

# The Individualization of Relationships in Japan

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**Abstract:** The individualization of relationships refers to the situation in which a leeway is allowed for the intervention of individuals making choices on their own in developing and maintaining relationships. Two types of discourses on relationships were generated: one is the “liberation” discourse that ties the individualization of relationships to individual self-realization and the demonstration of individuality, and the other is the “deprivation” discourse that ties the individualization of relationships to the weakened state of existing relationships. In this paper, we investigate which the aspects – “liberation” or “deprivation” – appear in family, company and local communities. We found that even though the Japanese are positive about living an individual life free from family and corporate relationships in the context of “liberation”, in order to deal with the risks of “deprivation”, they easily resort to family members and corporate community that formerly controlled or bound them.

## 1. The Individualization of Relationships

The individualization of relationships refers to the situation where the leeway for the intervention of individuals making their own choices deliberately can expand in developing and maintaining relationships. There are two conditions that must be met to establish this situation: the weakening of intermediate groups and the emergence of individual will and emotion. With those two coordinating like two wheels of a cart, the individualization of a relationship may unfold.

What accompanies this is a “pure relationship”. A pure relationship can develop in “a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it” (Giddens 1992: 58). For this reason, commitment by both parties is crucial to this relationship, and that is “essentially what replaces the external anchors that close personal connections used to have in pre-modern situations” (Giddens 1991: 92).

This generated two types of discourses on relationships: the “liberation” discourse that ties a pure relationship to individual self-realization and the demonstration of individuality, and the “deprivation” discourse that ties a pure relationship to the weakened state of existing relationships.

Japan used to be viewed as a society with strong intermediate groups as reflected by its low rates of job-switching and divorce. While Japanese collectivism was valued as the driving force facilitating economic growth, it was also understood as a factor to suppress individual freedom or even a sign of underdeveloped qualities. Under those circumstances, the advancement of individualization was often understood in the context of “liberation”.

However, at least as far as Japanese corporations are concerned, owing to advancing globalization and the deregulation of the labor market since the mid-1990 s, Japan’s collectivistic corporate management (i.e. Japanese-style management and corporate familism) has undergone a major transformation. Increased in number are people whose lifetime commitment and seniority wage system are no longer ensured. Thus, there is no prospect that employers will guarantee a lifetime of stability; coupled with the poor social security system, compared to Western developed nations, today’s individual citizens are, in a way, thrown out into a bare

market. As the course of one's life is further individualized, so is the relationship to the workplace. Increasingly, companies are no longer places that grant a sense of belonging to their employees. The rise in the number of workers in an unstable situation also affects marriage. While the divorce rate has been rising since the 1990s, age at first marriage has also gone up, particularly among low-income earners. In the category of local relationships, owing to the advance of globalization, repeated economic crises, and drastic reduction of public works projects after the 1990s, farming communities and industrial cities in local areas have rapidly deteriorated.

In this manner, the context of compulsory "deprivation" has been conspicuous in the individualization of relationships. Like it or not, individualization is already a fact. On the other hand, people's sentiment anticipating the liberating benefits of individualization also remains strong, which is the hypothesis of this paper.

In the following, in discussing this hypothesis, we will briefly summarize the discourse of liberation and the discourse of deprivation in Section 2, and then discuss the strong aspects in the relationships in Japan in Section 3. In so doing, we will clarify how the individualization of relationships has been accepted in Japan. Lastly, we will point out through comparisons of individualization in Japan and Germany that, although Japanese people expect "liberation" from individualization, due to the insufficient social security system, only the experience of compulsory "deprivation" stands out.

## 2. Liberation and Deprivation

The discourse of liberation may be grasped in two ways. Of the two, liberation from personal relationships is the fluctuation of intermediate groups such as blood, local and corporate relationships, and the latter is the opportunity for expanded latitude in one's choices in drawing forth individuality and bringing self-fulfillment into reality.

### 2.1 *The Discourse of Liberation*

Liberation from family relationships means freedom from the conventional and standardized family which consists of a man as husband, a woman as wife and their children. This leads to the acceptance of various family styles such as same-sex unions (Giddens 1992), common-law marriage, children born out of wedlock, and DINKS (double income, no kids). These weakened family relationships have been described as "the privatization of the family" (Isoda / Shimizu 1991; Isoda 1996), "family as a lifestyle" (Nonoyama 1996), and "the essential individualization of the family" (Yamada 2004). Also, family individualization is frequently linked to the issue of women's liberation. In other words, individualization is seen as liberation from existing gender roles.

Liberation from local relationships brings new connections beyond the burdensome ties of the neighborhood. For example, Fischer (1982) pointed out that heavily populated, diverse urban societies urge citizens to have relationships with those who are "just friends", not included in the existing frameworks of blood, neighbor, and corporate ties, generating subcultures. In recent years, there have been a number of discussions suggesting that the emergence of new relationships such as NPOs and NGOs, are free from existing local frameworks.

Those discussions suggested that liberating corporate relationships would be welcomed by both companies and workers from the standpoint of managerial organization theory. In other words, the liberation of existing corporate relationships could contribute to an increase of autonomy and spontaneity of each worker as well as the development of flexible relationships, which, in turn, would lead to an increase in organizational efficiency (Baba 2005; Takao 2005) and workers' self-realization (Ota 2000; Watanabe 1994).

## 2.2 The Discourse of Deprivation

In contrast to the above, the discourse of deprivation views the aforementioned weakening of intermediate groups and the expanded latitude for self-made choices in developing and maintaining relationships as a reflection of the shallow state of today's relationships.

In the first place, the relationships that have lost the support of such intermediate groups as blood, territorial, and corporate ties are always vulnerable since they are in danger of being dissolved depending on the decision of individuals. Giddens, who examined the pure relationship, discussed its weakness: "But shorn of external moral criteria, the pure relationship is vulnerable as a source of security at fateful moments and at other major life transitions" (Giddens 1991: 187). This kind of discourse is addressed in various situations.

For example, today's marital relationships are not as secure as conventional marital ties used to be. Thus, if either partner's love falters, the relationship may become unstable and collapse, leading to family instability. Community theorists have often pointed to the unstable nature of regional relationships. For example, Bellah criticized relationships becoming increasingly subjectively based as the chance of making one's own choices increased: "people could meet more easily and their intercourse was more open, but the ties between them were more likely to be casual and transient" (Bellah et al. 1985: 116). As for corporate relationships, the loss of the corporate community as a result of adopting a performance-based wage system or reexamining lifetime commitment is said to be causing communication failure and bullying at work (Kaneko 2007).

The two key points of these discourses are as follows. First, the weakening of intermediate groups will cause relationship anxieties along with unsettling feelings about existing relationships. As a result, people will be constantly exposed to the fear of seeing existing relationships go sour and then break. Anxieties over marriage, regional relationships, or the boss-subordinate relationship all stem from that. Those relationships could no longer be supported by particular social foundations. Conversely, the newly emerged relationships supported by individual will, needs, and emotions cannot dispel people's anxieties since they can be dissolved once the partner has a change of heart.

