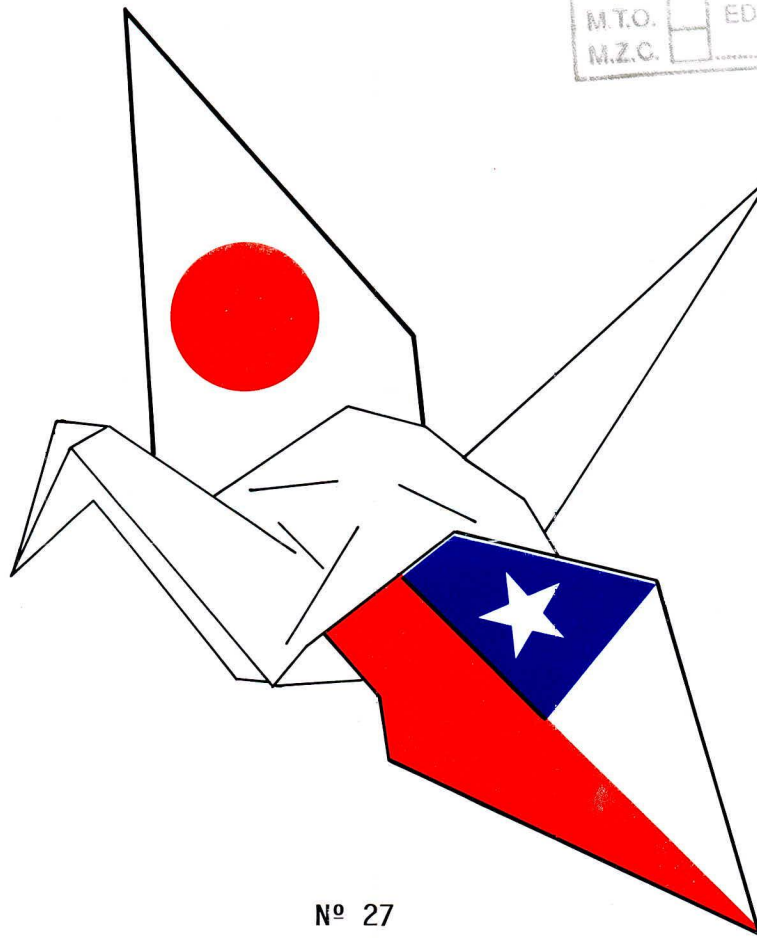


EMBAJADA DEL JAPON EN CHILE

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ARCHIVO

Nº 27

ULTIMAS NOTICIAS DEL JAPON

(Semana del 7 al 20 de febrero, 1994)

V I P ' 9 3

(DISTRIBUCION EXCLUSIVA)

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON THE LIFE
OF THE NATION

(First of three parts)

A middle-class consciousness and desire for emotional rather than material well-being have become firmly entrenched in the minds of the Japanese, according to the results of the Public Opinion Survey on the life of the Nation. More than half the poll's respondents since 1964 have placed themselves in the "middle" of the middle class, and more than half since 1990 have emphasized emotional well-being over material affluence.

Nevertheless, a declining proportion feel their standard of living is better now than it was a year earlier, and a growing ratio feel it has gotten worse, reflecting the toll the current economic recession has taken on consumer lifestyles and attitudes.

The Public Opinion Survey on the life of the Nation has been carried out by the Prime Minister's Office every year since 1958. Ten thousand men and women aged 20 or over were interviewed in May 1993 for the latest survey. The valid response rate was 73.3 percent.

The following series of articles focuses on the results of this year's poll and provides a summary of recent trends.

FOR A GROWING NUMBER, LIFE HAS NOT IMPROVED

Participants in the survey were asked whether their standard of living is better now than a year earlier (see table). A total of 4.8 percent felt life has improved; 75.1 percent said there has been no change; and 18.8 percent believed they are worse off now.

For the past two years, the proportion who feel life has improved has dropped from 10.8 percent in 1991 to 7.6 percent in 1992 and 4.8 percent this year, and the share who believe it has gotten worse has risen from 12.0 percent in 1991 to 15.1 percent last year and 18.8 percent this year.

CONTINUED SATISFACTION WITH LIFE

A relatively large share of respondents, or 69.8 percent, expressed satisfaction with their lives, including 59.5 percent who said they are "fairly satisfied" and 10.3 percent who said they are "satisfied".

In contrast, 27.3 percent expressed dissatisfaction, including 20.9 percent who said they are "slightly dissatisfied" and 6.4 percent who said they are "dissatisfied". There was no significant change from the ratios in recent surveys.

