

# Ageism in Japan: Negative and Positive

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## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to clarify about ageism in Japan as a whole. Especially I will discuss particular the following things. Firstly, I will explain about changing of demographic aspect in Japan compared to China and Korea. Secondly, I will define the term of ageism: negative and positive. Thirdly, I will describe the basic idea of modernization and aging theory. Fourthly, I will show the university students' prejudice against elders uncovered by my research result. Lastly, I will recommend policies that do not produce ageism as negative recognition.

## Demographic Aspect in Japan

To start with, I would like to share with you the overall image of Japanese aging society. The society of Japan continues to age at an alarming rate compared to Korea and China because the total fertility rate (TFR) is steadily declining. The ratio of people who are over sixty five years old is increasing, and labor population and total number of people are decreasing (see Table 1).

When we have a look at Japanese elders' situation, I could say, Japanese elders might face a serious financial and mental hardship. The number of elders who live alone and receive public assistance is skyrocketing. The National health insurance system was changed. Under the new system, if

Table 1 Changing of Demographic Aspects: Japan, China and Korea

Age	TFR : Below 2.07	65 and over → 14% ; +	Labor Force: Decrease	Total Population: Decrease
1950-1955				
1955-1960				
1960-1965	Japan			
1965-1970				
1970-1975				
1975-1980				
1980-1985				
1985-1990	Korea			
1990-1995	China	Japan		
1995-2000				
2000-2005			Japan	
2005-2010				Japan
2010-2015				
2015-2020		Korea	China	Korea
2020-2025			Korea	
2025-2030		China		China
2030-2035				

Source : Okuyama by National Institute of Population and Social Security

elders, who are over 70 years old, are categorized in a having enough income group by the government's standard, they have to pay as much as the young working generation for their medical treatment. The rate that Japanese elders commit suicide is rather high, which ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the world.

## Types of Ageism

Ageism, broadly speaking, means some traits of each generation. However, usually, it means prejudice and discrimination against elders. Ageism

connotes poverty, isolation, illness, and less productivity only because people are old. “Ageism” was introduced by Robert Butler (1969), the first Director of the National Institute on Aging in the US in 1969.

Erdman Palmore at Duke University Medical Center expanded the definition. He discussed the residential programs and free medication programs that could be categorized into positive ageism. He introduced four dimensions such as negative prejudice, negative discrimination, positive prejudice, and positive discrimination, as Figure 1 shows. He described that ageism consisted of prejudice and discrimination.

	NEGATIVE		POSITIVE	
PREJUDICE	Stereotypes	Attitudes	Stereotypes	Attitudes
DISCRIMINATION	Personal	Institutional	Personal	Institutional

Figure 1 : Types of Ageism

Source : Erdman B. Palmore, Ageism: Negative and Positive (1990)

## Modernization and Ageism

The basic idea of modernization and aging is that the changes from preindustrial to industrial societies cause declines in the status and prestige of elders (Cowgill, 1974). This devaluation is caused by several factors associated with modernization as follows:

1. Lowered birth and death rates produce a higher proportion of aged in the population. This makes the supply of older persons exceed the demand.
2. The increased use of technology and automation decreases the demand for older workers.

3. Rapidly changing technology and new occupations make the job skills of older workers obsolete.
4. Increased retirement lowers the income and social status of elders.
5. Child-centered education and rapid social change make obsolete much of the knowledge that that formerly was a basis for prestige of elders.
6. Urbanization often leaves the elderly behind in rural areas or deteriorated parts of the city, further reducing their status and prestige.

Next, I would like to analyze the stereotype toward elders in Japan, focusing on social communication. Yoshiya Soeda, a Japanese sociologist, proposed you can analyze elders' social communication from two perspectives. One is how a society treats them and the other is how they behave in a society.

In this presentation, I would like to talk about how a society treats them. Apparently, there are ostensible intentions and real intentions behind it. For instance, a society treats elders as respectable people. It's an ostensible intention. On the other hand, a society disrespects and is indifferent to elders. It's a real intention.

Takeyoshi Kawashima, a law sociologist, explained that “the respect for the aged” originated in the uncivilized social hierarchy principle and it developed through influence from Confucianism from 17<sup>th</sup> century to 19<sup>th</sup> century. After World War II, our civil law was revised and “the respect for the aged” lost society's attention. However, it has still been existing as an ostensible attitude toward elders.

I assume that such an ostensible attitude toward elders could be converted to discrimination easily because people make a clear boundary only by age. Such an attitude might make elders a sort of minority group in a society. It is analogical to racial discrimination and sexual discrimination in terms of making a clear boundary by reasons too simple, ignoring individual potential, and by putting people concerned in minority groups.

“The respect for the aged” has been justified because of its connection with the enactment of Act on Social Welfare for the Elderly of 1963. Article 2 stipulates that elderly persons, as persons who have contributed to the development of society for many years and who have abundant knowledge and experience, shall be respected as such, and healthy and comfortable lives that make living worthwhile shall be secured therefor. When I analyze the existence of this act and meaning of Article 2, I find two notions underlie, which are; “People must be defined to be old by their age” and “Young people must be capable and useful”. I could say that the Act helped to prevail the ostensible respect for elders in the society.

Next, I would like to talk about the real intention, which is the disrespectful and indifferent attitude toward elders that prevails among people generally. There are some individual reasons for that. And, there are social influence and cultural reasons for that as well. For instance, rapid technological innovation, youth centered value, individualism based on materialism, elders’ fatal disease, and antipathy toward the impact of death to build the notion of ageism.