Rather, in those relationships, because the continuing requirement is to satisfy the participating members, people become excessively self-conscious or nervous over the mood of the participants. This is the second key point. Doi (2004) called this kind of relationship a "heavy relationship", in which people keep guessing what the other party is thinking while trying to hide their own feelings; he pointed to the shallow nature of young people's friendships. Thus, the individualization of relationships can easily lead to the discourse of deprivation.

## 3 The Individualization of Relationships in Japan

Now, in the relationships of Japanese people today, which discourse is more applicable? Let us examine this based on existing studies and past statistics.

### 3.1 Family Relationships

In Japan, the dual-surname system is not legally approved, and the percentage of out-of-wedlock children is, due to legal discrimination, only about 2 % (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> In that respect, it is difficult to say that the discourse of liberation is applicable to Japan. Although the number of

<sup>1</sup> Thus far there is no statistical data available on common-law marriage, so its reality remains unclear. However, knowing that the number of illegitimate children has not dramatically increased, we do not foresee a major increase in the number of common-law marriages.

unmarried young men and women has increased, those with “no intention of getting married” account for less than 10 % (male 8.7 %; female 8.0 %), meaning that the desire to get married remains high.<sup>2</sup> In view of these facts, we believe that the increase in the number of unmarried people is a result of the deprivation by individualization rather than that of liberation by individualization.<sup>3</sup>

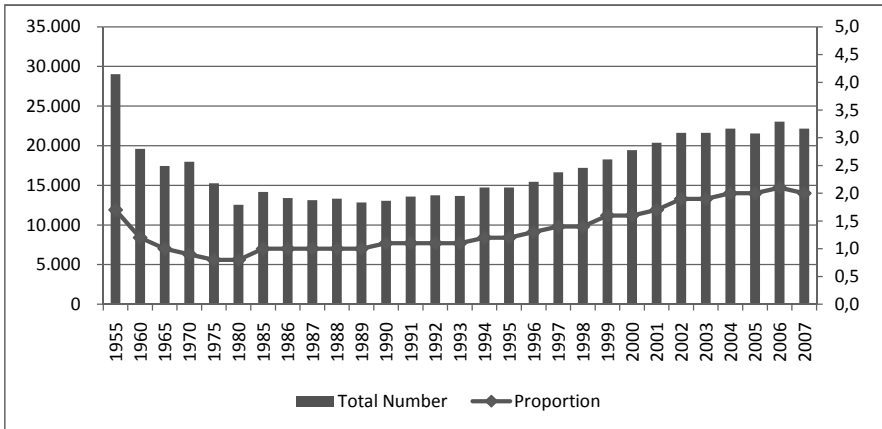


Fig. 1: Changes in the percentage of illegitimate children in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Vital Statistics of Japan)

The same can be said of the increase in the number of single households, which in recent years has been on the rise in Japan. Is this a consequence of liberation by individualization? The answer would have to be no. Considering both the strong desire to get married and hopes for when one is old, the increase in single-households is also a result of deprivation by individualization. According to the annual *Survey on the National Lifestyle* conducted in 2009 by the Cabinet Office of the Japanese government, to the question “In general, when you reach old age, who do you wish to live with?” only 34.5 % of the respondents said they “want to live apart from children”. The rest all expressed a desire to live with, or close to, their children. Of the 34.5 % of respondents, some may want to live with a friend or sibling, or move into a nursing home. Thus, the percentage of people wishing to live alone in a single household is believed to be extremely small. Given the fact that the majority of single householders are unmarried and elderly people, and the former mostly wish to get married and the latter mostly wish to live with someone, the increase in the number of single households is also a result of the deprivation by individualization. In support of these facts there is a great deal of data indicating the weakening of family ties.<sup>4</sup>

2 Poll on the Low Birthrate (2004), Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

3 In the same survey, explaining why they are not married, many unmarried people (male 60.8 %; female 58.0 %) cited “Have not met my ideal partner yet”. This shows a higher degree of insight into individual feelings and motivations about marriage.

4 According to the *Survey on Children's Environment* and the *National Survey of Children in the Family* by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the frequency of a family having dinner together four days or more in a week continued to drop from 58.3 % in 1976 through the 1991, 1996, and 2001 surveys to 45 % in 2004. According to the same survey, the time of day working parents came home on weekdays steadily grew later from 2001 through 2007. Also, according to the Yomiuri Shimbun polls in 2008, respondents who said that family “ties” and “unity” had “been weakened” reached 89 % if the response “weakened, given the choice” is included.

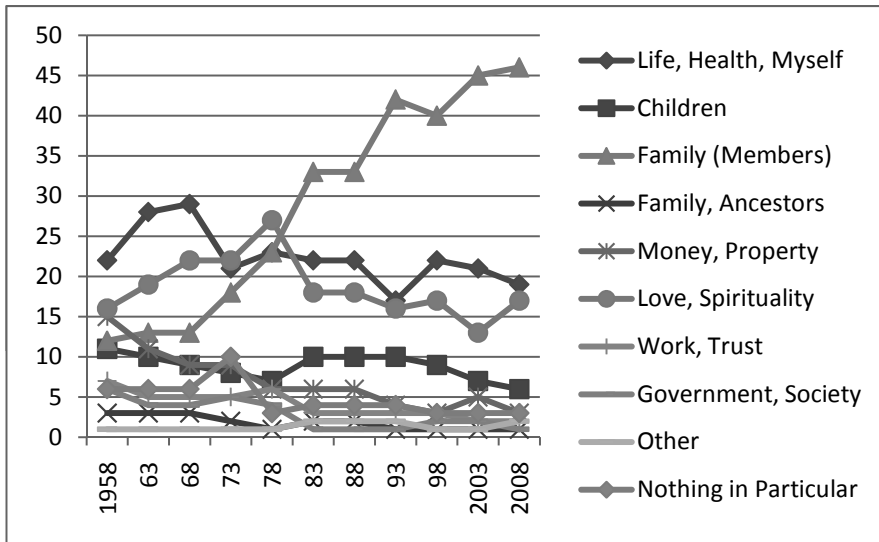


Fig. 2: What is the most important thing in your life? (The Institute of Statistical Mathematics, Study of the Japanese National Character)