The respondents were further asked about aspects of life they are content with (multiple responses). Among those who said they are satisfied with life, 76.4 were content with their ownership of durable goods; 68.4 percent with their housing situation; 57.0 percent with their leisure activities; 48.6 percent with their income; and 40.6 percent with their assets and savings.

In all categories except assets and savings, the share of people who expressed satisfaction exceeded the proportion who said they are dissatisfied.

The respondents were also asked to specify the aspects of housing they are content with. The residence's proximity to nature was the most popular choice, given by 78.3 percent, followed by the type of community the respondent lives in, given by 76.9 percent; the convenience of the location for commuting and shopping, chosen by 74.1 percent; the size of the residence, selected by 65.8 percent; and general housing amenities, chosen by 63.9 percent.

FULFILLMENT THROUGH THE FAMILY

Some 72.0 percent of the respondents believed they lead fulfilling lives, including 10.5 percent who said they were "very fulfilling" and 61.6 percent who said they were "fairly fulfilling". Meanwhile, 23.1 percent felt their lives are not fulfilling, including 17.9 percent who selected the response "not very fulfilling" and 5.2 percent who chose "not at all fulfilling". The share of respondents who enjoy a sense of fulfillment has remained between 70 and 80 percent since the 1985 survey.

The 6,847 respondents who said their lives are in some way fulfilling (those who gave answers other than "not at all fulfilling" or "don't know") were next asked when they feel this way (multiple responses).

Of the total, 42.4 percent said they feel a sense of fulfillment when they are with their families; 34.2 percent when they are caught up in their work; 31.7 percent when they are taking it easy and relaxing; 31.1 percent when they are immersed in hobbies or sports; and 29.6 percent when they are meeting and talking with friends or acquaintances.

PERSONAL HEALTH TOPS LIST OF CONCERNS

Some 52.5 percent of the respondents said they experience anxiety or feel concern about aspects of everyday life, and 46.0 percent said they have no such worries, about the same ratios as in recent surveys.

Among the 3,845 people with troubles or anxieties, 42.2 percent felt concern about their personal health; 37.6 percent about their plans for life in old age; 35.8 percent about the health of family members; 25.1 percent about their financial outlook; and 21.8 percent about issues affecting family life, such as education, employment, and marriage.

SUFFICIENT TIME FOR THEMSELVES

The respondents were asked whether they only have enough time to cope with work, housework, or schooling or whether they have time to relax and pursue their own personal interests. Some 61.5 percent said they have enough time for themselves, including 15.1 percent with "a lot" and 46.4 percent with "some". Only 37.9 percent said they do not have enough time, including 29.1 percent with "not very much" and 8.8 percent with "none at all".

The share of respondents with sufficient time was 8.2 percentage points higher than in the 1991 survey.

A DEEPLY INGRAINED MIDDLE-CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

The survey's participants were asked to rate their standard of living in comparison with other Japanese people by placing themselves in one of five groups. A majority of respondents, or 54.6 percent, put themselves in the middle of the middle class; 24.3 percent viewed themselves as lower middle class; 11.1 percent saw themselves as upper middle class, 5.6 percent placed themselves in the lower class; and 1.2 percent identified with the upper class. The share who rated themselves as average middle class rose above 50 percent in the 1964 survey, further increased from about 55 percent to more than 60 percent during the 1970s, dropped below the 60-percent mark in the 1980s, and has remained between 50 percent and 60 percent ever since.

In terms of assets, 41.3 percent felt they have average holdings; 30.7 percent thought they have slightly less than average; 12.1 percent said they have much less than average; 8.8 percent believed they have slightly more than average; and 1.3 percent felt they have much more than average. The ratio of those who thought their holdings are about average fell 1.7 percentage points from the previous survey.

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PERCEIVED CHANGES IN THE QUALITY OF LIFE FROM A YEAR EARLIER (Percent)

	Life has improved	No change	Life has gotten worse
1984	9.0	65.9	22.7
1985	9.3	70.9	17.7
1986	7.9	69.7	20.3
1987	7.8	70.1	19.8
1988	10.1	73.2	14.3
1989	7.7	70.4	19.9
1990	10.6	73.7	13.7
1991	10.8	75.5	12.0
1992	7.6	76.0	15.1
1993	4.8	75.1	18.8

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON THE LIFE
OF THE NATION
(Second of three parts)

BLEAKER OUTLOOK ON THE FUTURE

Asked about how they see life developing in the future, the majority of the respondents, or 62.5 percent, anticipated little change; 17.7 percent thought it would get better; and 13.5 percent thought it would get worse (see table). The proportion of people anticipating a better life has dropped sharply in recent years, from 24.0 percent in 1991 to 20.3 percent last year and 17.7 percent this year.

