

Essays on dropping birth rates

Essay #1

This article about the decreasing population in Japan challenges Japanese ideals as well as how women are seen in society. The decreasing population causes many concerns such as a shrinking tax base, having to allow immigrants into Japan, not enough care-givers for the elderly, and the concern of who will take over the traditions. Japan has an amazing economy, but there aren't enough people in the new generation who can take over that. Also, in order to save the Japanese economy they would have to allow 600,000 immigrants a year to keep the economy up. This affects their idea of homogeneity and the "all Japanese" society. Usually, tradition dictates that the new daughter (married to the oldest son) would take care of the elderly, but with more people pursuing job opportunities, that is not possible. Also, the idea of *ie* or household is in danger because there is a fear of the loss of tradition. In the *ie* society, the first son inherits the *ie* and must take care of the family and carry on the traditions. The kinship idea in Japan is that sometimes you don't need to be related by blood to inherit the *ie*.

The main concern is that women do not want to have children anymore. This is due to the fact that nowadays they aren't tied down by the traditional view of women (staying at home being supported by the husband) which is the oyabun-kobun relationship, and they try to educate themselves and have careers like men. Also, companies would encourage women to wait on having children or they say that the children would hold them down. They propose that women be given flexible hours, but some women don't come back after having children. Women have a hard time returning to work in the same jobs they took up. This causes a fear in unmarried women because the usual women's role in the vertical society is that they are subservient to men (sempai/kohai). They want to break free from that and the normal view of how Japanese are seen.

I believe that this article clearly challenges the Japanese perception of a homogenous society as well as the role of women. Japan faces a harder decision now; they can either bring in immigrants and allow them to have Japanese citizenship or they can give more Japanese rights to women so that they will be cared for if they have children, so that the idea of *ie* continues on and the economy stays stable. If it is true that in Japanese society some parts of the oyabun-kobun relationship is integrated, companies must give/take care of their female employees in order for them to come back to work and help the economy by having more children.

Comments: The author introduces the idea that Japan will have to turn to immigration if people do not have more children, which will threaten the idea of Japanese identity as homogeneous. The author talks about the role of the *ie* in Japanese society and the threats to the idea of *ie* with this falling rate of births.

Essay #2

I chose this article because it shows a current problem occurring in Japan right now. That problem is that Japan's population is actually decreasing every year. If the Japanese do not think of a solution soon, by 2050, their population pyramid will look like the inverted pyramid of India, where the population continues to grow.

One of the reasons the population is decreasing is because more women are choosing to have a career over a family. Women used to think that they had to be married by the age of 25, or they'll be old "Christmas cakes." However, many of them are choosing to marry and have

children at an older age, like in their late 20s, or early 30s. Another reason is that many companies see that having children is a burden to female employees. The Japanese do not have a flexible work schedule or maternity leave as we do here in the United States. They are salaried, and work long, difficult hours, not a 9 a.m.-5 p.m. job. It is also very expensive to raise a child in Japan. It is very difficult for mothers who continue their careers to find a daycare that will accommodate their long hours. Many towns and cities are offering money and incentives (such as paid educations) for families to have more children and help their towns' population grow.

If Japan does not have more children, they must turn to immigration to help increase their population. However, many Japanese do not want this because they want to keep their culture "Japanese." I feel this presents a form of *sakoku*, all over again. By limiting immigration, Japan seems like they are closing themselves off to the world again.

Also, this may present a problem in the *Honke-Bunke* format for a family. If a *Honke* household in the countryside only has one child, then that child decides to move to Tokyo to form their own *Bunke*, who is left to take care of the elderly parents? It will not be the government, like here in the United States. Japanese government feels that families need to care for their elders. That is difficult when you only have one child instead of multiple children, thus placing the pressure on the one child. And if that one child only has only one child, how will they be aided when they get older?

If the Japanese people do not have more children, I feel as if the *Oyabun-Kobun* model will fail. How are you supposed to continue the family model and protection if you do not have any kids to carry on traditions and look after you?

It seems as Japan keeps digging themselves into a deeper hole. If they don't have a more open mind to immigration, they need to lessen the workload and present more flexible hours for their employees to have families. I understand the companies in Japan want to succeed. However, it will backfire on them if they don't change to views on having a family. There will be no new workers to take the place of those who will eventually get older, and pass away.

Japan needs to find a way of increasing their population, or risk losing culture and traditional ceremonies/rights/secrets of their own country.

Comments: The author does an excellent job of summarizing the article, incorporating a number of key terms in the discussion, and including a lengthy argument about the importance of immigration as a future necessity and its impacts on Japanese identity.

Essays on the Korean Wave:

Essay #1

In Carol Gluck's "10 Things to Know About Japan" one thing she claims is that change in Japan is incremental. Korea and Japan have always had very tense relations, but it is possible that this "Korean Wave" in Japan might be the first step in conquering these hard feelings. On top of that, this article is demonstrating that Japan is becoming more accepting of outside influences, which it has historically tried to avoid.