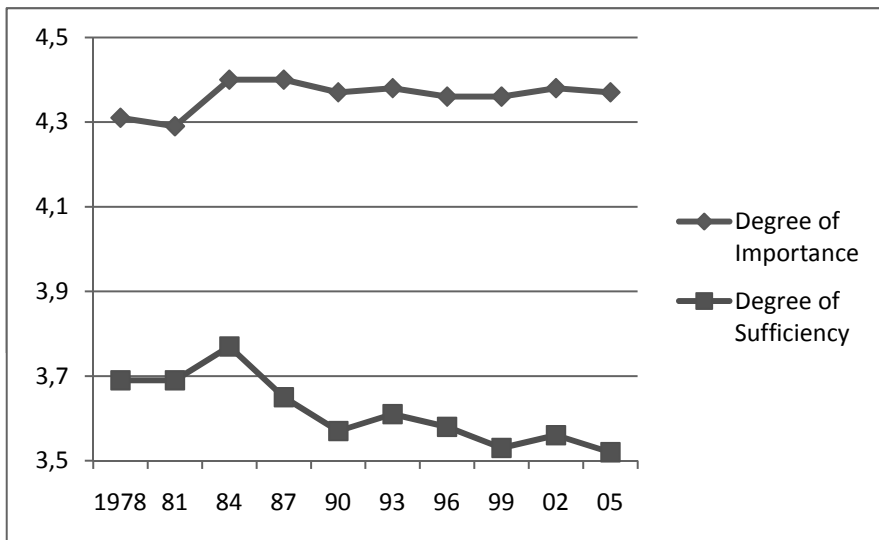


Fig. 3: The degree of importance and sufficiency of dialogue and mutual trust between parents and children (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, National Survey on Lifestyle Preferences)

However, in contrast to that trend, recently, expectations regarding family are rising. To the question “What is the most important thing to you?” those who responded “Family” have been rising in number every year (Fig. 2). In the *National Survey on Lifestyle Preferences*, which asked about the degree of importance and sufficiency (“There is dialogue and mutual trust

between the parents and children”), the degree of importance attached to dialogue and mutual trust has not changed. Yet, one can observe that the degree of sufficiency had a tendency to fall (Fig. 3). Even though this was not a time-series comparison, with regard to one’s own family “Want to cherish family ties and unity” accounted for 98 % (Yomiuri Shimbun, *Annual Continuous Survey*, Japanese, 2008). In other words, in reality, family relationships in Japan have begun to weaken despite the fact that people’s expectation level remains the same or has risen.

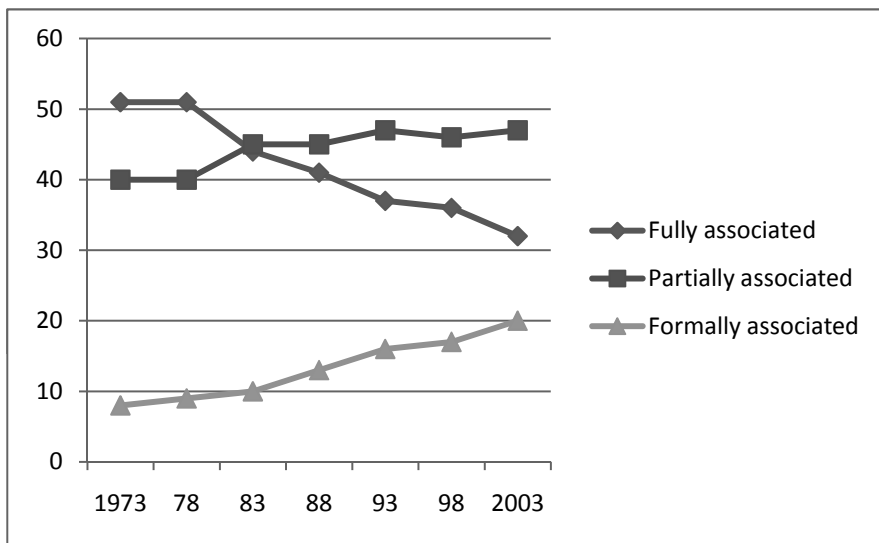


Fig. 4: The way we interact with relatives (NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, *Surveys on Value Orientations of Japanese*)

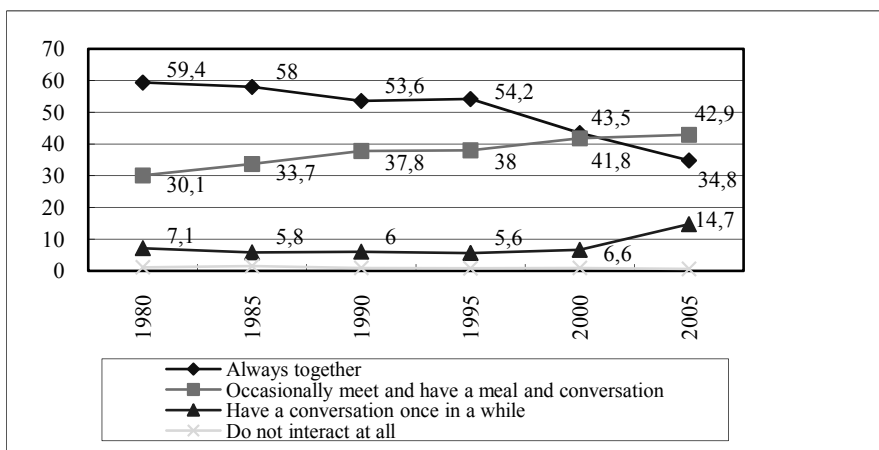


Fig. 5: The way we interact with family (children and grandchildren) in old age (Cabinet Office, *International Comparison Survey on the Lifestyle and Mentality of the Elderly*, 2007)

However, looking at the way people interact with family members, there is a contradictory trend. Regarding how they interact with family and relatives, many survey respondents expressed opinions that agree with the discourse of liberation. Those who want constant interaction, saying, “So we can consult with each other on any topic and help each other out (fully associated)” has decreased, while those who want casual and polite interaction saying “Want to stay on casual visiting terms (partially associated)” and “We interact politely (formally associated)” have increased (Fig.4). As for interaction in their old age (with children and grandchildren), “Want to always be together” has decreased while “Want to meet occasionally for a meal and conversation” and “Want to meet for conversation only once in a while” have increased (Fig. 5).

From the data above, we can discern the following trends. First of all, Japanese feel comfortable being aligned with the discourse of liberation that includes some elbowroom for making their own choices; they want to stay involved with their family within the range of necessity rather than with full commitment. At the same time, however, out of anxiety for weakened family ties by deprivation, they have strong expectations toward their family or retain a strong desire to depend on their family. In other words, it is caused by a vague disposition in which they enjoy the sense of liberation through individualization, yet they also want to bask in the warmth of existing family relationships so as to elude deprivation. This mindset is strongly tied to the realistic aspects of family relationships.

Japanese family relationships showed greatly weakened aspects by deprivation. Yet, we detected very few budding new relationships that were supposed to be promised by liberation. This was perhaps a result of the ambivalent sentiment that they wanted to benefit from the liberation of existing relationships, yet also wanted to avoid the deprivation from it, thus they decided to embrace the existing relationships after all. For this reason, no alternative relationships emerged; in the meantime, the intermediate family relationships among them have slowly begun to crumble.

