Chapter 2
Demographic Changes in Japan

2.1 Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that the progress of population aging in Japan has been dramatic over the past several decades, with a speed unprecedented among industrial nations. Hence, there has emerged an acute increase in households where elders live either alone or as a couple. It is not common among traditional Japanese families.

Before starting the discussion, let us identify two primary emerging issues. They are, in what respects and over what period of time have these changes emerged? In addressing these changes, there exist two essential areas that have had significant impact on the makeup of Japanese families. They are, namely, population aging and declining fertility. The initiation of these recent changes corresponds to the onset of the so-called aging society in Japan in 1970 (IPSSR 2014a; Kumagai 2008, 2010; MIAC 2014a, b).

Japan became an aging society relatively late, when the proportion of the elderly population 65 and over reached 7 %. One of the unprecedented features of the aging society in Japan, however, has been its swiftness. Japan experienced a doubling of the aging population—in that the elderly 65 and over grew to 14 % of the total population—in less than a quarter century, by 1994. This was unprecedented. No other industrialized nation experienced this speed (IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.18).[1] Today, however, some Asian nations, such as South Korea, Singapore, and China, that launched into the aging society much later than Japan, their doubling of the aging population supersedes even that of the Japanese counterpart (IPSSR 2014a,

[1] Examples of "a doubling of the aging population" of some other industrialized nations are as follows: France (114 years: 1864–1978), Norway (92 years: 1885–1977), Sweden (85 years: 1887–1972), the United States (72 years: 1942–2014), Canada (65 years: 1945–2010), the United Kingdom (46 years: 1929–1975), and Germany (40 years: 1932–1972).

F. Kumagai, *Family Issues on Marriage, Divorce, and Older Adults in Japan*,
DOI 10.1007/978-981-287-185-5_2

Table 2.18).[2] This chapter includes not only a comparison between 1970 data and the most recent statistics but also the oldest demographic data available for each relevant sociocultural characteristic. By this method, it is possible for us to view the entire trend from an objective perspective (IPSSR 2014a; b; MHLW 2014a, b; MIAC 2014a, b; UN 2014).

Based on two theoretical frameworks discussed in Chap. 1 of this book, the dual structural perspective and the regional variation in community analysis, this chapter proposes hypotheses on changes, continuities, and regional variations of Japanese families and households by prefecture. Thus, the hypothesis to be tested is that Japanese families and households vary from region to region. At the same time, it is hoped to find the existence of continuities sustaining the traditional nature of the Japanese family and household.

In this chapter, five areas of demography characteristics have been analyzed and presented in one table and 16 figures. These five areas are as follows: Changes in the Japanese Household Structure, Changes in the Three-Generation Family, Family Size, Demographics of the Japanese Elderly, and Living Arrangement of the Japanese Elderly. In presenting these figures, several features for each of these five characteristics were analyzed.

2.2 Changes in the Japanese Household Structure: The Nuclear Family

It is frequently asserted that industrialization and the nuclear family go hand-in-hand. What has been Japan's experience in this regard? According to the Census Bureau of Japan, a nuclear family is one which consists of (1) a couple only, (2) a couple with their unmarried children, or (3) a single parent (either male or female) with unmarried children. Statistics reveal that the total proportion of all such nuclear households in Japan in 1920 was 55.3 %. In the ensuing 35 years, the rate of increase was relatively gradual, thus the proportion in 1955 was still slightly below 60 %. After increasing to 59.5 % in 1990, the proportion of nuclear households since then has been on a gradual decline, totaling just 56.4 % in 2010, and is projected to further decline to 51.5 % by the year 2030 (IPSSR 2014a, Tables 7.10 and 7.12) (see Fig. 2.1). Thus, contrary to popular references of the nuclearization of the modern Japanese household, there is no evidence of a striking increase in such households over the past 90 years.

The proportion of single-person households, on the other hand, has increased dramatically, from just 6.0 % of the total in 1920, and 16.1 % in 1960, to 32.4 % in 2010, nearly one-third of the total households. Combining the proportional changes of nuclear family and single-person households reveals an increase from 61.3 % in 1920 to 88.7 % in 2010 (IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.9) (see Fig. 2.2). In other words,

[2] South Korea (19 years: 1999–2018), Singapore (22 years: 1999–2021), and China (26 years: 2001–2027).

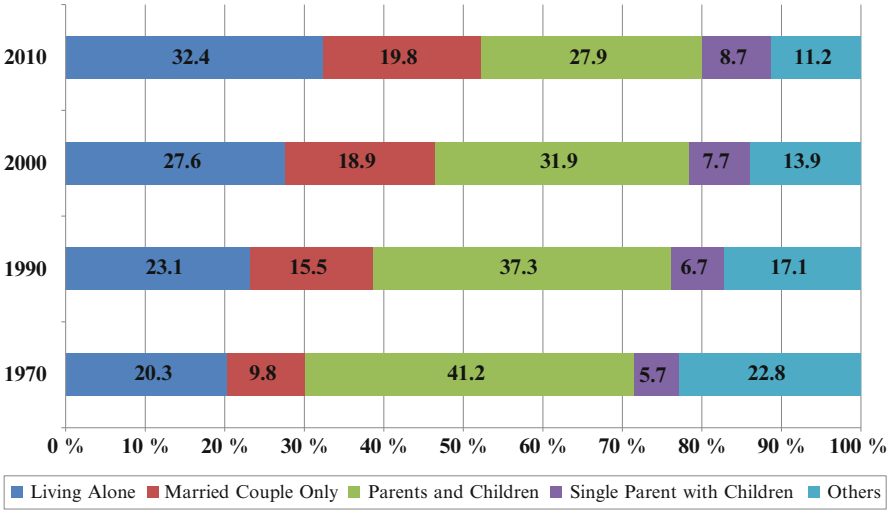

Fig. 2.1 Changes in the proportions of the household type: 1970–2010 (*Source*: IPSSR 2014a, Tables 7.10 and 7.12. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

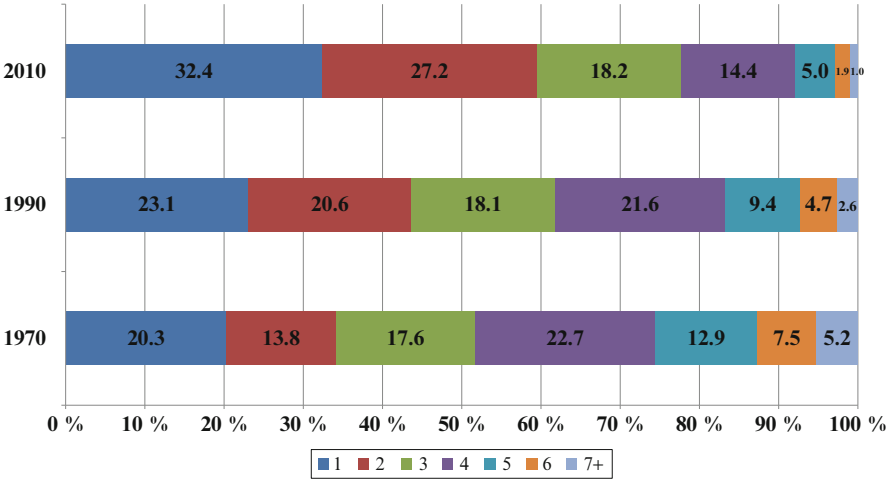

Fig. 2.2 Changes in the family size: 1970, 1990, 2010 (*Source*: IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.9. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

close to nine of ten households in Japan today fall outside the traditional Japanese family system, clearly signaling the decline in the traditional stem family in Japan.

Future projections, however, suggest that the nuclear family may not become a universal phenomenon in the modern era. With nuclear households projected to decline to 51.5 % by the year 2030, the proportion of single-person households is expected to increase to 37.4 % by that same year (IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.12).

These changes have been accentuated by the movement of young newlyweds, especially in urban areas, to households outside the family home. While upper-class families with ample property have customarily extended financial support to their newlywed children by building detached homes on their premises, people in the middle and lower classes have usually been obliged to rent independent housing or purchase a condominium and pay a mortgage in installments. This may be a reason why we see an increase in the couples-only category of the nuclear family household.

Establishing a first residence outside the family home has yet to become a standard arrangement among newly married Japanese. In rural areas, most newlywed couples continue to reside with one of the couple's parents. Even in urban areas, many self-employed newlyweds still reside with the family of the eldest son, as long as space permits. But the shortage of housing space is so acute in urban areas that the nuclearization of reduced-sized families has increased in recent years.

2.3 Changes in the Three-Generation Family

Just as the nuclear family is linked with modernization, the stem family (also referred to as the three-generation family or simply the generational family) seems to be one of the preconditions for modern economic development. The stem family structure incorporates a support network for elder members in the household where three, four, or even five generations live in a single household.

The Japanese family alterations become more apparent when we analyze changes in the proportion of three-generation families in Japan. Slightly more than one-third of all Japanese households in 1955 (36.5 %), and slightly less than one-third in 1965 (33.2 %), today the stem family accounts for only one in every 14 households (7.1 % in 2010) (Yamagata Prefecture 2012, Table 8). It is important to note, however, that there exist significant regional variations by prefecture in the proportion of three-generation households as shown in Fig. 2.3.

That is, although the national average for the three-generation households is only slightly more than 7 %, the prefecture showing the highest rate (Yamagata) is as high as 21.5 %. On the other hand, Kagoshima, southernmost prefecture on the Kyushu island, is less than half the national average (3.2 %). Where do these significant regional variations come from? Let us discuss this issue later in this book, i.e., Chap. 7: *Japanese Elders Living Apart*.

Of Japan's total households in 1975, those with elder members aged 65 years and over constituted slightly more than one-fifth of the total households (22.2 %). The proportion increased to nearly four out of ten by 2010 (39.9 %) (IPSSR 2014a, Tables 7.1, 7.15). Of these elderly, only slightly less than one in every five resides in a three- or more generational household today (86.8 % in 1960 versus only 16.2 % in 2010).