Japan has taken great lengths to avoid admitting influence from Korea in the past. For example, to justify the way ideas like metalworking and language came to Japan from Korea by claiming Japan conquered Korea. In the early 1900's Japan annexed Korea and tried to assimilate the Koreans to Japanese culture. Today there is still tensions between Koreans living

in Japan and Japanese. This was evident in the example the professor gave in class about how his father-in-law was content with the fact that his daughter married an American man, but did not know if he would have been very accepting of a Korean husband.

Koreans still face battles to equality and rights in Japan. Although they have begun to move past jobs in mines and factories, they still face discrimination. A person may be of Korean descent, 2nd or 3rd generation and still be considered a foreigner in Japan.

But now, maybe some of these ideas will begin to slowly change with this Korean wave sparked by “Winter Sonata” and Bae-Yong-Joon. From the article it appears that quite a few people are beginning to take more of an interest in Korean culture, going so far as to visit, or learn the language. Even the Prime Minister’s wife claims to be a “fan” of Korean culture. This television show appears to be humanizing Koreans a little more, or at least demonstrating the fact that they are very relatable to Japanese. IF this trend from the Korean wave continues, then it is possible that Koreans may gain more equality than they currently have in Japan.

Another interesting part of this article is that Japanese people are becoming more open to other cultures when historically they have wanted to maintain a homogeneous country. However, if this is the start of a large change the future Japan may become more accepting of many other cultures allow more immigration, which they may need to help their population.

So, change in Japan is slow and incremental. This Korean wave combined with the history with Korea makes that evident. This Korean wave may be the catalyst that not only begins to heal relations between Japanese and Koreans, but it may also lead to Japan becoming more open to other cultures and maybe eventually immigrants, slowly of course.

Comments: The highlight of this essay is that it begins and ends with the same central idea, borrowed from Gluck, that change is incremental in Japan. The essay outlines the history of the poor relations between the Japanese and Koreans, as well as the discrimination continued against Koreans in Japan. The wider implications of the news, including the fact that it might lead to improved relations and a more open society in Japan, is clearly laid out.

Essay #2

Japan is a country known to the outside world as a homogeneous and private nation. Recently however, this view is changing. New relations established with Korea through modern activities, such as Television has been a major factor. The news article regarding the Korean drama series ‘Winter Sonata’ and its huge success in Japan is a perfect example of the transition from the built-up anger and rivalry between Japan and Korea to an incremental change, like Gluck has stated.

Tensions between the two countries stem from several arguments such as the controversy over the archaeology of the Yayoi peoples in relation to the same bone structure as modern Japanese. Another is the quarrel of “who invaded whom.” Japanese believe that they invaded Korea in earlier times and gave them tools and language and vice versa.

In more modern arguments, during WWII Koreans were forced to work as Japanese laborers and in 1910, Japan took over Korea. This led to the Japanese banning Korean and only the teaching of Japanese culture and language. Aside from their imperialistic rule, Japan also took Korean women and used them as ‘comfort women.’

Following WWII and the return of captured countries from Japanese rule, some Koreans decided to stay in Japan. This has led to mistreatment and decreased personal freedom for the Koreans. Within Japan, they are considered and physically treated as a minority. It is also fairly

hard to obtain a well-paying job. Other minorities receive this same treatment, such as, the Ainu, Okinawans, and Burakumin.

Gluck has stated that people need to know about Japan and for good reason. Most people believe in the 'Benedictian Myths' of Japan. These 'myths' are usually very common beliefs, such as that Japan is homogeneous and that the Japanese are a non-changing society. But now, as modernization and globalization become far more clear, these beliefs are slowly fading away.

As it is written in the article, "Twenty-six percent of those surveyed answered that their image of Korea had recently changed, while twenty-two percent expressed a greater interest in Korean culture than before" (Eyes wide open, 1). These statistics alone prove that change happens in Japan. The article also states that "Korean culture is becoming a widespread phenomenon" that has "such a huge influence on Japanese society" (Eyes, 1).

The world belief of Japan as a timeless and homogeneous culture is coming to a close as modern advancements bring them together.

Comments: Good historical overview to give context to the article. Use of key terms like homogeneity and comfort women, as well as Benedict's myths. The author also linked Koreans to other minorities.

Essays on Google Earth and Burakumin:

Essay #1

Ruth Benedict, the influential author of *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, created a pattern of simplification in which she and numerous anthropologists who followed her, employ far reaching ideals to explain and classify the Japanese people into a single, predictable homogenous mass. Shedding light on a marginalized minority subclass, the article, "Old Japanese Maps on Google Earth Unveil Secrets" by Jay Alabaster, illustrates the continued mistreatment of the Burakumin.

Classified historically by professions pertaining to death such as leather working, slaughter of animals, and mortuary services, the policy initiated by the Tokugawa regime in 1609, which forced the Burakumin into 'Eta's', changed the point of differentiation. No longer segmented by professions dealing with death, the Burakumin's residence in a particular area labeled as 'eta' now identify his/her inferior status. Discriminated openly even after the passage of the Emancipation of 1879 by the Meiji government, unequal treatment continued until its banning by the new constitution of 1946. Despite these governmental measures, the Burakumin continue to witness unfair treatment in marriage and employment practices: "the company regularly screens out Burakumin job seekers". Further, even after several generations or changes of residence, private contractors are still utilized to research and track descendants of Burakumin.