### 3.2 Work Relationships

Like the family, the corporate world is also experiencing the wave of individualization. The cohesive and collective nature of Japanese corporations, centered on lifetime commitment, the seniority wage system, and enterprise unions, rapidly deteriorated in the 1990 s. Consequently, working people have been given no choice but to select their own course of life based on their own decisions and ideas, and then live with the consequences. In a way, this liberates people from the life course that corporations had supplied them (or bound them) with, while in another sense, it deprived them of the guarantee of stable lifetime commitment. Meanwhile, a similar sentiment is emerging in family relationships. Specifically, while savoring the fruits of liberation, people remain concerned about the collapsing corporate community, and so, welcome the Japanese-style management of days past as a dependable basis of existence. In the following, we will review this unique mindset before discussing relationships in the corporate community.

The stance of reverting to the corporate community while it is in the midst of crumbling can be clearly observed. See Fig. 6. This figure is an interannual summary of what people want from their companies. Key elements of Japanese-style management such as lifetime commitment, sense of organizational unity, and the seniority wage system have all sharply increased in recent years. Self-motivated skill development, which suggests strengthened individuality, shows a slight decline. Thus, people’s expectations of Japanese-style management have grown.

Still, people value not only the security of Japanese-style management but also the fulfillment of individual desires. Fig. 7 summarizes jobs that people consider ideal. The two types

of job, “a job with a stable income” and “a job I can enjoy,” remain high. In other words, workers have a strong desire to have structural and institutional stability and fulfill personal psychological needs. Of the two, the former can function as a defensive wall to protect workers from crises caused by deprivation, and the latter as benefit in the discourse of liberation. Or, put differently, people want to enjoy the blessings from individualization even in the world of work, but would like to avoid any risk from it by adopting, instead, something more structurally stable.

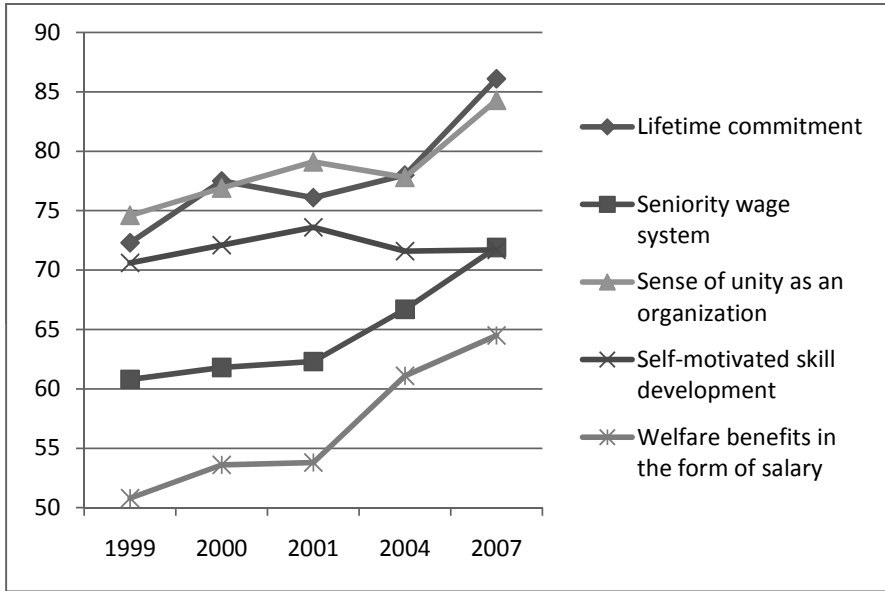


Fig. 6: The ideal corporate system (Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training, Survey on Working Life)



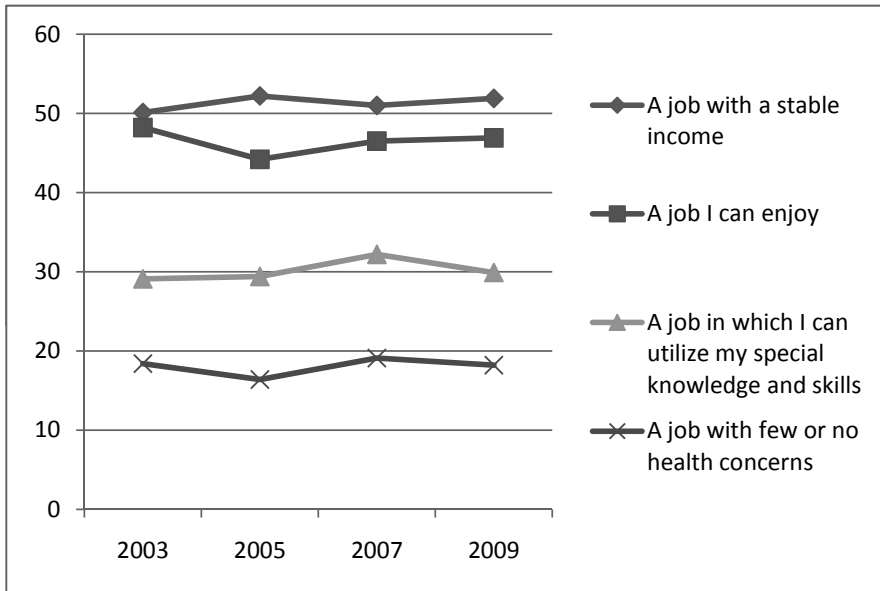


Fig. 7: The job people consider ideal (Public Relations Office, Minister's Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Opinion Poll on the National Lifestyle)

Also, just because people's expectations have grown higher regarding Japanese-style management, it does not mean that traditional loyalty to companies has been revived. Fig. 8 and Fig. 9 show the corporate sense of belonging, and the work-orientedness of the Japanese, respectively, and reveal that both corporate sense of belonging and work-orientedness has declined while the inclination to balance work and leisure has increased. To summarize, although today's workers are swallowed up in the wave of individualization due to corporate-led systemic transformations, in order to adapt to this, they value more personal satisfaction and less compulsion at work. In that sense, it is easy to detect the trend of liberating themselves from collective companies. However, on the other hand, they have also begun to resort to traditional Japanese-style management to forestall deprivation. This proclivity more or less matches the tendency in a family relationship to "cling to the conventional customs while benefiting from liberation".