In addition, households with only elder members have increased dramatically over the years (see Table 2.1). The proportion of one-person elderly households increased from 5.2 % in 1960 to 16.1 % in 2012. Similarly, the proportion of elderly couple households increased from 5.8 % in 1960 to 37.5 % in 2012 (IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.16).

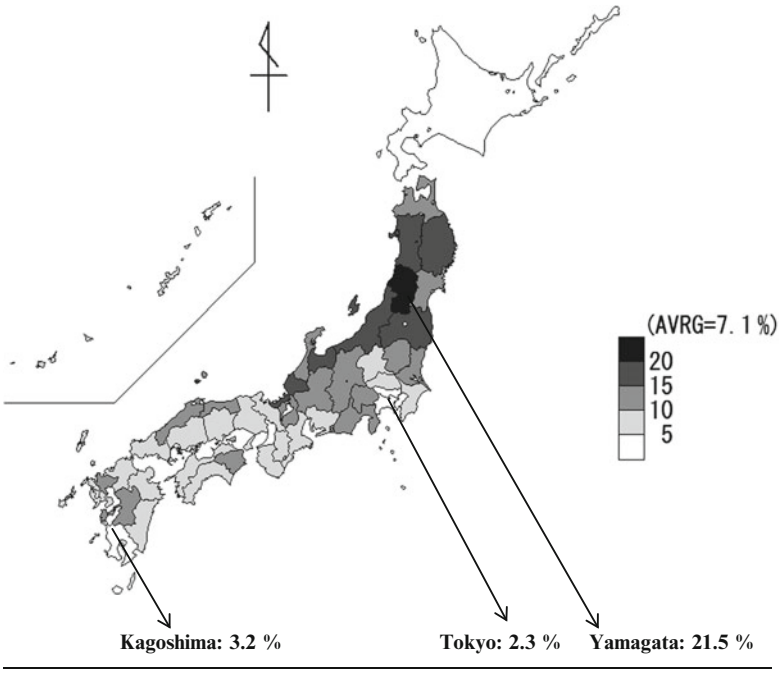

Fig. 2.3 Proportions of three-generation households by prefecture: 2010 (*Source*: Yamagata Prefectural Government 2012, Table 25, p. 30, and Table 1, p. 134. The figures were compiled and constructed by the author)

Table 2.1 Changes in the proportion (%) of family types of Japanese persons aged 65 and over: 1960–2012

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2012
Living alone	5.2	6.7	8.5	11.2	14.1	15.5	16.9	16.1
Married couple only	5.8	10.1	19.6	25.7	33.1	36.1	37.2	37.5
Others	89.0	83.2	71.9	63.1	52.8	48.4	45.9	46.4
With their children			69.0	59.7	49.1	45.0	42.3	42.3
Children are a couple			52.5	41.9	29.4	23.3	17.5	16.0
Child(ren) currently not married			16.5	17.8	19.7	21.6	24.8	24.8
With other relative(s)			2.8	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.6
With non-relative(s)			0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: For 1960 and 1970: IPP 1990, table 8.16; for 1980, 1990, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2012: IPSSR 2014a, table 7.16

Clearly, a greater proportion of the elderly 65 and over in Japan now live in one- or two-person-only households. As a consequence, an increasing number of Japanese elderly today are obliged to adopt independent lifestyles, not consistent with the traditional stem family system.

2.4 Family Size: Changes and Projections for the Average Number of Persons in a Household by Prefecture

Given this growth of nontraditional family structures, it is not surprising to find that, while the total number of Japanese households has increased nearly five times over the past nine decades, from 11 million in 1920 to 52 million in 2010 (IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.1), the average number of family members in a household has decreased dramatically. The average family in prewar Japan had more than five members, but today it has less than three (2.42 in 2010) (IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.9). This increase in the total number of households and decrease in average family size signals the emergence of the modern family in Japan. It should be noted with caution, however, that the modern family in this context means "a-traditional or nonconventional" rather than the traditional family household.

Governmental report and statistics on the "Projections for Japanese Households by Prefecture: 2010–2035" has been released recently (IPSSR 2014b). When we look at those on family size by prefecture, we notice consistently unique patterns on three points (see Fig. 2.4). First, it is evident that Japanese family size is getting smaller and smaller throughout Japan. It has been pointed out that the average family size in Japan today is much smaller than three (2.42 in 2010). This statistics, however, is not only for the average figure, but it also applies to all the 47 prefectures throughout Japan today already. This declining trend in attrition in the family size will continue in the future. (Those in 2025 and in 2035 would be 2.25 and 2.20, respectively.)

Second, the family size in Tokyo will become less than two (1.90) by 2025. It indicates that a significantly large proportion of the household in Tokyo will be those of living alone, may it consist of young people or of senior citizens. For the detailed discussion on the elderly living alone, see "Chap. 7: *Japanese Elders Living Apart: Policy Suggestions*" of this book.

Third, Yamagata prefecture and those in Tohoku and Hokuriku regions are and will expect to keep relatively larger family size, on one hand. On the other hand, however, prefectures in urban areas and those of rural Kagoshima and Kochi are and will continue to show the smallest family size in Japan. As discussed later in this book, it seems as if prefectural divorce rates and the family size by prefecture are inversely related to each other. In other words, the relatively large family size regions of Yamagata, Tohoku, and Hokuriku tend to show low divorce rates. On the other hand, prefectures which show relatively small family size in Tokyo, Hokkaido, Osaka, Kagoshima, and Kochi tend to show high divorce rates. The seemingly possible relationship between the high divorce rate and relatively small family size proposition does not apply for the case of Okinawa. There should be unique cultural variations accounting for these prefectural variations. (For detailed discussion on cultural factors which account for prefectural variations, please refer to the following chapters of this book, Chap. 5: *Changing Divorce in Japan*; Chap. 7: *Japanese Elders Living Apart*.)

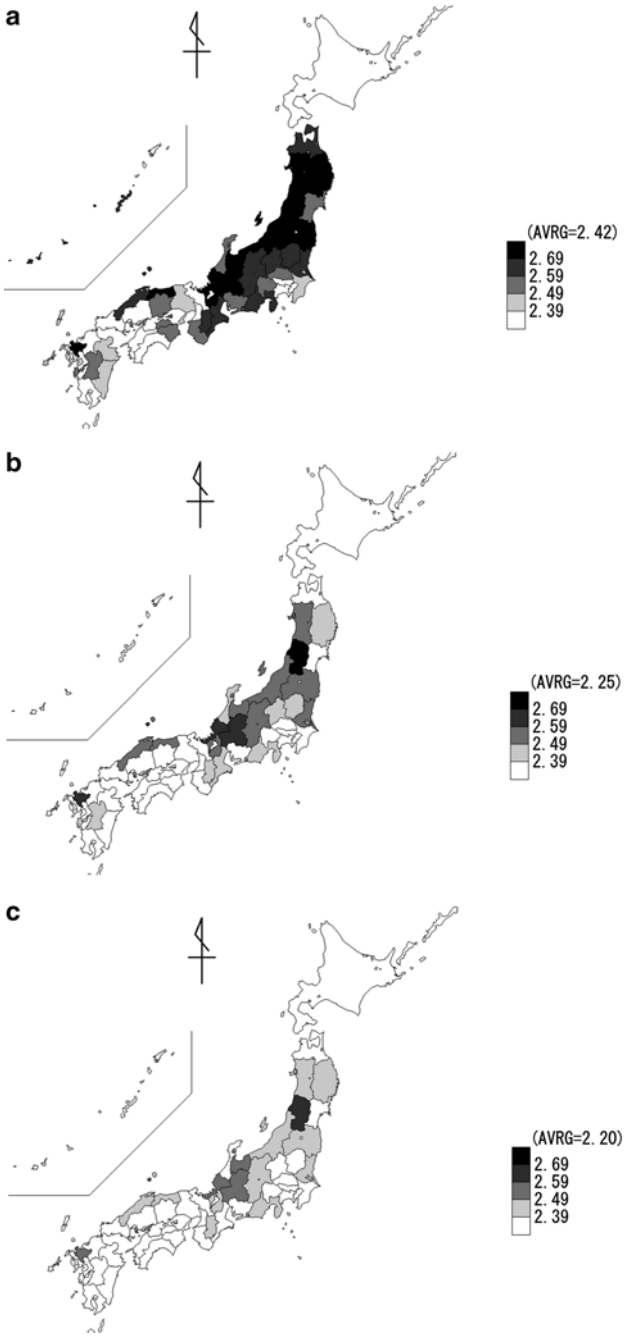

Fig. 2.4 Changes and projections for the family size by prefecture: 2010, 2025, 2035. (**a**) 2010: (Average: 2.42; Tokyo: 2.03-Yamagata: 2.94). (**b**) 2025 (Average: 2.25; Tokyo: 1.90-Yamagata: 2.71). (**c**) 2035 (Average: 2.20; Tokyo: 1.87-Yamagata: 2.59). (*Source*: IPSSR 2014b, Table II-2. The figures were compiled and constructed by the author)

2.5 Demographics of the Japanese Elderly

2.5.1 The Graying of Japan: Population Aging and Fertility Decline

As a consequence of this persistent trend of declining fertility, the number of children (up to 14 years old) in Japan has declined considerably over the years—from 29.4 million in 1950 (35.4 % of the total population) to 22.5 million in 1990 (18.2 % of the total population) and 16.5 million in 2012 (13.0 % of the total population) (IPSSR 2014a, Tables 2.5 and 2.6). In 1990, the dependency ratio of children for every 100 productive population (ages 15–64) was 26.2 (18.2 % vs. 69.7 %), indicating that approximately 3.8 productive persons supported every child. At the same time, the elderly in 1990 constituted 12.1 % of the total population (dependency rate: 17.3, signifying that 5.8 productive persons supported every elderly). By the year 2012, these ratios had declined significantly to 20.6 (13.0 % vs. 62.9 %) for the dependency ratio of children and increased to 4.9 productive persons supporting every child. Furthermore, the elderly population in 2012 increased to 24.1 % of the total population, resulting in the increase in the dependency ratio to as high as 38.4, indicating that only 2.6 productive persons supported every elderly (IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.6).