Thus, when Google Earth presented historical maps of cities such as Tokyo, with 'eta' areas clearly labeled and identifiable when compared to modern representations of neighborhoods, many feared a flare up of discrimination and mistreatment. Moreover, targeting areas long forgotten to be the home of Burakamin, could result in a loss of property values, increased violence, and greater incidents of graffiti; all effects currently witnessed in known Burakumin areas.

Despite the simplification of Benedict's Myths, Nakane's all encompassing 'ie', or Doi's 'amae' to homogenize and create a clear identifiable picture of the Japanese, diversity continues to appear. Highlighted by Alabaster's article, the story of the Burakumin, who face discrimination and prejudice, mirrors closely those of the Ainu, the Korean, the Taiwanese, and the Okinawan minorities who live with unfair treatment in Japan.

By uncovering the position of the minority groups, and unveiling the complex dynamic workings of subcultures, perhaps a more colorful, more mysterious Japan could emerge. This unique, vibrant Japan could tempt a new generation of anthropologists with its uniqueness just as it did in the 19th century through the tales told of an exotic land.

Comments: the author gave an excellent historical overview of burakumin and discussed the implications of the Google Earth news. The author set the story within the context of various key concepts employed by anthropologists of Japan. The author also compares the burakumin to other groups similarly discriminated against. Overall, the writing is fluid and very readable.

Essay #2

The burakumin are a minority of Japan who have been discriminated against not based on their ethnicity or race, but because of the types of jobs their ancestors held. Even today, the significance of this history remains a large part of society, as Google Earth saw from posting its historical Japanese maps.

Even though the burakumin are ethnically Japanese, they are ostracized from society, which questions the theory of Japanese homogeneity. This means that even people with differences in a supposedly homogeneous culture can be shut out and discriminated against. Because of this, Japan cannot be considered homogeneous, especially since they themselves are forcing a differentiation between people of their own race, not to mention the other ethnic minorities.

Through this, the idea of *uchi* versus *soto* can be observed. *Uchi* is like an in-group and *soto* is like an out-group, which clearly explains the burakumin's situation. They are not included in a sort of "national *uchi*" because of the historical discrimination against them. During the Tokugawa era, the burakumin were considered "unclean" based on their jobs dealing with death, which is a Buddhist principle. They developed their own *uchi* from this, which are the villages and areas described in the article. From this, anyone living in these areas became "burakumin," even if their occupation was not. This is especially evident today, because of poverty. However, this does not prevent the discrimination, and companies screen people if "[they] suspect that an applicant is burakumin." According to the article, the locations of many of the historical villages are not known, but "Lists of 'dirty' addresses circulate on Internet message boards." Because of Google Earth, the locations have now been released, which threatens the partial assimilation of the burakumin.

All of this can be connected to Japanese culture, which, as stated before, has heavy influences of Buddhism. Discrimination in Japan is not considered a major issue, either. Even though it is illegal by the Constitution, it still remains ever-present in everyday life, and there is nothing preventing it from happening. This article is extremely important in demonstrating how historical practices remain in society today, and demonstrates how sometimes tradition has negative results.

Comments: The author discusses the importance of the notion of homogeneity and introduces the

key term of uchi/soto to analyze the discrimination against burakumin. The author focuses on ethnicity as a key idea in understanding this news article and the burakumin's place in Japanese society. The continued influence of Buddhism is also mentioned.

Essay #3

The anger that these maps provoked shows the remnants of the caste system from the Tokugawa Period. The Burakumin were at the bottom of this hierarchy because they worked in "dirty" jobs and there was resultant prejudice towards them. This supports Ruth Benedict's myth of Japan as clean. Although the Burakumin are ethnically Japanese, they are lowest on the ladder simply because they are considered unclean. However, this refutes Benedict's myth that Japan is homogeneous. Shown by the system of Uchi and Soto (in-groups and out-groups,) the Burakumin are certainly an out-group. In a truly homogeneous society there would not exist such prejudice between groups or even such defined "groups" at all.

The contrast at the end of the article between older and younger generations comments on the state of Japan's culture. When shown the maps from Google Earth, the older residents declined to comment while a younger girl responded as though it was not something that really crosses her mind. Japan's culture is changing and the negative ideas about Burakumin are fading. A parallel example can be seen in the U.S. with the fading racism towards African Americans, especially among young people. This supports the concept of Cultural Relativism developed by Franz Boaz. Japan is not less civilized than the West, it simply has different beliefs and has developed in its own way.

Comments: This essay is brief, but it includes several key ways to interpret the article (uchi/soto, homogeneity), as well as some extra unexpected ideas (cultural relativism, Boas) that greatly strengthen the argument. Benedict's legacy is introduced, along with the implications of this news on ideas of homogeneity.