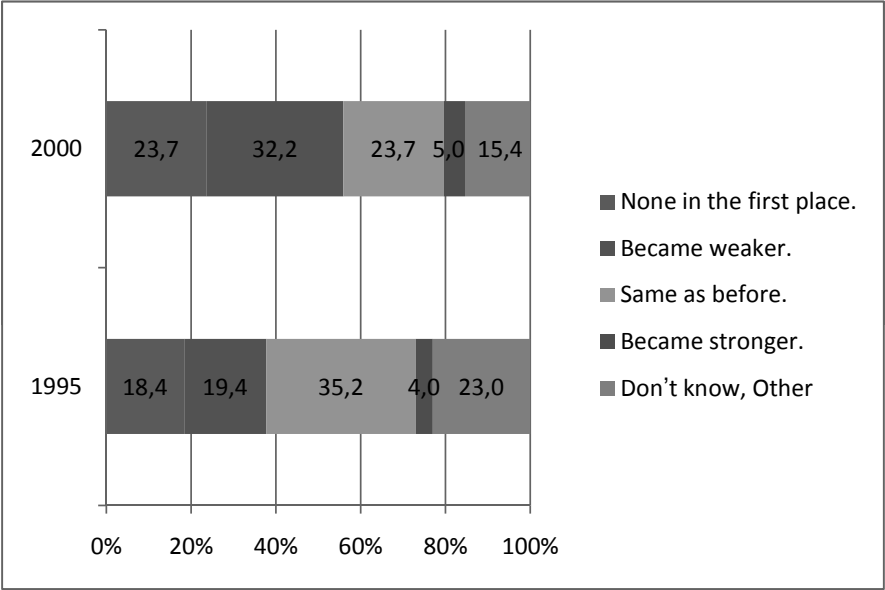


Fig. 8: Corporate sense of belonging (Nihon Keizai Shimbun)

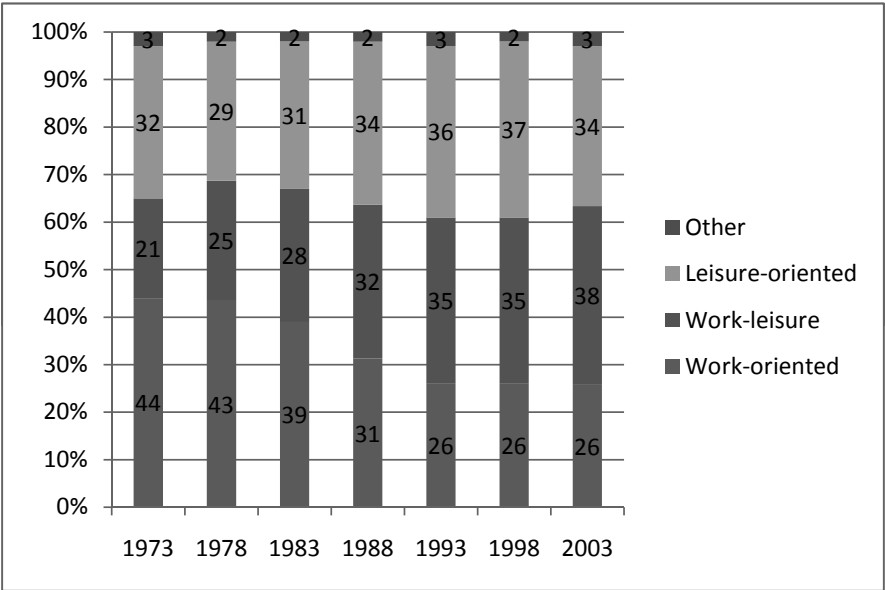


Fig. 9: The work-orientedness of the Japanese (NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, Surveys on Value Orientations of Japanese)

Now, when these people make their way into the industrial and labor community, what relationships will they develop? To give the conclusion first, these relationships will be similar to family relationships. While it is difficult to see a burgeoning of new relationships, we can clearly foresee the weakening of old, traditional relationships.

We surveyed two types of corporations, those that maintain a traditional (collective) character, and those that break down collective dealings and plan to create a networked environment. Next, we analyzed various aspects of relationships in those companies.<sup>5</sup> As a result, we did not see workers, having destroyed the collective dealings and established their own networks at work, currently utilizing networks they had built on their own, and independently doing their work. Instead, what attracted our attention was this: those who tore down the conventional corporate culture are all the more likely to be aware of traditional vertical relationships. The reason for this is found in the characteristics of those corporations.

They have streamlined vertical corporate relationships so that they can make use of more horizontal ties.<sup>6</sup> If this organizational structure is fully utilized, workers can be liberated from ties based on the vertical corporate system, and then freely develop independent relationships. This is the essence of a networked organization. However, weakened control from above may also make relationships with superiors weaker and shallower. This is because those relationships are now converted relationships that they must make efforts to maintain individually, as opposed to those that existed “on a routine basis” and were supported by a strong social foundation.

Those new situations may create the “privilege of having a connection to the superior”, of which only selected workers who retain that connection can derive much benefit. One end result is that while the power of one’s boss is still retained, the useful value of the boss as “resource” is elevated since not everyone can maintain the superior-subordinate relationship “as a matter of routine”. Those findings show that in Japan the attempt to depart from the old collective culture or to create a new chain of networks may not only fail to demonstrate one’s independence or autonomy, but in fact contribute to strengthening the conventional power structure.

In addition, a trend was seen that work relationships developed at such corporations were shallower than those at conventional collectivistic companies. To put it differently, the employees who work at a corporation that has destroyed collective relations and promoted networking are more likely to be isolated at work; they tend to have fewer colleagues they can trust, and have less friendly relationships at work. In addition to our analysis, discussions on declining relationships at work abound.<sup>7</sup> We believe that because of those circumstances, today’s Japanese workers feel nostalgic about Japanese-style management.

Based on the above discussion, we can conclude that although the strong aspect of shallow work relationships by deprivation can be observed in Japan, the burgeoning of new relationships in the workplace, which are supposed accompany liberation, is relatively scarce. The mindset of workers emerging in the background is this: we want to benefit from liberation, yet also avoid any deprivation from it; thus, we want stability to be guaranteed through the existing

<sup>5</sup> For details, refer to Ishida (2009).

<sup>6</sup> For example, the then-existing vertical relationship of department manager – deputy department manager – assistant manager – section manager – subsection chief was streamlined to department manager – office chief – groups and then, expanded the horizontal line from the saved positions.

<sup>7</sup> *The 2007 White Paper on the National Lifestyle* presents specific examples of weakened work relationships: “One out of seven people has no one to consult with in the workplace,” “The number of people who do not want close relationships has been on the rise”, “The participation rate in all-company trips has seen a drastic drop”, “Those who frequently go out drinking with colleagues are few”, and “The percentage of those finding future marriage partners in the workplace has declined”.

employment practices, and to achieve that goal, do not mind resorting to relationships in which they cozy up to their superiors. For this reason, we do not foresee the emergence of trailblazing workers who independently develop work relationships. Consequently, workers look on with resignation while the intermediate groups of work relationships slowly crumble at their feet.

### 3.3 Local Relationships

Trends in local relationships differ from those in family and work relationships. However, there are two common elements: the weakening of existing connections and the absence of solidarity as an alternative.