Kumagai in her earlier study projected that with an acceleration of the decline in child population and rapid increase in the elderly, the proportion of the elderly population would exceed that of the child population as early as by the end of the twentieth century (Kumagai 1990). In fact, it did so by the year 1997 (child population: 15.38 %; elderly population: 15.65 %). Since then, the proportion of children decreased to 13.1 % and that of the elderly increased to 25.1 % of the total population by the year 2013. Furthermore, projections for 2020 and 2060 would be, respectively, 11.7 % and 9.1 % for the child population and 29.1 % and 39.9 % for the elderly population (MIAC 2014a, Table 8) (see Fig. 2.5). In other words, by the year 2060, as many as four out of every ten of the Japanese population would be 65 years old and over.[3]

The proportion of Japanese 65 and over has been increasing at an unprecedented pace. This is termed the graying of Japan. Only in 1970 did Japan enter the aging society, in which the proportion of elderly 65 and over hit 7 % of the total population. In fact, Japan was one of the latecomers in this regard among the industrialized nations. Other countries became aging societies much earlier than Japan, some as early as the latter half of the nineteenth century (e.g., France in the 1860s and the United States in the mid-1940s).

Today, however, the increase in the aged is so acute in Japan that few other nations in the world, except Greece and Italy, surpass its rate. The national average aging rate in Japan today is as high as one in every four (25.1 % in 2013) (in comparison to Hong Kong 12.9 % in 2010, Korea 11.8 % in 2012, Singapore 9.9 % in

[3] For more detailed discussion on the topic of the elderly in Japan, refer to Chapter 5 of Kumagai 2008.

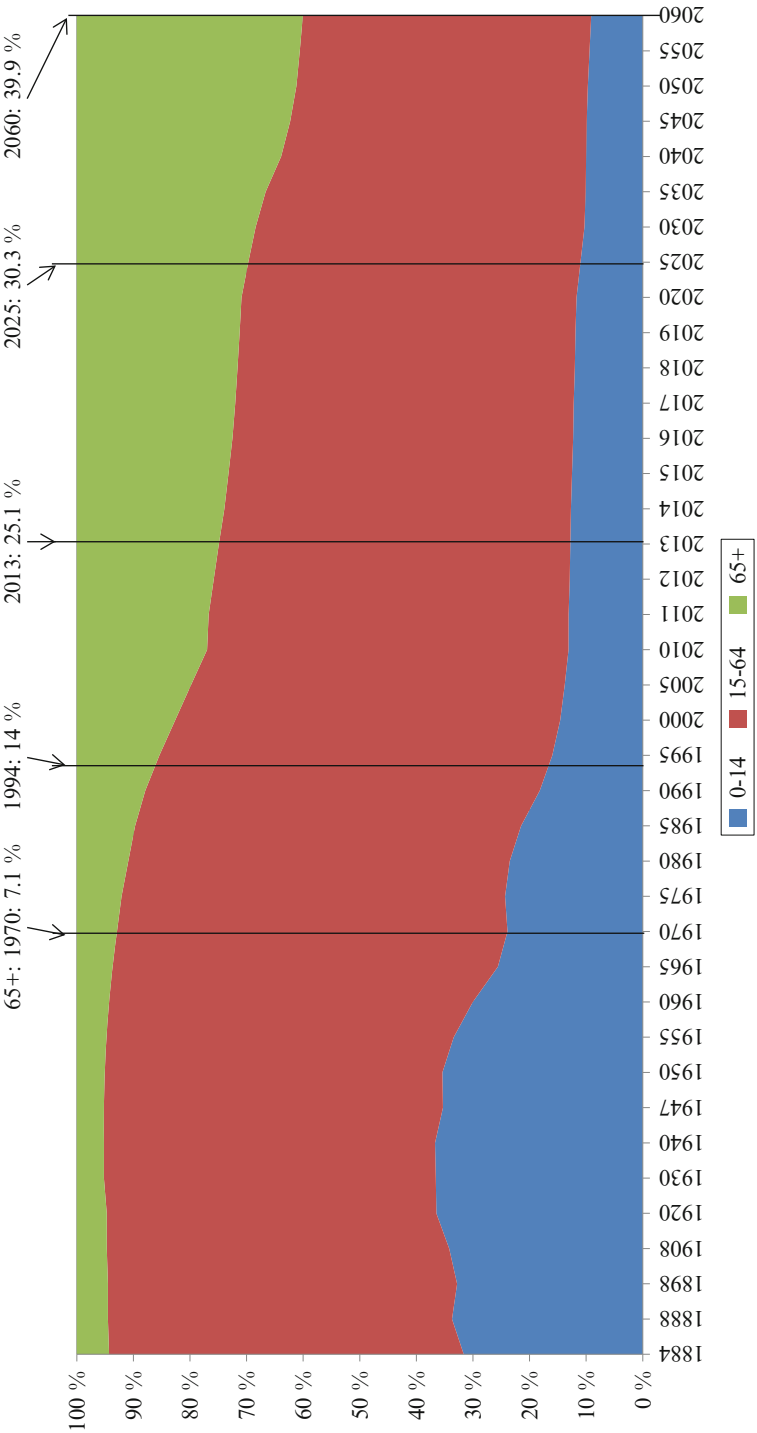

Fig. 2.5 Changes in percent distribution of the Japanese population by three age groups: 1884–2060 (*Source:* IPSSR 2014a, Tables 2.6 and 2.8, for data 2013, Statistics Bureau, MIAC 2014a. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

2012, and the United States 13.0 % in 2010) (IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.15, MIAC 2014a, 2). The predictions for aging rates by the National Institute of Population and Social Security are three out of every ten (30.3 %) for 2025 and as many as four out of every ten (39.9 %) for 2060 (IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.14) (see Fig. 2.5).

Furthermore, the elderly population in Japan today indicates the emergence of a frightening situation in the coming years. That is, when we look at the elderly population by two age groups, 65–74 years of age and 75 years plus, the older group appears to be growing faster. Of the total 5.1 % of the Japanese elderly population 65 and over in 2013, the under-75 group was 12.2 %, and the over-75 group was slightly less, 11.9 %. However, this will change in the future: with the over-75 group becoming proportionately larger. In fact, it is projected that of the elderly 65 and over, as many as two-thirds will be over 75 by the year 2060 (12.3 % vs. 18.1 % in 2025, 14.2 % vs. 24.6 % in 2050, and 13.0 % vs. 26.9 % in 2060) (IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.9) (see Fig. 2.6).

It is a natural course of our life that aging brings about health problems, physical and mental. In light of the population imbalance of fertility decline and population aging in Japan, the care of frail and bed-ridden elderly is one of the serious problems that Japan faces today. Why has this problem emerged?

2.5.2 Declining Birth Rates and Total Fertility Rates (TFR)

Further analysis needs to be conducted in the area of children's population—those who are less than 15 years of age.

Prior to the emergence of the aging society, Japanese children numbered just one-third of the total population. Today, however, the attrition rate in this proportion is so acute that it is as small as one in seven (13.1 % in 2013) (IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.6). It is predicted that the rate in Japan will decline to 11.7 % in 2020 and to 9.1 % in 2060 (IPSSR 2014a, Tables 2.6 and 2.8) (see Fig. 2.5 discussed earlier.)

Furthermore, very low level of the total fertility rate in Japan today (TFR: 1.43 in 2013) makes the demographic situation quite imbalanced, as has been discussed elsewhere (Kumagai 2008, 2011) (see Fig. 2.7).[4] Therefore, these trends have led to a much larger ratio of elderly to young people in Japanese society.

In addition to the overall changing trend of live births and the total fertility rate, TFRs by age group (Fig. 2.8) and TFRs by prefecture in 2013 (Fig. 2.9) are presented. By glancing at these figures, we can tell immediately that not only do Japanese women today delay their childbearing and child-rearing, but also there exist significant regional variations in the total fertility rate in Japan today. That is, the southeastern part of Japan tends to show higher total fertility rates rather than her northeastern counterpart.

[4] For more detailed discussion on "Changing Pattern of Fertility Rates in Japan: National Trends and Community Level Analyses," refer to Chapter 4 of Kumagai (2008).

