

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN JAPANESE VALUES TODAY

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According to the *Yoron chōsa nenkan 1990-ban* [Yearbook of Public Opinion Polls, 1990 Edition] edited by the Public Relations Section of the Prime Minister's Office (Naikaku Sōridaijin Kanbō Kōhōshitsu 1990), altogether 411 surveys (surveys to study more than 500 subjects using questionnaire method with more than ten questions) were conducted in Japan during the fiscal year of 1988 (from April 1, 1988 through March 31, 1989). This is equivalent to the average number of public opinion studies conducted annually in Japan today. They were carried out either by the Japanese Government or by various prefectural or municipal governments, universities, newspapers or other kinds of agencies. All aimed, however, at establishing some general trends in the whole country or within some limited areas and hence regional variations are not discussed. The only study aiming at the analysis of regional variations in the values and psychological attitudes was the nation-wide research conducted in 1978 by the Institute of Public Opinion, Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK Hōsō Yoron Chōsajo 1979a, 1979b). This is a study from over ten years ago, but since we do not have more recent studies of the same kind, and since there do not seem to be any fundamental changes during these ten years, I shall here introduce and discuss some of the results of this project.

This study was conducted to look for variations among the forty-seven prefectures in Japan, using about one hundred questions asked by interview method to forty thousand subjects selected by random sampling method from all over Japan (nine hundred subjects above sixteen years of age from each prefecture).

1. RESPECT FOR THE EMPEROR

The most remarkable outcome was the response to the question, "Do you think the Emperor should be venerated?" (Q 29 D). There are remarkable regional variations as is indicated in Table 1 at the end of this article.

It should be stressed here that Yamaguchi Prefecture produced many young patriots in the Meiji Restoration in the year 1868, who later became the central forces in the Government at the time. Since then Yamaguchi Prefecture has been known for its long tradition of conservative political

groups, which are powerful even today. Kumamoto and Saga are similarly known for their conservative and patriotic traditional trends; it should also be pointed out that the students of the Military Academy (*Rikugun Daigaku*) before the end of World War II, and the National Defense Academy (*Bōei Daigakkō*) after the war are most frequently from these three prefectures.

On the other hand, Okinawans who live in the subtropical region at the southern end of the Japanese Archipelago showed the least respect for the Emperor. It was as late as 1609 that Okinawa was forced to become a territory of Japan; traditional customs including their shamanistic beliefs and local dialect are considerably different from other Japanese areas, and they often became the subject of Japanese discrimination as a minority group. Okinawa is the only place within the Japanese Archipelago that became a battlefield during the war; American troops landed on these islands in 1945 to attack the Japanese army. Many native inhabitants died in this battle, among whom some were compelled by Japanese officers to commit suicide. All these facts seem to be the cause of very strong anti-pathology to the Japanese government and to the Emperor.

Next to Okinawa are Kanagawa and Ōsaka, which also showed very little respect for the Emperor. Kanagawa Prefecture has the City of Yokohama and a wide residential area of salaried men commuting to Yokohama and the City of Tōkyō; therefore this prefecture is characteristic for its urbanized feature and the intellectuals do not seem to have much interest in the Emperor. In the case of Ōsaka, in addition to its urbanized character, it has been known as a commercial center since the 16th century and has a long tradition of strong animosity to political authority. All these factors may be the cause of very little respect for the Emperor.

2. EVALUATION OF CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SOCIETY

Looking at Table 2, which indicates the response to the question, "Criticism notwithstanding, are you basically satisfied with the present state of society in Japan?" (Q 21 F; see Table 2). Here again Okinawans show the strongest dissatisfaction with Japanese society. It should also be noted that Okinawa ranks lowest economically within Japan; Iwate and the other two prefectures are also known for their low economic state and people do not seem to be satisfied with the present state of society, while Tōkyō and two other prefectures situated near Tōkyō may have given enough economic satisfaction to the inhabitants, and hence the high percentage of affirmative answers.

3. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT

Table 3 is the result of the question "Do you feel that it is more to your advantage to follow, rather than oppose, the policies of the national and local governments?" (Q 29 F; see Table 3). This table indicates that the more rural and conservative the area, the more cooperative it is, while Tōkyō and adjacent prefectures show a critical attitude.

4. MERIT SYSTEM AND WORK ETHICS

Table 4 shows the percentage of "Yes" to the question "In your society today, do you feel that it is inevitable that less competent persons should give way to those more competent?" (Q 15). Here again Okinawans are least sympathetic with the "merit system," obviously because they are often situated in a place out of the sun. On the other hand, people in Toyama Prefecture have the strongest sympathy with the "merit system." Probably closely related to this, it should also be noted that the ratio of junior high school graduates who advanced to senior high schools is highest (98.6%) in Toyama Prefecture while it is lowest (90.7%) in Okinawa where the economic standard is lowest (Sōmuchō Tōkeikyoku 1990: 666). According to another nation-wide study by the Institute of Public Opinion, Japan Broadcasting Corporation, conducted in 1980, the average working hours per individual in Toyama Prefecture was the longest in Japan (NHK Hōsō Yoron Chōsajo 1982).

It should be noted here that Toyama and adjacent prefectures were the place where a sect of Buddhism called Jōdo-Shinshū was founded by Shinran in the 13th century. Prior to this, Buddhism was accepted only among the aristocrats and upper-class. This new sect emphasized that anyone can go to the Paradise after death if they only keep chanting the Buddhist invocation every day. This new sect appealed to the farmers and other common people both in villages and towns, and the influence of the teaching of this sect was enormous in this area. "Work hard," "Save money," and "Do not gamble," became their daily work ethics, and thus the inhabitants of this area are characterized by aspirations for high achievement.

