently has there been a call for regulation of these art forms to protect young people from the more subversive influences they can yield. From time to time in the past popular media has been able to convey the ideals, challenges, best practices and ultimate rewards of child-rearing, family life and social engagement that encourages an expanded outlook on life and society. Literature and media could be utilized to do so again if such goals are seen as enhancing the "richness of mind" that Japanese society is seeking as an aspect of its place in the world.

Conclusion:

There is no reason that Japan should be satisfied with its dwindling population of children given its rich past and general excellence in raising up people of genuinely high quality who are in the habit of promoting harmony and beauty in nature and society. The world could use more such people. Reaching out to fulfill the goal of "richness of mind," if schools were encouraged to add or enhance family life, socialization, human geography and community building topics employing arts and experiential learning into their programs, and were directed to have academic skills developed and evaluated in the context of real-life social contributions rather than merely tested on paper, young people who are given a chance to learn interpersonal and child-rearing skills might develop a wider diversity of talents, and family-life values within the context of a social as well as global outlook. Economic and commercial interests should also recognize that their long-term survival depends on a society that is more balanced between work, social and personal life. More attention in the media and in commercial spheres to values that promote long-term, spiritually and socially enriched environments and life-long learning would also be helpful. A Japan that nurtures the social and spiritual balance, valuing children, families and community life in this way could realize both the desired growth in population and enhancement of quality of life.

The old Japanese legend tells of a leader who visited his people and asked them to show him all of their treasures. One peasant with little to offer in the way of material things stood his three children beside him and proclaimed them as his treasures. According to the legend, the leader was more pleased with this than any other display of wealth. Japan's treasures in this day are indeed its children. Every effort must be made to safeguard, enrich and increase these true treasures.

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