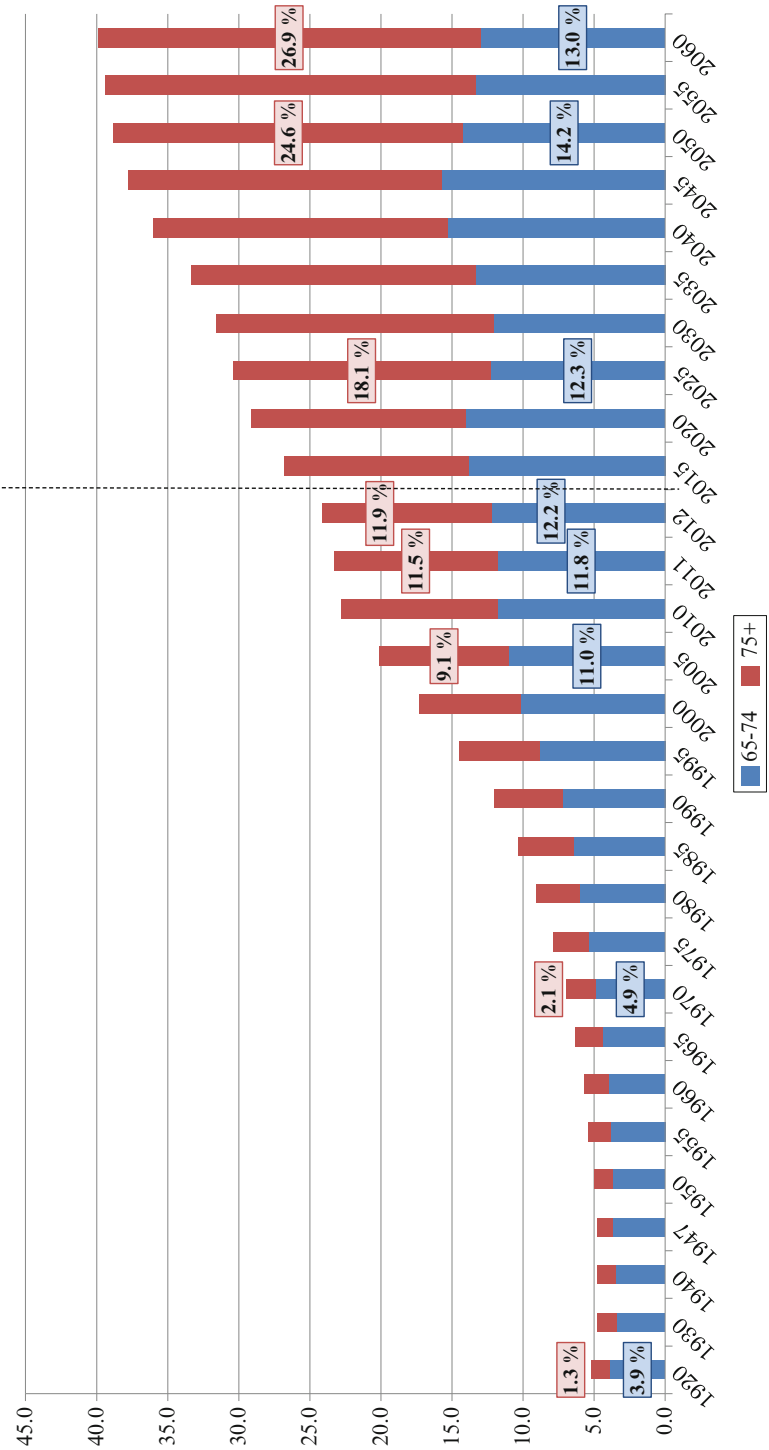

Fig. 2.6 Changes in the proportions of the Japanese elderly by age group: 1920–2060 (*Source*: IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.9. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

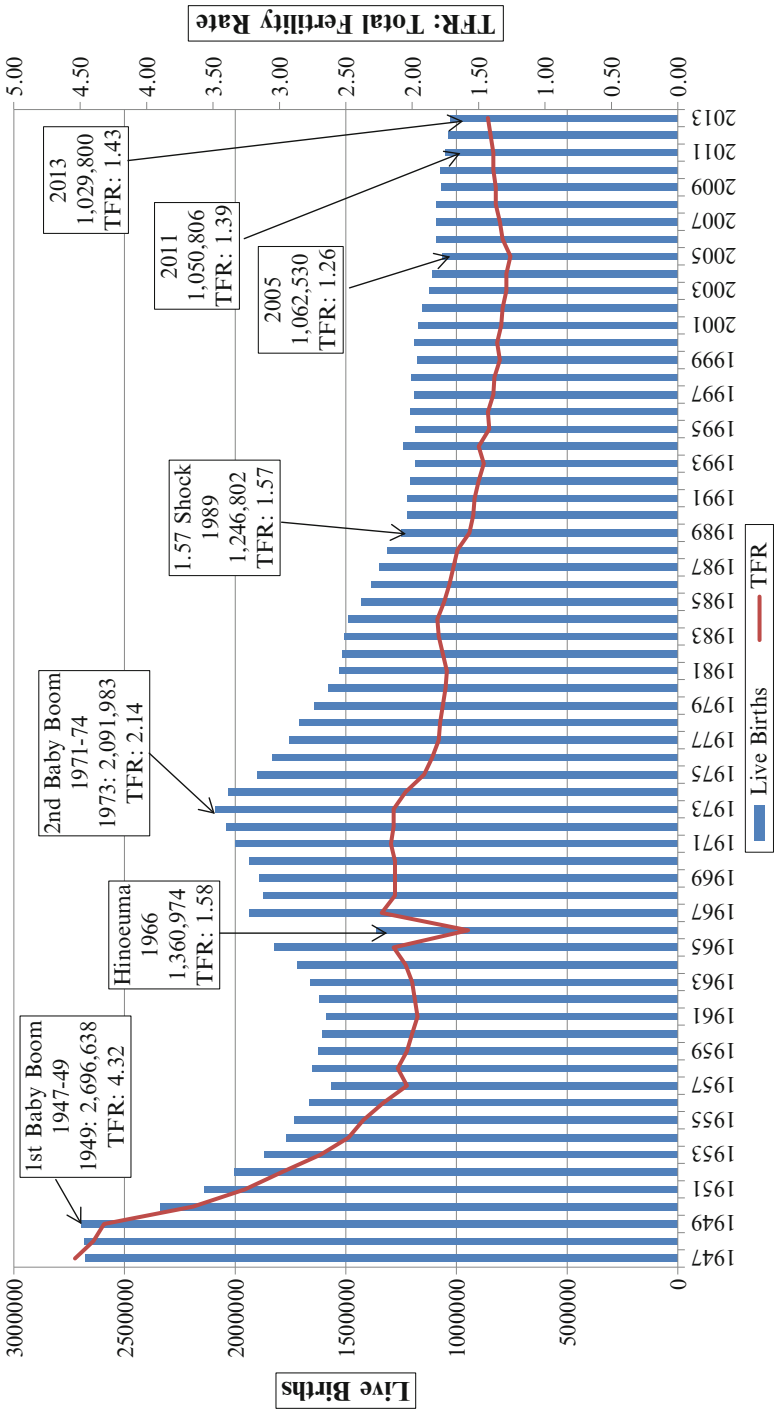

Fig. 2.7 Changes in live births and the total fertility rate: 1947–2013 (*Source*: IPSSR 2014a, Table 4.7, Statistics Bureau, MHLW 2014a, Table 2, and MHLW 2014b, Tables 1 and 2. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

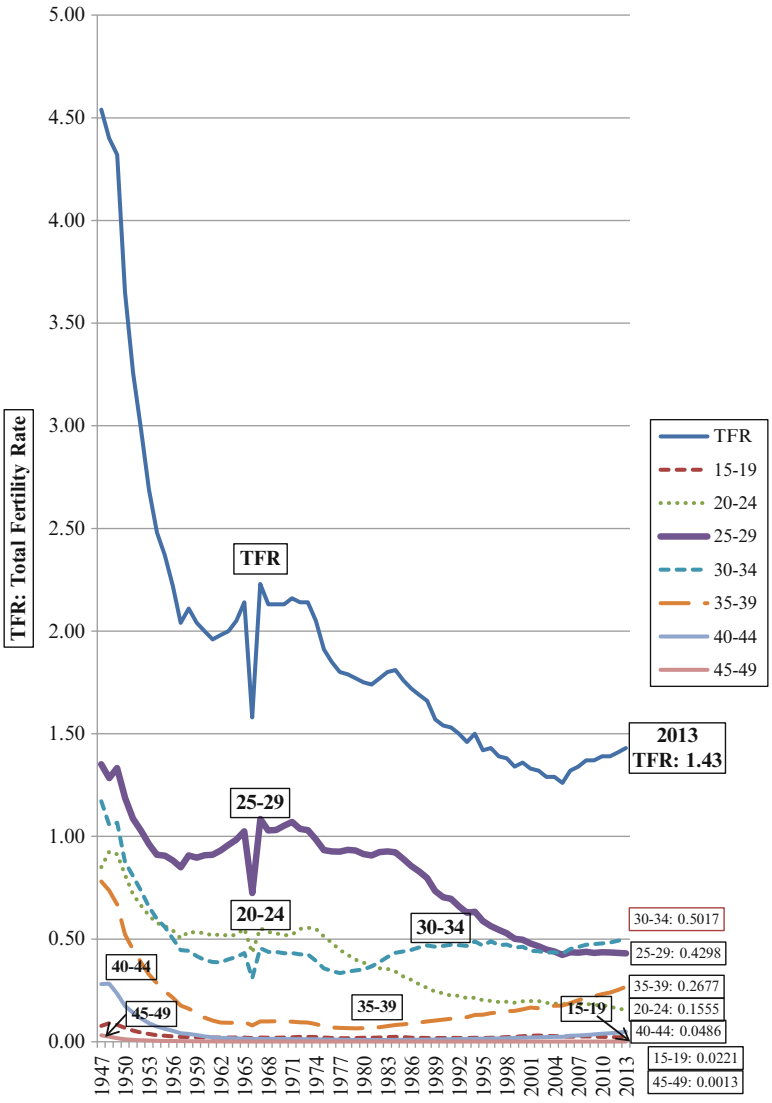

Fig. 2.8 Changes in total fertility rates (TFR) by age group: 1947–2013 (*Source*: MHLW 2014b: 7, Table 2. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

2.5.3 The Baby Boomer Generations

The impact of two Japanese baby boomer populations (8.1 million born between 1947 and 1949 and 8.2 million born between 1971 and 1974) has also contributed to the rapid rate of aging in Japan. By the time all the people in the first baby boomer generation are launched into old age, the proportion of Japanese elderly will exceed