Although membership in neighborhood and residents' associations, which used to be at the core of Japan's local communities, remains somewhat unchanged, the level of participation in their activities has dropped. According to the *Survey on Community Policies of Municipalities* (2001) by the Japan City Center, resident membership in neighborhood and residents' associations exceeds 70 % in nearly 80 % of local governments. However, a closer look at participation reveals that their activity is becoming a façade. Fig. 10 shows that non-participating members account for 51.5 % followed by members participating several times a year at 35.8 %; the combined two groups thus account for nearly 90 %, meaning that most members do not participate. Thus, the cohesive nature of existing organizations is weakened to a great degree.

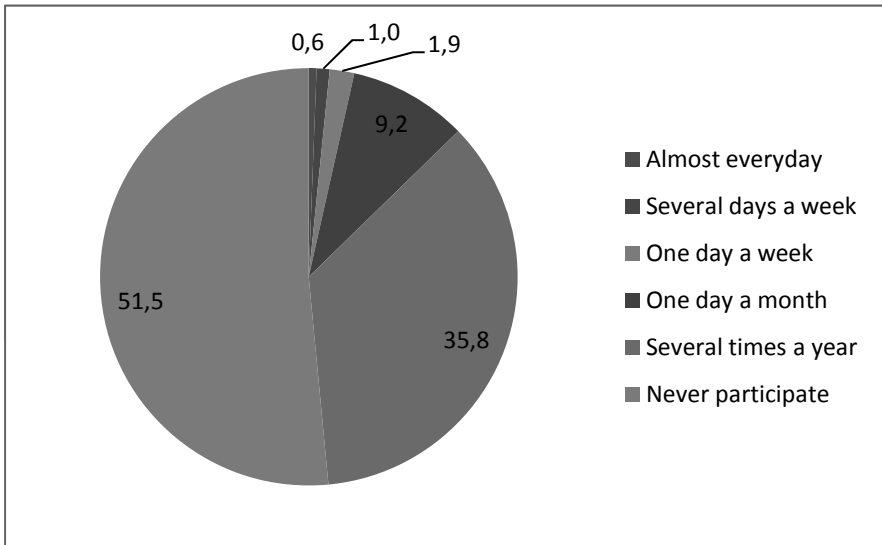


Fig. 10: Participation in neighborhood and residents' associations (Cabinet Office, National Survey on Lifestyle Preferences, 2007)

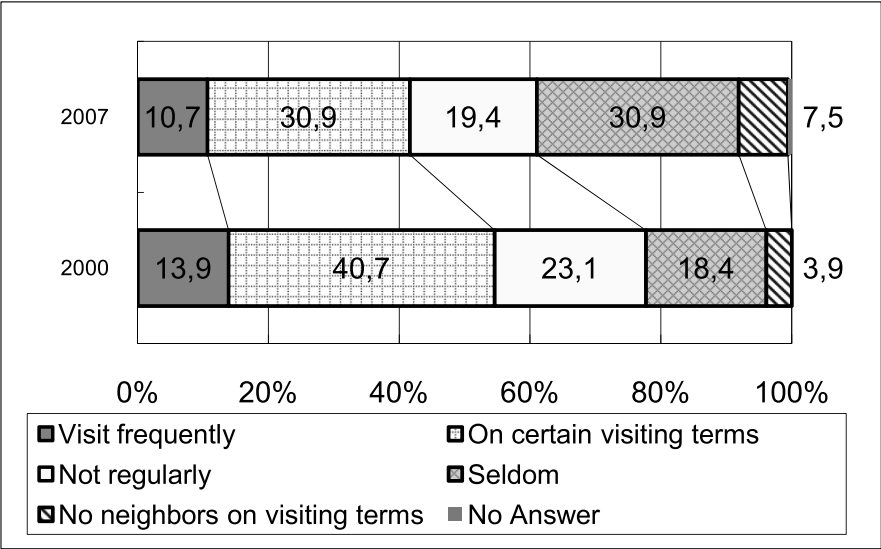


Fig. 11: Frequency of visiting neighbors (Cabinet Office, National Survey on Lifestyle Preferences)

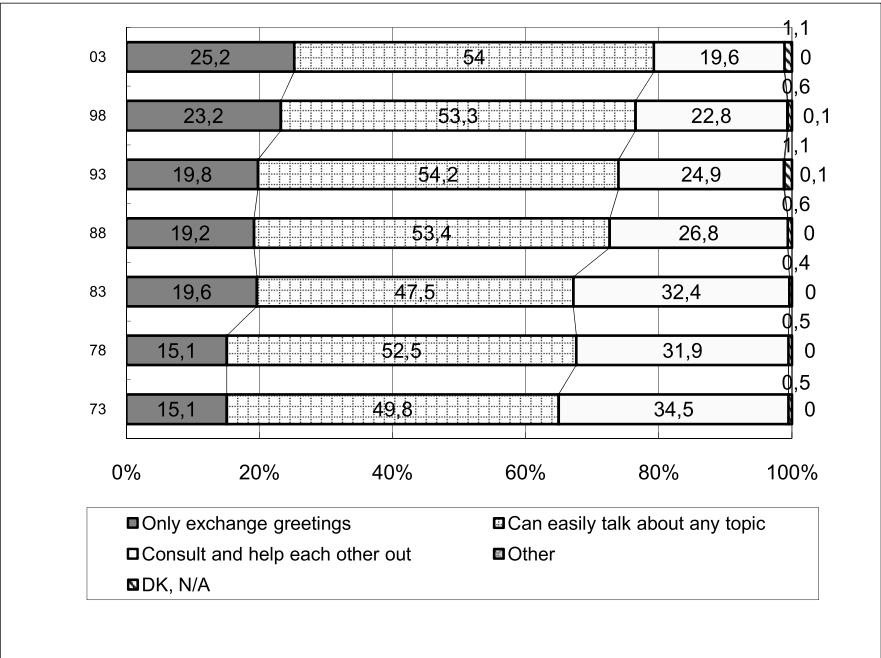


Fig. 12: Interaction with neighbors (NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, Surveys on Value Orientations of Japanese)

The same trend can be observed in relationships with neighbors. Relationships with neighbors have steadily declined. People do not visit neighbors as often as they used to (Fig. 11) and their relationships with neighbors have been reduced to mainly exchanging greetings (Fig. 12). Thus, although semi-façade-like neighborhood organizations remain, existing local relationships have been gradually declining.

Research also reveals that although people's neighborhood relationships are shallower today, this does not mean that they want to strengthen those ties – so far, no such trend has surfaced. The findings of the *National Survey on Lifestyle Preferences* (2003) by the Cabinet Office show that just 7.1 % responded that they “want to be on very friendly terms” with their neighbors. Even coupled with respondents who said that they “want to be on somewhat friendly terms”, the percentage is 47.0 %. Meanwhile, those who responded that they “want interaction but don't have to be on very friendly terms” accounted for 48.9 %, nearly half. Thus, local relationships are different from family and work relationships in that we see a weakening of existing relationships, yet there is no longing or attitude to return to traditional relationships.