LEISURE RANKS HIGHEST ON LIST OF PRIORITIES

The respondents were asked to choose one aspect of living they want to devote time and effort to in the future. At the top of the list were leisure activities, the choice of 37.1 percent of the respondents, followed by housing, chosen by 25.8 percent; dietary habits, chosen by 13.2 percent; ownership of consumer durables, chosen by 3.7 percent; and clothing, selected by 1.1 percent. In 1983 the share of respondents choosing leisure activities surpassed the ratio citing housing, and the figure has remained the highest ever since.

LIVING A COMFORTABLE POSTRETIREMENT LIFE

The survey's participants were next asked to choose up to three statements that best describe the type of life they would like to lead in the future. The most popular response, cited by 49.5 percent, was a comfortable life in old age, followed by a life of material affluence, chosen by 42.9 percent; a happy family life, selected by 42.7 percent; a life with plenty of free time, selected by 31.0 percent; a life in which they can spend a lot of time and money on their hobbies, selected by 27.2 percent; and a quiet life in an environment blessed by nature, chosen by 23.6 percent. The ratio of respondents emphasizing hobbies rose by a fairly substantial 2.5 percentage points over the previous year.

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OUTLOOK ON LIFE IN THE FUTURE (Percent)

	Life will improve	Little change anticipated	Life will get worse
1984	22.3	54.0	15.1
1985	24.4	55.0	13.7
1986	21.8	55.7	14.2
1987	19.3	57.9	14.8
1988	21.2	59.1	11.8
1989	17.3	59.8	15.1
1990	23.4	58.4	11.1
1991	24.0	59.8	9.6
1992	20.3	59.1	14.1
1993	17.7	62.5	13.5

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON THE LIFE
OF THE NATION
(Third of three parts)

ONE IN THREE EMPHASIZE LOVE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Asked to choose from among a list of statements the one that best describes the focus of their life, 33.1 percent of respondents cited treasuring the love of the people closest to them; 23.5 percent chose enjoying each day as it comes; 17.3 percent cited striving for material affluence; and 12.8 percent chose their hobbies. There was no substantial change in the ratios from previous years.

STRONG DESIRE FOR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

A total of 57.4 percent of the respondents said they have already achieved a measure of material affluence and want to devote more energy to their emotional well-being (see table). Only 29.0 percent said they would continue their quest for material affluence. The ratio of those emphasizing emotional well-being surpassed the proportion choosing material affluence in 1979, and in the past four years the figure has remained between 50 percent and 60 percent.

FEWER PEOPLE OF THE "SPEND NOW, SAVE LATER" MINDSET

Asked whether they will give priority to saving and investing for the future or enjoying life now, 49.2 percent said they will enjoy life now, 2.2 percentage points less than last year, and 37.1 percent said they will save for the future, 3.3 percentage points more than the previous year.

Among the 2,751 people who planned to save for the future, the most common objective, cited by 27.1 percent, was to ensure their security in old age, followed by the aim to create a hedge against illness or injury, chosen by 23.9 percent; to pay for a child's educational and wedding expenses, chosen by 23.2 percent; to feel a general sense of security, selected by 9.9 percent, and to buy, renovate, or rebuild a home, selected by 8.3 percent. The ratios did not change significantly from the previous year.

BALANCING WORK AND PLAY

When asked what balance should be struck between work and play, 51.2 percent said they would rather have a bigger paycheck, even if it means not having more free time, and only 28.9 percent said they would rather have more time even if it means not getting a bigger paycheck.

EXPECTATIONS OF GOVERNMENT

In reply to a multiple-response question concerning the issues they think government should address, 61.1 percent of respondents, the largest share, chose improving medical care, welfare policies, and the pension system; 47.2 percent selected improving the welfare of the elderly and disabled; 44.7 percent cited tax reform; 40.1 percent chose antiinflation policies; and 37.6 percent chose measures to bolster the economy.

Smaller proportions of respondents chose environmental preservation (28.7 percent) and housing and land policies (25.7 percent). In comparison with the previous survey, the ratio of respondents choosing tax reform rose 3.6 percentage points and the proportion choosing measures to foster growth increased 10.9 percentage points. By contrast, the ratio citing antiinflation measures and housing policies fell 2.3 percentage points and 3.5 percentage points, respectively.

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THE PRIORITIES OF EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND MATERIAL AFFLUENCE (Percent)

	Emotional well-being	It is hard to say one way or the other	Material affluence
1975	38.8	17.4	40.9
1980	42.4	15.3	39.8
1985	49.6	14.2	32.9
1990	53.0	13.5	30.8
1991	52.0	14.5	30.5
1992	57.2	12.6	27.3
1993	57.4	11.2	29.0

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