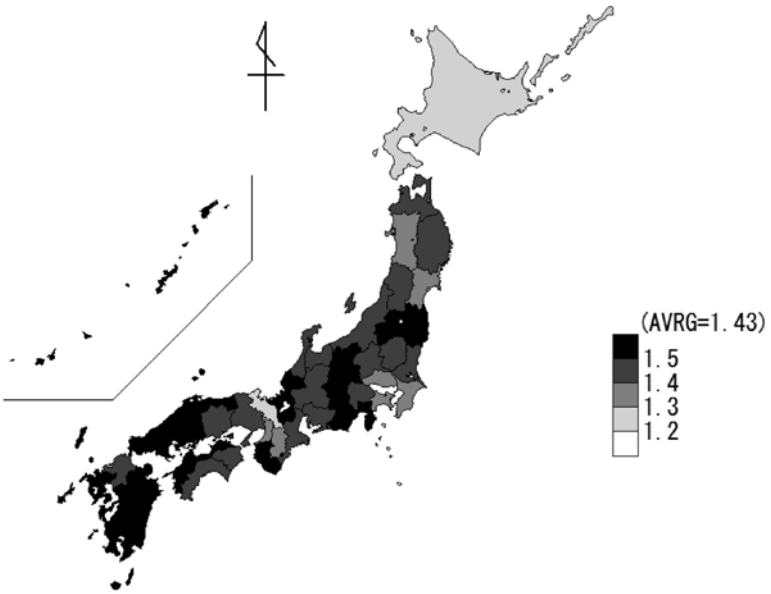

Fig. 2.9 Total fertility rates (TFR) by prefecture in 2013. TFRs in 2013: All Japan: 1.43; Lowest: Tokyo: 1.13; Highest: Okinawa: 1.94 (*Source*: MHLW 2014b: 7, Table 5. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

one in every five people. In fact, the acceleration of aging is so pressing that the Japanese elderly population surpassed 20 percent in September 2005 (20.2 %) and is now slightly more than a quarter of the total population: in 2013, it was 25.1 % (IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.6, MIAC 2014a: 2).

2.5.4 The Longevity Revolution: Rising Life Expectancy

Japanese citizens today are living longer than ever before (see Fig. 2.10). The life expectancy at birth of both Japanese men and women is now the highest in the world: 79.94 years for men and 86.41 years for women in 2012 (IPSSR 2014a, Table 5.12, b; MHLW 2014b, Table 6, United Nations 2014, Detailed Indicators). The longevity revolution experienced by most industrialized societies during the twentieth century has been most pronounced in Japan, where the increase in life expectancy has been both more rapid and more extensive than that of any other country. According to recent projections, the level of life expectancy among Japanese men and women is expected to be among the highest in the world throughout the twenty-first century. By 2035 and 2060, the projected life expectancies are 82.40 and 84.19 for the male population and 89.13 and 90.93 for the female population (IPSSR 2014a, Table 5.12).

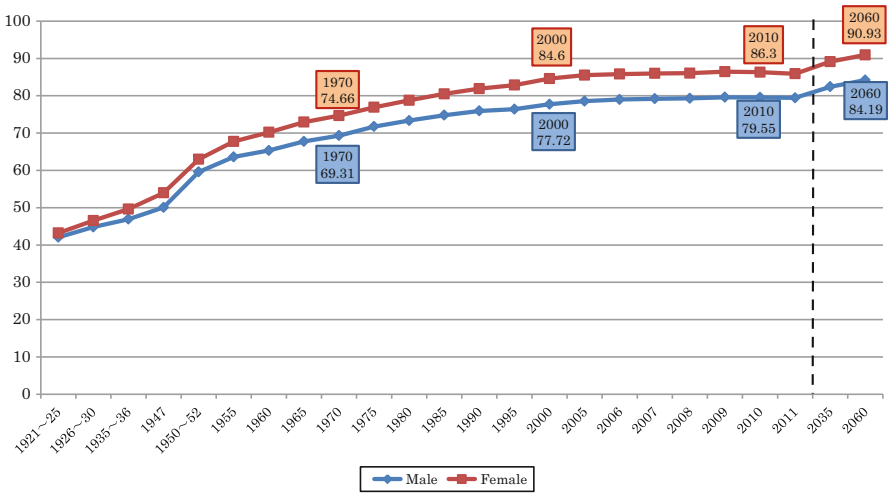

Fig. 2.10 Changes in life expectancy at birth of Japanese male and female: 1921–2060 (*Source*: IPSSR 2014a, Table 5.12. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

Life expectancy at birth for both men and women of other Asian countries, such as Hong Kong, Korea, and Singapore, has been prolonged significantly: Hong Kong, 80.3 and 86.4; Korea, 77.9 and 84.6; and Singapore, 79.7 and 84.6 in 2011, respectively (MHLW 2014b, Table 6, United Nations 2014, Detailed Indicators) (see Fig. 2.11). This fact suggests that aging will be a significant problem in many Asian nations in the twenty-first century, despite a relatively low level of current aging rates there.

2.5.5 Aging of the Elderly Population

The rising life expectancy in Japan has resulted in the aging of the elderly population itself. While the group of elderly 75 years and older constituted only one-quarter of the total elderly population in 1920, this proportion has increased to nearly half of the total elderly population today (49.4 % in 2012) and is projected to rise as high as 59.5 % by 2025 and 67.4 % by 2060 (IPSSR 2014a, Table 2.9) (see Fig. 2.6). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the population of 75 years old and over will exceed more than half of the total elderly population by the year 2020.

The age structure of the elderly population also differs by sex. Historically, the proportion of younger elderly men (65–74) has been greater than that of younger elderly women, and this difference has increased over time. In contrast, the older elderly (75 and over) are overrepresented by women. Although elderly men are living longer than ever before, there are still more elderly women in Japan who are, on the average, older than their elderly male counterparts. Consequently, the problems inherent in the aging process could be felt more severely by Japanese women than men.

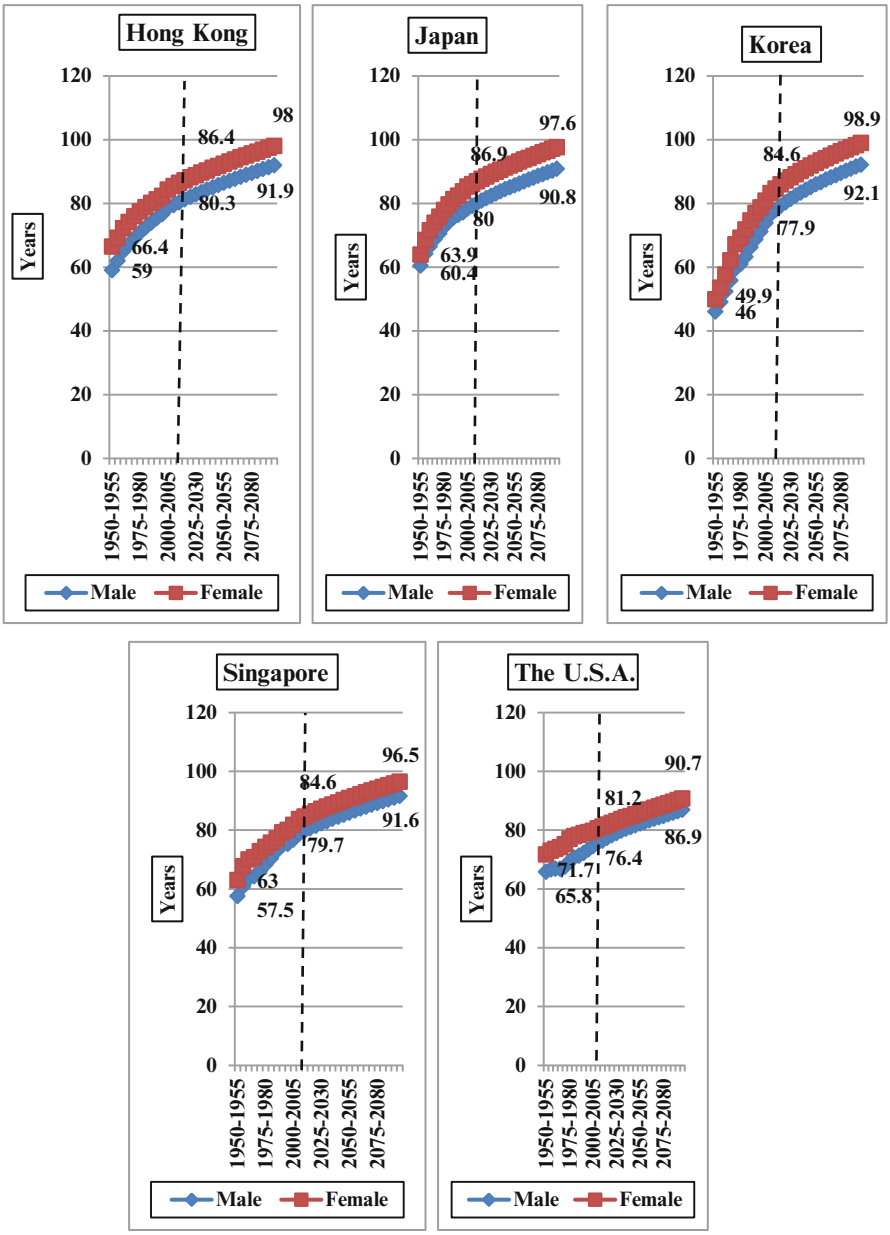

Fig. 2.11 Life expectancy at birth by sex: 1950–2100 in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and the United States (*Source*: United Nations 2014. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

2.5.6 Marital Status of Japanese Elderly

The marital status of Japanese elderly differs significantly by sex and age. The proportion of married elderly men is much higher than that of married elderly women: 90 % of men in their sixties are married, as are 80 % of men in their seventies and more than half of those 85 and over. However, of women in their late seventies, less than 30 % are married. Although widow(er)hood increases substantially with age for both men and women, the majority of Japanese women continue to outlive their husbands for two major reasons: first, in the early twentieth century, the average life expectancy of women was 2–3 years longer than men; and second, most elderly women were about 3 years younger than their husbands at their first marriage. Today, however, the average life expectancy of women is nearly 7 years longer than that for men (2012: 6.47 years) (IPSSR 2014a, Table 5.12) (see Fig. 2.10 discussed earlier). As a consequence, the average Japanese woman must expect to be a widow for approximately 5–10 years.