Nowadays, when people evaluate other people, they see what they have done and what they do. It is so called meritocracy. Meritocracy and youth culture value are highly compatible because meritocracy takes it for granted that elders are powerless and not valuable at all. Youth culture affirms youth itself. It denies aging and takes aging for being ugly. Such backgrounds make a stereotype of the elder generation, who are not valuable at all, and push people to disrespect elders.

Additionally, overall indifferent mood is rampant in the modern society other than the matters related to materialism and such a situation promotes indifference to elders.

## Research findings' Prejudice against Elders

Next, I would like to move to the university student's survey by the questionnaires about elders and aging. I asked three universities and I got responses from 91 students. There is a limitation on this survey because I could not pick up respondents randomly, however, the survey revealed an overall picture about how young people feel about aging. I used the questionnaire developed by Palmore's "The Facts on Aging Quizzes", translated from English to Japanese by myself.

### The Facts on Aging Quizzes (revised by Okuyama)

1. The majority of old people (age 65+) are senile (have defective memory, are disoriented, or demented).
2. The five senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell) all tend to weaken in odd age.
3. The majority of old people have no interest in, nor capacity for, sexual relations.
4. Lung vital capacity tends to decline in old age.
5. The majority of old people feel miserable most of the time.
6. Physical strength tends to decline in old age.
7. More than one-tenth of the aged are living in long-stay institutions (Such as nursing homes, mental hospitals, homes for the aged, etc.).
8. Aged drivers have fewer accidents per driver than those under age 65.
9. Older workers usually cannot work as effectively as younger workers.
10. Older three-fourths of the aged are healthy enough to carry out their normal activities.
11. The majority of old people are unable to adapt to change.
12. Old people usually take longer to learn something new.
13. It is difficult for the average old person to learn something new.
14. Older people tend to react slower than younger people.
15. In general, old people tend to be pretty much alike.
16. The majority of old people say they are seldom bored.
17. The majority of old people are socially isolated.

18. Older workers have fewer accidents than younger workers.
19. Over 30% of the population in Japan are now age 65 or over.
20. The majority of medical practitioners tend to give low priority to the aged.
21. The majority of old people have incomes below the poverty line (as defined by Japanese government).
22. The majority of old people are working or would like to have some kind of work to do (including housework and volunteer work)
23. Old people tend to become more religious as they age.
24. The majority of old people say they are seldom irritated or angry.
25. The health and economic status of people will be about the same or worse in the year 2030 in Japan (compared to younger people).

The purpose of this survey was, A: To know if they have correct knowledge about aging society and elders or not, B: To know if they have positive prejudice, C: To know if they have negative prejudice.

In terms of A, I got a result by the number of correct answers out of 25 which were true or false questions. It is set like odd numbered statements are correct and even numbered statements are incorrect. In terms of B, I got scores by counting the number of the wrong answers of numbers 2, 4, 6, 12, 14 statements out of 25 statements. In terms of C, I got scores by counting the number of the wrong answers of numbers 1, 7, 11, 13, 17 statements out of 25 statements.

The survey revealed that the rate of correct answers is about 50% and that the more students have negative prejudice (C), whose average score out of 5 is 2.88, rather than positive prejudice (B), whose average score is 0.77.

Actually, the similar survey of 3,000 people aged from 30 years old to 70 years old, conducted by General Affairs Agency in 1989, showed almost the same result.

Such results conclude that stereotype of aging society and elders has

been built up by people's indifference, ignorance, and disrespect toward elders.

## Future Measures and Recommended Policies

Lastly, I would like to imply some recommended policies to solve negative stereotype ageism toward elders from individual aspects and social influence aspects.

In terms of individual aspects, people should start to build strong bonds with their partners, children, and also people in the community since they are young.

In terms of social aspects, employers should reconsider the mandatory retirement age system to get rid of prejudice and discrimination against elders in the labor market. In Japan, we have had the mandatory retirement age system since 19<sup>th</sup> century. In those days, the retirement age was 55 years old. Based on Act on Stabilization of Employment of Elderly Persons, most of companies follow 65 years old mandatory retirement age rule these days. According to the report by the Ministry of Labor and Welfare in 2016, only 18.7% of the 153,023 companies with more than 30 employees abandoned the mandatory retirement rule at the age of 65. The ratio of elder employees over the age of 65 occupies only 4% in the 153,023 companies which participated in this survey.

Actually, the US enacted the Age Discrimination Employment Act of 1967. Enactment of new laws in Japan might be effective to solve the negative stereotype ageism toward elders. I would say, such new laws should be prepared well enough to include not only elders but also handicapped people and victims of sexism or whatever based on human rights and democracy in the modern society. If there would be a residential program for handicapped people in all generations, the program would be effective to get rid of strong negative stereotype ageism toward elders because people could

use the program because of their handicapped situation.

Also, education and media, including films, TV programs, advertisements, and what not, should play an important role to correct misunderstanding about elders in the society.

I hope all people think about ageism because all of us cannot avoid aging.

### 【付記】

2017年5月26日～27日（韓国・ソウル）、韓国老人人力開発院、韓国老年学会、国際老年学会（IAGG）の共同主催で、「年齢差別の実態とその社会的対応」（2017 Joint International Conference: From Ageism towards Anti-Ageism: Realities & Solutions）という共通テーマで、国際会議が開催された。この拙稿は、イギリス、フランス、アメリカ、オーストラリア等の欧米諸国と韓国、シンガポール、日本等の東アジア諸国から招聘されて開催された国際会議の中で、私が、「日本におけるエイジズム」について発表した内容を簡略化してまとめたものである。

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