5. DIVORCE RATE AND INTRA-FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most popular topics of discussion among the scholars are the regional variations in divorce rate. It should be pointed out, first, that the

average divorce rate in Japan was highest in the year of 1883 (divorce rate per 1,000 persons was 3.39) and became lower after 1898 (Yuzawa 1987: 166; compare Table 5 and 6). This is due to the fact that divorces at that time were initiated from the husband's side and the husband's mother played the most decisive role. If the mother-in-law was not satisfied with her daughter-in-law, or if the daughter-in-law could not bear a child, there would be a divorce. Under such circumstances, the divorce rate through the end of the Second World War was higher in villages and lower in cities, and they were highest in the north-eastern part of Japan where patriarchy is traditionally very strong and the status of the bride very low. Divorces after the War, however, came to be initiated mostly by wives, and hence much more frequently in cities. The north-eastern part of Japan became the area where the divorce rate is generally low, while the highest rate from 1950 through 1967 was in Kōchi. Then Hokkaidō gradually catching up, became the top in 1968. Okinawa gradually overtook Hokkaidō, becoming the top in 1985. According to the newest available data as of 1988, Okinawa comes first (1.98), and is followed by Hokkaidō (1.73). Scholars mostly agree that the high rate in Kōchi may be due to the obstinate character both of men and women and the high frequency of alcoholism; in this prefecture alcohol drinking is highly valued since the feudal age both among men and women.

Then Hokkaidō's place at the top between 1968 and 1984 is interpreted as based upon the traditional character of women raised in Hokkaidō. Quite similar to the situation of the American West during the frontier period, the number of women was much less than that of men during the nineteenth century; as a result, the status of women gradually grew higher; they were characterized by independence and autonomy, and this should be closely related to the high divorce rate.

Finally, as regards Okinawa, its highest rate since 1985 is discussed by Higa Masao, Professor of Anthropology at the Ryūkyū National University, as follows: First, he points out that heterosexual relationships and family organizations are quite flexible and free in Okinawa. Second, he calls attention to the fact that in Okinawa women have the very important role of performing traditional religious ceremonies at their parents' households. Therefore, women can come back to their parents' home easily and are accepted without much resistance (Higa 1987: 63–66).

Rank	Prefecture	%
1	Yamaguchi	70.8
1	Kumamoto	70.8
3	Saga	67.4
45	Osaka	48.4
46	Kanagawa	46.0
47	Okinawa	35.7

Table 1: Percentage of “Yes” answers to the question: “Do you think the Emperor should be venerated?” (Q. 29 D)

Rank	Prefecture	%
1	Gumma	78.7
2	Tochigi	78.4
3	Tōkyō	78.0
44	Iwate	66.9
44	Shiga	66.9
46	Kōchi	66.3
47	Okinawa	48.6

Table 2: Percentage of “Yes” answers to the question: “Do you think Japan is roughly a good society?” (Q. 21 F)

Rank	Prefecture	%
1	Ehime	58.6
2	Yamaguchi	58.3
3	Yamanashi	55.9
45	Tōkyō	39.9
45	Saitama	39.9
47	Kanagawa	34.6

Table 3: Percentage of “Yes” answers to the question: “Do you think it is better to be cooperative with what the national and local government are doing?” (Q. 29 F)

Rank	Prefecture	%
1	Toyama	71.4
2	Tokushima	69.7
3	Wakayama	68.2
45	Ōita	55.6
46	Akita	54.4
47	Okinawa	49.1

Table 4: Percentage of "Yes" answers to the question: "Do you think it is inevitable that less competent persons may be outstripped by more competent ones?" (Q. 15)

1883	3.39	1920	0.99	1960	0.74	1988	1.26
1890	2.70	1925	0.87	1965	0.79		
1895	2.62	1930	0.80	1970	0.93		
1900	1.46	1935	0.70	1975	1.07		
1905	1.29	1940	0.68	1980	1.22		
1910	1.21	1950	1.01	1983	1.51		
1915	1.14	1955	0.84	1985	1.39		

Table 5: Divorce rate in Japan (per 1,000 of population)

Source: Yuzawa 1987: 167

1960		1967		1968	
1. Kōchi	1.31	1. Kōchi	1.29	1. Hokkaidō	1.28
2. Hokkaidō	1.12	2. Hokkaidō	1.20	2. Kōchi	1.27
3. Aomori	1.08	3. Fukuoka	1.14	3. Fukuoka	1.19
1982		1983		1984	
1. Okinawa	2.17	1. Hokkaidō	2.31	1. Hokkaidō	2.33
2. Kōchi	2.16	2. Okinawa	2.29	2. Okinawa	2.26
3. Fukuoka	1.82	3. Aomori	2.00	3. Fukuoka	2.01
1985		1988			
1. Okinawa	2.20	1. Okinawa	1.98		
2. Hokkaidō	2.12	2. Hokkaidō	1.73		
3. Fukuoka	1.88	3. Fukuoka	1.66		

Table 6: Prefectural divorce rates in Japan (per 1,000 of population)

Akita	3
Aomori	2
Ehime	15
Fukuoka	18
Gumma	5
Hokkaidō	1
Kanagawa	9
Kōchi	14
Kumamoto	19
Ōita	17
Okinawa	21
Ōsaka	11
Saga	20
Saitama	7
Tochigi	4
Tokushima	13
Tōkyō	8
Toyama	6
Wakayama	12
Yamaguchi	16
Yamanashi	10



Map: Prefectures of Japan mentioned in the text

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