Marriage rates of Japanese elderly have been increasing over time for both men and women across different age groups. This does not mean, however, that Japanese elderly remain in their first marriages. Elderly men are much more likely to remarry than women, due to the availability of eligible partners. At the same time, the traditional orientation of Japanese culture continues to prevent widows from actively seeking remarriage. Widowhood is considered indicative of a woman's loyalty to her deceased husband and is still regarded as a virtue of Japanese womanhood.

Enjoying life after retirement as a couple is not yet a lifestyle fully appreciated by Japanese people. Most Japanese men who have devoted their lives to working outside the home find it difficult to manage free time after their retirement. And by the time their husbands retire from work, most Japanese women have established independent lifestyles that do not include their husbands. The unaccustomed full-time presence of a husband at home often has a negative impact on family life. Marital stress, difficult to cope with under the best of circumstances, becomes even more so for the elderly, particularly if their health and economic conditions are deteriorating. In some instances, the outcome of this negative impact has been identified as *jukunen rikon* (late-life divorce and separation), perhaps peculiar to Japanese elderly couples today, after being married for as long as 20 years or more. For a detailed discussion of *jukunen rikon*, refer elsewhere by the current author (Kumagai 2006; Kumagai et al. 2010). In addition, you may also like to refer to Chap. 6 of this book entitled on "*Late-Life Divorce in Japan Revisited: Effects of the Old-age Pension Division Scheme*."

2.5.7 Japanese Elderly and Family Relations

Societal aging has important implications not only for the elderly themselves but also for their families. This is especially true in Japan, where the traditional ideals of family life continue to play a critical role in Japanese society. Adult children and their families, especially the sons' families, are expected to extend support to their elderly parents by providing them a place to live.

2.6 Living Arrangements of the Elderly

2.6.1 With Family

With all these demographic changes, it seemed likely that living patterns of Japanese elderly would change dramatically. By 2010, elderly (65 and older) lived in nearly 40 % of the nation's 51,842,000 households. (IPSSR 2014a, Tables 7.1, 7.15). When Japan entered "the aging society" in 1970, one-fifth of all households included elderly member. Of all households which included the elderly, the number of households composed only of the elderly, living alone or as a couple, has more than doubled over the past 25 years. The traditional living arrangement of generational families, where elders reside with the family of one of their married children, has declined dramatically over the years. In 1975, more than half of the elderly in Japan were in generational households (54.4 %). The rate, however, had dropped to 15.3 % of the total households with the elderly by 2012 (see Fig. 2.12).

The traditional Japanese living arrangements in which the elderly live with their married children's families are becoming increasingly rare. Sometimes, one married couple cares for four elder parents, placing great stress upon the family. Moreover, most of the burden rests upon the shoulders of the caretaker, usually the married woman, denying her some independence. Marital stress, difficult under the best of circumstances, becomes even more so in generational homes, particularly if the health and economic conditions of the elderly are deteriorating.

The coresidency rate for the elderly, that is, the proportion of the elderly 65 and over who reside with their married and/or unmarried children, and/or relatives, used to be quite high in Japan, compared to Western societies. In fact, until the 1960s, the rate was more than 80 %. Today, however, only (42.3 %) of Japanese elderly adopt such living arrangements (IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.16). Although still quite high, the percentage is significantly lower than 50 years ago, when 86.8 % of Japan's elders lived with their families. This is also reflected in the increasing number of elders living alone and those as couples (see Fig. 2.13).

One-person households in Japan have more than quadrupled over the past five decades, from 3.8 % in 1960 to 16.1 % in 2012. The rate of increase of elderly couples living alone (7.0 % in 1960 to 37.5 % in 2012) has been even greater than one-person elderly households.

Living arrangements for Japanese elders vary according to marital status, sex, age, and the community in which one resides. Several trends may be identified (MHLW 2014a):

- The rate of coresidency increases as the elderly age, ranging from 42.7 % for those between 65 and 69 years of age to 63 % for those 85 years and older.
- Elders living in urban areas are less likely to live with their children's families and more likely to live with a spouse or alone.
- The coresidency rate of elder women has always been higher than that of men, and the gap becomes more apparent as elder women grow older. This is because women tend to live longer than men and have spouses who are older than they are.

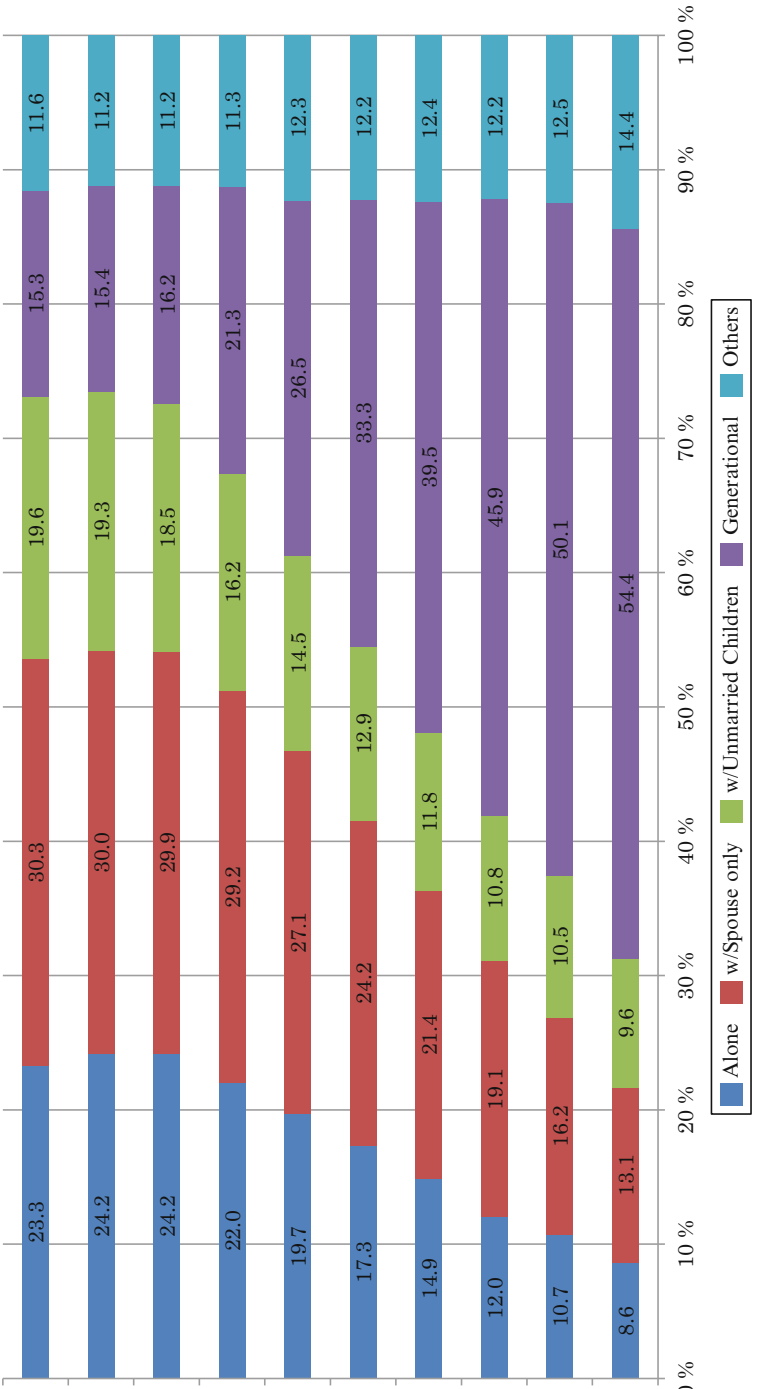

Fig. 2.12 Changing proportions of household types with elderly 65 and over: 1975–2012 (*Source*: IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.15. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