The question is, then, is any solidarity being formed as an alternative to local relationships? In the following, we will look at people's inclination for volunteerism and the reality of volunteer activities as one example of voluntary solidarity.

When Japanese people are asked about their motivation for volunteer activity, they show relatively high levels of interest, and there are a great many Japanese citizens who value volunteerism. According to the findings of the *Opinion Poll on Life in Old Age* (2006) by the Social Policy Bureau of the Cabinet Office, 59.9 % of people “want to participate” in social contribution activities (community activities, volunteer activities, etc.) after they turn 60 and retire from work. The results of a similar survey show that both middle-aged and elderly people value volunteerism (Fig. 13). While the longing to return to traditional ties with neighbors was not strong, the desire to develop a new solidarity instead is strong.

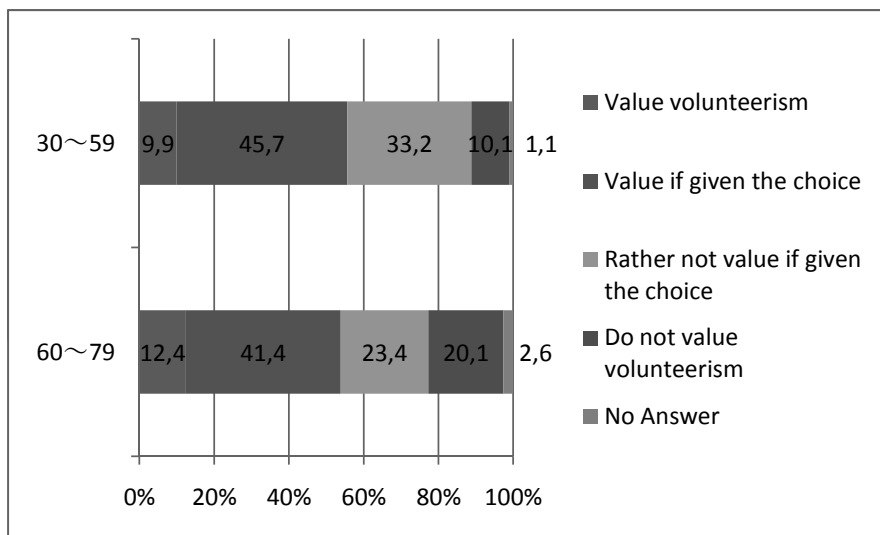


Fig. 13: Appreciation of volunteerism (Social Policy Bureau, Cabinet Office, *Opinion Poll on Life in Old Age*, 2006)

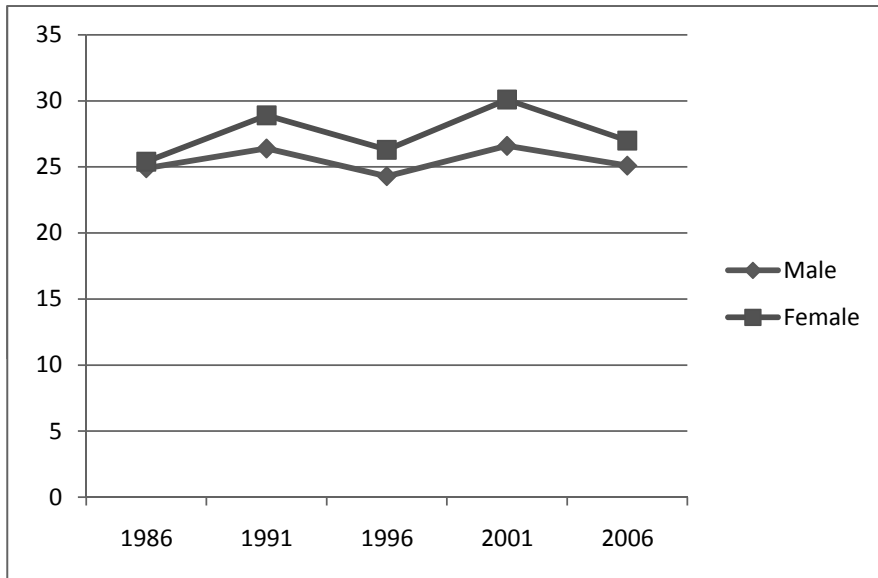


Fig. 14: Participation rate of volunteerism (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Basic Survey on Social Life)

However, looking at the number of actual participants, the volunteer rate drastically shrinks. Fig. 14 shows the participation rate of volunteerism in Japan. The volunteer participation rates in Japan have remained almost unchanged since the 1980 s. This trend has been seen in other surveys. For example, according to the *National Survey on Lifestyle Preferences* (2007) by the Cabinet Office, 80.7 % of respondents replied that they “have not participated” in volunteer activity; merely 7.2 % participated once or more a month. Therefore, although Japanese people demonstrate some motivation to join associational alternative groups and value their activities, the actual participation rates have not improved.

Based on the above findings, we will summarize local relationships. Like family and work relationships, existing local relationships have steadily declined. However, unlike other relationships, the weakening of local relationships has not been commonly perceived in the context of deprivation. Rather, people have a tendency to avoid friendly local relationships.

In the meantime, volunteerism as an alternative form of solidarity has attracted much attention. Nearly 60 % of Japanese people expressed a desire to participate in volunteerism and at least a majority of them value volunteer activity. In that respect, we can see possibilities for liberation from existing relationships, and the emergence of a new alternative solidarity. Unfortunately, looking at the actual participation rate in volunteerism, the number is overwhelmingly small.

For this reason, while aspiring to a new solidarity in line with the context of liberation, local relationships are actually at a very low level. This aspect differs from family and work relationships in which people showed a tendency to return to existing relationships precisely because those relationships are very weak today. The difference can be attributed to the difference in the speed of change. Local relationships – unlike family and work relationships – began to weaken from the 1970 s when urban problems began to surface; in other words, the breakdown of local relationships was already underway. Drawn-out changes can alleviate the sense of

deprivation, and thus, the desire to return to the old ties was not particularly enhanced. For this reason, only the hope for a new solidarity emerged rather smoothly.

Despite the presence of those hopes, we do not see a trend to expand the alternative “new” solidarity. The reason is perhaps that the effects of local relationships are weaker than those of family and work relationships. Local relationships, unlike family and work relationships, which play emotional and economic roles, have ambiguous functions. Therefore, the roles of local relationships tend to be “residual”, and compensate for the parts that family and work relationships cannot. Because they are “residual,” the motive for maintaining local ties and active participation in local activities tends to be weaker.

Today people focus more upon the family and work relationships that are the fundamental roots of emotional and financial roles, and which are increasingly shaky. This trend may evoke the attitude “I want to participate in local activity, but cannot because I’m short of extra energy”. For this reason, although the motivation for a new solidarity can be observed in local communities, actual activity is not generated.

To conclude, since people put priority on the move to return to traditional family and work relationships, local relationships, though the trend of their liberation can be seen, do not reach the formation stage of a new solidarity.