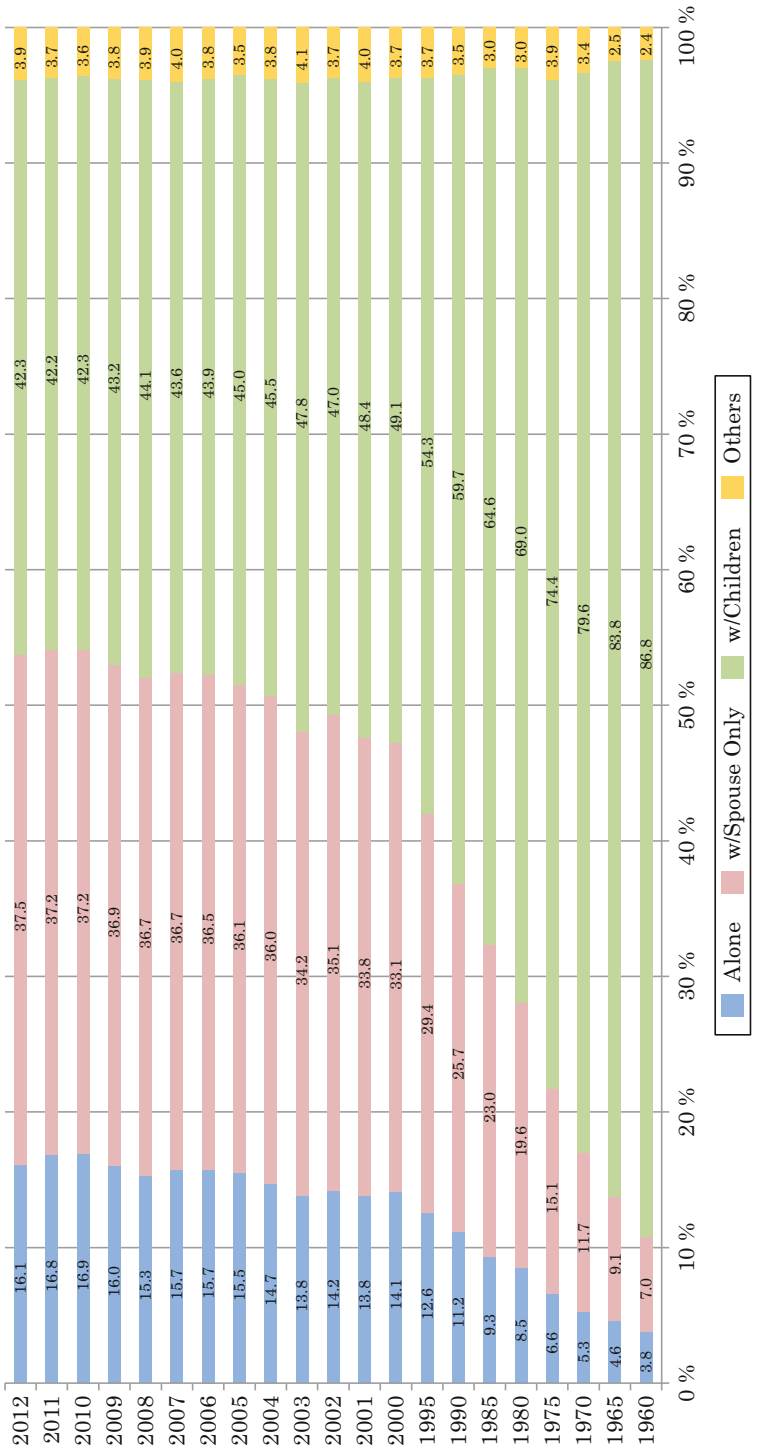

Fig. 2.13 Changes in the proportions of the elderly 65 and over by living arrangements: 1960–2012 (*Source*: For data 1980–2011, IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.16; for data 1960–1975, Statistical Bureau, MIAC 2014a. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

- Women are less likely than men to live with their spouse only and more likely to live with children or alone.

Living in traditional intergenerational families might be conflict laden, particularly between married women and mothers-in-law. In the idealized traditional extended family model, the elderly—both natural parents and in-laws—are willing to share responsibilities of childcare and household chores. But it is not reality. A study by the author of this book showed the opposite is true, at least for cross-sectional data at one point in time (Kumagai 1997a, b; Kumagai and Kato 2007). Kumagai analyzed reasons why a married woman would seek employment. Using logistic multiple regression analysis of a national representative sample, key factors were revealed. Japanese married women who live with their mothers-in-law eagerly seek employment outside the home if:

- The youngest child is 0–10 years old.
- The husband's annual income is low.
- The husband is non-salaried.
- They reside in a small community.
- They possess liberal attitudes toward traditional marital roles.

Working outside the home, perhaps, is an effective strategy for married women in traditional intergenerational families to reduce conflict with her mother-in-law.

2.6.2 Problems Associated with Coresidency Living Arrangements

Often, in Western eyes, the intergenerational families of Japan are looked on with envy—the symbol of a closely knit family working together. But it is not clear whether this is due to traditional sociocultural aspects of the Japanese family system or simply inadequate social support policies for the elderly. The author of this book elaborated three possible reasons for the relatively high rate of coresidency in Japanese society (Kumagai 1996, 149–51): (1) the tradition of family support for the elderly, (2) preferred living arrangements of the Japanese people, and (3) the lack of other alternatives.

During the prewar period when life expectancy was much shorter, successive generations of families lived together for much briefer periods of time, and generational conflicts were minimized. Today the stress of prolonged multigenerational living arrangements has resulted in intense conflicts, which reveal the ongoing struggle between traditional attitudes and modern lifestyles in Japan, particularly since adjustment to new lifestyles is more difficult for the older generation. In addition, the strong intergenerational ties that existed between mother and son in times past can be a continuing source of friction for young wives, who must cope with their mothers-in-law on a daily live-in basis.

Although there is no ideal solution for the intergenerational problems that can accompany living together, Japanese elders in the twenty-first century might look to

the United States to find another pattern of independent lifestyles. Being independent does not necessarily mean a complete absence of contact with family members and relatives. Rather, both the elderly and their children's families could maintain their privacy while still sharing close contact in everyday life. Dramatic increases in the elderly one- and two-person households in Japan today might be considered as the elderly learning to lead independent lifestyles.

In the United States, many younger Americans are willing to extend support to their elder parents and to maintain close contact with them. In fact, empirical studies prove the existence of strong and cohesive intergenerational relationships among American families despite their low rates of coresidency (Brubaker and Brubaker 1999; Swartz 2009). Swartz (2009: 191) suggests that "Intergenerational relations constitute an important and largely hidden aspect of how families contribute to the reproduction of social inequality in society. These findings reinforce the value of extending both scholarly and cultural notions of family beyond the traditional nuclear family model."

2.7 Regional Variations of the Japanese Elderly

Let us now elaborate on the marked diversity of Japanese families and aging in different regions. Although Japan is a small island country, its wide regional variations in sociocultural and demographic characteristics are unusual. The proportion of elderly population in many farming regions in northern and western Japan is already more than one in four (Kumagai 1996, 134–35). According to population estimates based on the Japanese National Census in 2010 conducted by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, the proportion of elderly in Japan varies significantly by region (IPSSR 2014a, Tables, 12.14, 12.19). As discussed earlier, the national average elderly population in Japan today is 23.3 %. However, among Japan's 47 prefectures, higher proportions of elderly are found in some of the southwestern areas of Japan, such as Shimane (29.1 %) and Kochi (28.8 %), and in some northeastern areas, such as Akita (29.6 %) and Yamagata (27.6 %). Prefectures with relatively low proportions of elderly are Okinawa (17.4 %), Kanagawa (20.2 %), Aichi (20.3), satellite prefectures of the Tokyo metropolis (20.4 %), Saitama (20.4 %), and Chiba (21.5 %) (see Fig. 2.14). Thus, we note that in looking at the distribution of the elderly population by prefecture, we must pay close attention to regional differences rather than looking at Japan as a whole.

By the year 2025, the national average elderly population is projected to be 30.5 % of the whole. Population projections, however, reveal that the process of aging in Japanese society will accelerate evenly across both lower populated rural areas and densely populated urban regions (IPSSR 2014a, Table 12.19, b) (see Fig. 2.15).

This regional variation of the aged population in Japan is also true for elderly households where the head of household is 65 and over. Of the total Japanese house-

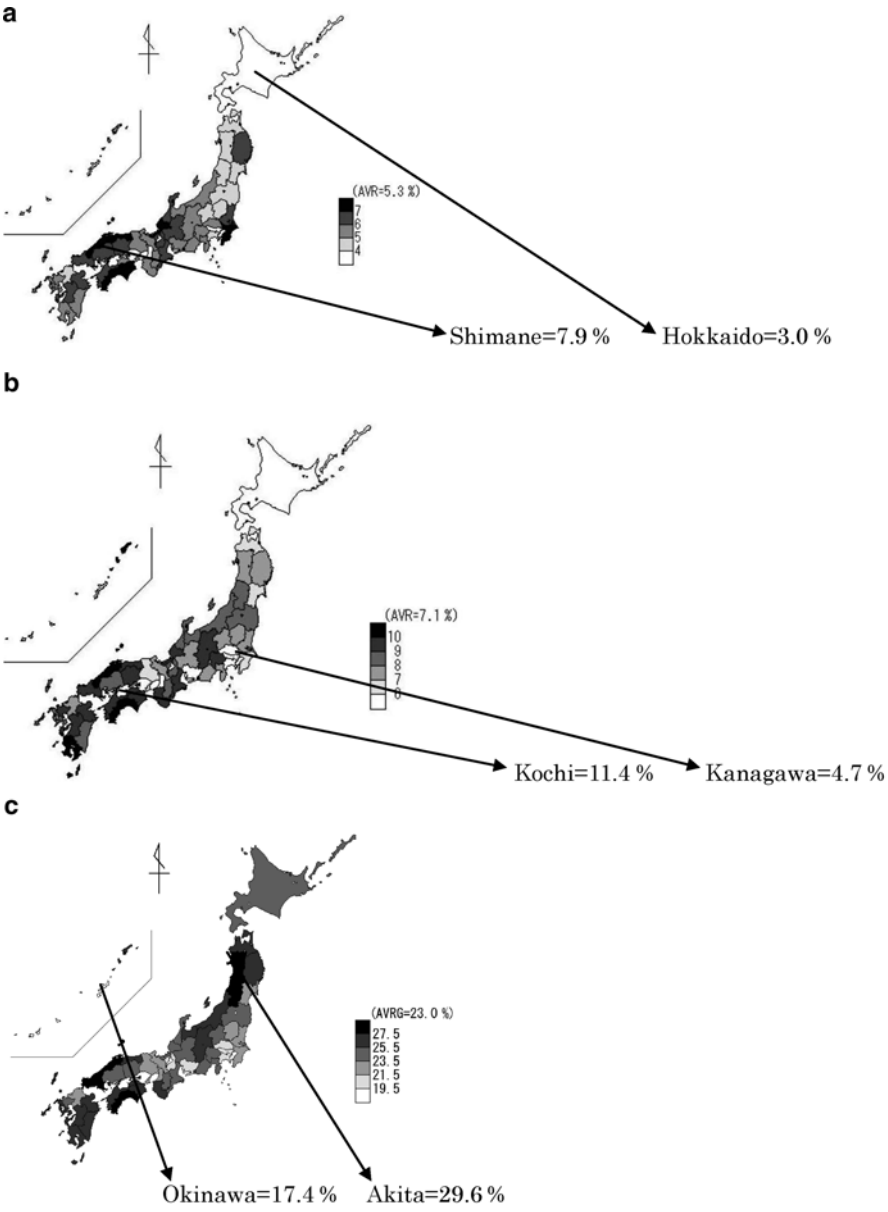

Fig. 2.14 Changes in the proportion of the Japanese elderly population: 1920–1970–2010. (**a**) 1920: (Average = 5.3 %; Hokkaido = 3.0 %-Shimane = 7.9 %). (**b**) 1970: (Average = 7.1; Kanagawa = 4.7 %-Kochi = 11.4 %). (**c**) 2010: (Average = 23.0 %; Okinawa = 17.4 %-Akita = 29.6 %) (*Source*: IPSSR 2014a, Table 12.14. The figures were compiled and constructed by the author)