#### **4. Conclusions and Discussion**

So far, we have examined the acceptance of individualization in Japan, and its attendant changes in relationships. In this section, we will summarize those changes, and then, briefly, look at the various aspects of individualization in Germany in order to relativize the Japanese experience. Based on that, we conclude by presenting this theoretical outlook: which of the two potentials of individualization, liberation and deprivation, will be realized will also depend on the legal system of each society.

##### *4.1 Summary*

The process of individualizing relationships accompanies the dissolution of immediate groups. In Japan, this breakdown rapidly advanced in the 1990s except for local relationships. This aspect differs from Europe. Family relationships centered on marriage and work relationships centered on the corporate community rapidly lost their momentum in the 1990s and then declined further. During that period, how did the Japanese deal with the liberation and deprivation caused by individualization? Here, we will address this question by focusing on family and work relationships in which change occurred suddenly and which vividly reflected Japanese characteristics.

The aspects of liberation by individualization were accepted in a manner that was not tied to the development of independent relationships. As family ties loosened and making one’s own choices became increasingly common, what was accepted was the mentality that one does not have to be with one’s family “all the time” or have “interaction on a full-time basis”. Likewise, at the corporate level, the context of liberation was accepted so that an employee would value his privacy, have a lesser sense of belonging, and would not have to be a “company-first person”. This shows liberation from the existing binding relationships, but does not indicate the construction of independent relationships. In fact, we did not see any trend of building independent relationships at the family, corporate or local level.

How, then, did the Japanese attempt to minimize the risk of deprivation that accompanied liberation? They began to fall back on the traditional family and the corporate community based on Japanese-style management. In view of those facts, we noted that even though the



Japanese are positive about living an individual life free from family and corporate relationships in the context of liberation, in order to deal with the risks of deprivation, they easily resort to the very family and corporate community that formerly controlled or bound them. That is why people have fallen into a state where they make no attempt to search for an alternative solidarity, standing pat and allowing deprivation to advance further. Next, we shall examine the background, in which such a situation occurred, in contrast to Germany.

#### 4.2 Individualization in Japan and Germany

Beck, the pioneer of the theory of individualization, classified individualization into the two dimensions of disembedding and reintegration<sup>8</sup> (Beck 1986, 2002; Beck / Beck-Gernsheim 1993; 1994). Assuming that there are both positive and negative sides to the dimension of disembedding, “liberation” in this paper is the positive side and “deprivation” the negative. The observation in this paper that the deprivation side has received more attention in Japan than liberation indicates characteristics of contemporary Japanese society in the dimension of disembedding on individualization.

That Japan’s response to the phenomenon of disembedding was more passive than in Germany derives, for one thing, from differences occurring in the dimension of reintegration between the two societies.

According to Beck, one characteristic of individualization in the Second Modernity was that of disembedding without re-embedding in the dimension of reintegration, and that various institutions would directly target individuals, rather than groups, regarding citizenship, political rights, and social security. Beck also pointed out that individuals, not groups, would be the unit of reproduction of the social in the second modernity (Beck 1986, 2002: 228). This means that individuals are reintegrated (though insufficient it may be) not only at the social policy level of nations and the EU but also in the consciousness of people, in the sense that individuals can be the unit for the social in Europe or at least in the German context.

Meanwhile, in Japan, although individuals were released from various intermediate groups that formerly played primary roles in granting identity and in mutual aid in the First Modernity, the degree of allocating institutions to individuals remains lower than in Germany. Using the family as example, let us further examine this.

First, we may divide the functions of the family into two: life security and emotional stability for its members. To fulfill those two functions, there are more alternatives in Germany than in Japan that do not depend on the legally bound family.

Since the social security system is better in Germany than in Japan, subsistence is possible for the unemployed and lone parents who have no one to rely on. Also, in developed European nations, the rights of both legitimate and illegitimate children are treated equally before the law. Law is made to respect the rights of the individual (including children), rather than the rights of the group (the family). Moreover, welfare provided by church organizations is better run than that of religious groups in Japan. In short, the life security function of various institutions other than the family is greater in Germany than in Japan.

Similarly, providing emotional stability is better handled in Germany. As in other Western nations, lifestyles in Germany have become increasingly diverse since the 1960s. For this reason, obtaining emotional stability from others outside the legally bound family is relatively easier than in Japan. New lifestyles that shape intimacy include common-law marriage, mar-

<sup>8</sup> Individualization is sometimes classified into the three categories of disembedding, loss of meaning, and reintegration.

riage without children, single-parent families, serial marriage, same-sex partnerships, living in multiple households, and a lifestyle of coming and going between different cities. In Germany, the traditional family of a husband, wife and children living under one roof has become just one alternative along with the above (Beck-Gernsheim 1998: 20; Peuckert 2008). Also, the role of the Christian church as a spiritual home is stronger and more crucial than in religious groups in Japan. For instance, the childcare service provided by churches functions to protect mothers from child-rearing anxiety and neurosis, as well as early detection of child abuse.

To summarize, by creating a society where individuals are its basic unit in terms of social systems and individual awareness, Germany is striving to mitigate the risks of deprivation that are incidental to disembedding. Meanwhile, in Japan, such endeavors poorly run. Thus, in reality, Japanese have no choice but to protect themselves through reliance on the old deteriorating relationships.

### 4.3 Theoretical Implications

Having briefly compared the experience of individualization in Japan and Germany, we shall now confirm the theoretical implications of that individualization theory.

Alberto Melucci viewed the process of individualization as a potential for individualization, thus, focusing on its ambiguities. While this process includes the potential for individual control over the conditions of action, it also entails the expropriation of these self-reflective and self-productive resources by society (Melucci 1989: 48). One common aspect we see in the Japanese-German comparison is that which of the two – liberation or deprivation – can be realized will be determined by the conditions in society and legal systems. Germany is attempting to mitigate the risks of deprivation entailed by liberation by building a society consisting of individuals in terms of social systems and individual awareness. Japan, by comparison, has no choice but to rely excessively on the crumbling family and corporations due to its inadequate social security system and a legal system that does not support the pursuit of diverse lifestyles. In Japan, therefore, individualization seldom leads to liberation.

Still, Japanese are beginning to realize that equal legal and social security systems are the very conditions required to enjoy a free lifestyle. In 2009 the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was reduced to opposition-party status, replaced by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). This transfer of power reflected a strong dissatisfaction with the LDP on the part of the Japanese people who had experienced individualization only in the form of “deprivation”. Undoubtedly this new political shift will reflexively change Japan’s social and systemic conditions for individualization.<sup>9</sup> Determining just how the change will lead to the potential for liberation will require further research.

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9 In fact, in addition to nursing-care insurance implemented before the change of government, it is possible to say that the post-change child allowance as well as the movement to promote gratuitous high schools show the transition toward a social welfare policy for individuals (rather than family based), though there are various issues and limits.

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