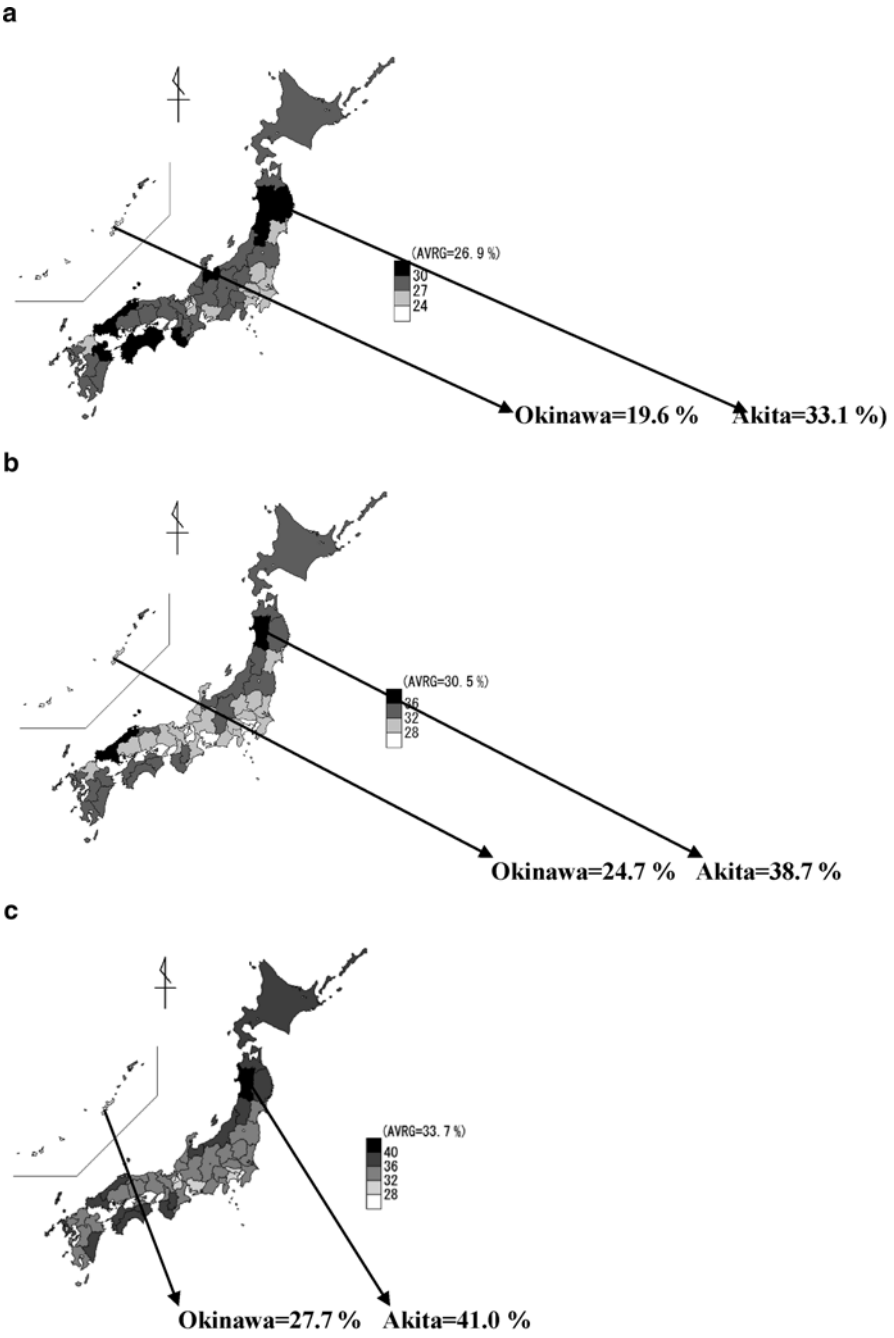

Fig. 2.15 Changes in the projected proportions of the Japanese elderly population: 2015–2025–2035. (**a**) 2015: (Average = 26.9 %; Okinawa = 19.6 %- Akita = 33.1 %). (**b**) 2025: (Average = 30.5 %; Okinawa = 24.7 %-Akita = 38.7 %). (**c**) 2035: (Average = 33.7 %; Okinawa = 27.7 %-Akita = 41.0 %) (*Source*: IPSSR 2014a, Table 12.19. The figures were compiled and constructed by the author)

holds in 2010 (51,842,000), such elderly households were more than one in every ten (15,987,000; 30.8 %) (IPSSR 2014a, Table 7.27). However, of the 47 prefectures in Japan, in one-third of mostly rural farming regions, the elderly proportion exceeded 30 % by 1995. The national average rate for elderly households has now reached more than three in every ten (30.8 %) in 2010 and is projected to be more than one-third of all households (35.2 %) by 2020. Moreover, in 2020 the elderly household rate for all 47 prefectures may be more than 30 % and in some areas may be more than 40 %.

The regional variation of the proportion of Japanese elderly suggests that the Japanese aging society must be studied carefully, with close attention to the region and the community (Kumagai 1997b, c). Policies for elderly welfare need to be proposed in the same manner, not simply by looking at the national average statistics.

Conclusion

In an attempt to prove the hypotheses on changes, continuities, and regional variations of Japanese families as a whole and by prefecture, data concerning households were examined. Findings suggest that the institution of the Japanese family currently differs widely from one region to another. At the same time, the study highlighted continuities sustaining the traditional nature of the Japanese family and household, by analyzing the traditional coresidency households in the northern part of the farming region. Similarly, the finding identified a long-existing unique family household type in the southern part of Kyushu, in which one- or two-person households are the predominant types among the elderly. These findings suggest that community and family policies are culturally bound, and therefore, it is essential for each Japanese community to develop family policies best suited to its own needs.

Most Japanese elderly today are healthy, active, and independent (90 % of those 65 and over) (PHP 2013: 17). If that is the case, seniors living by themselves have all the means to lead useful and active lives and to enjoy various lifestyles of their own. To fill these needs for the changing lifestyles of the active elderly, various business sectors in Japan have been offering programs and information about health care, food, adult education, travel, art, music, dance, sports, ICT, and many others.

As for the security of the elderly living alone, various devices such as the SECOM system and Mimamori.net have been well developed to watch their daily activities (Kumagai 2011). In case of an emergency, the network system that connects to the central headquarters will immediately contact a person to be informed. Nursing robots for the elderly helps them perform daily tasks in place of the growing shortage of caregivers. Robot dolls have been also

(continued)

developed to assist communication with lone elders by providing personal conversations and responses.

The onset of Japan's aging society in 1970 came relatively late among Western industrialized nations. Afterward, however, population aging in Japan has been progressing with unprecedented speed. Acute attrition in the children's population aged 0–14 in recent years in Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Korea, and Singapore bring about serious concern for the aging society there in the years to come, perhaps more critical than in their Japanese counterpart (see Figs. 2.16a, b). In other words, the increase today in elderly one- and two-person households in Japan could be a lesson for these Asian societies that will also face the situation in the near future.

This is not to suggest, however, that the Japanese disregard the family policies of Western nations that are successful in developing countermeasures for the elderly apart households. It goes without saying that policies of such countries should be studied carefully. In developing family policies in Japan, it is important to consider the historical and cultural background specific to each region. For this very reason, it is believed that this chapter has significant policy implications not only for the future of the Japanese aging population and family but also for those in Asia.

Through the historical and longitudinal analyses of demographic characteristics in Japan, we now realize that Japanese society today is truly going through a process of fertility decline and population aging. Thus, in the next chapter, we will turn to a basic issue in the study of the family, i.e., courtship and marriage.

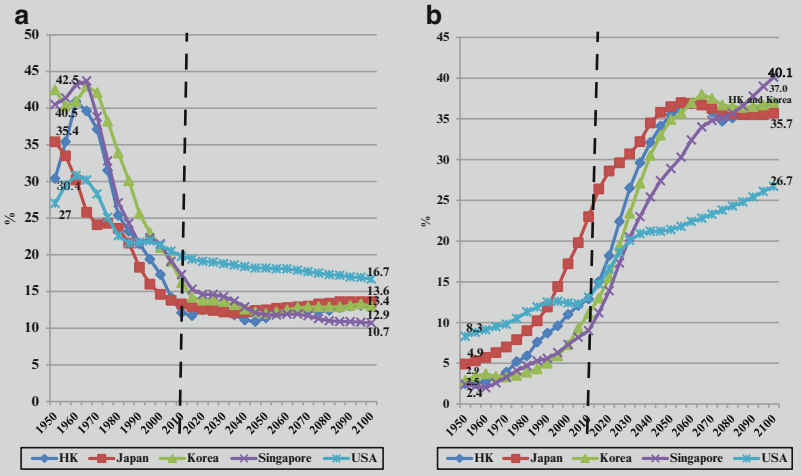

Fig. 2.16 Proportions of population (**a**) aged 0–14 and (**b**) 65 and over: 1950–2100 in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and the United States (*Source*: United Nations 2014. The figure is compiled and constructed by the author)

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http://www.springer.com/978-981-287-184-8

Family Issues on Marriage, Divorce, and Older Adults in Japan
With Special Attention to Regional Variations
Kumagai, F.
2015, XIX, 184 p. 54 illus., 32 illus. in color., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-981-287-184-8