

Change of Attitudes towards Social Policy in Japan in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century: Neoliberalism or Welfare State?*

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The aim of this paper is to clarify the change of social consciousness concerning neoliberalism and the welfare state in Japan in the 2000s. In the first half of the decade, the influence of neoliberalism grew in the field of economic and social policy. Unlike the first half, however, the second half of the 2000s showed slightly different situations: Neoliberalism started to become less influential. This paper discusses the change of social consciousness as the background to the policy changes witnessed in the first half and second half, respectively, of the 2000s. Orientation toward “small government” (low cost) was high in the first half and remained low in the second half of the decade. In contrast, orientation toward a “welfare state” (high benefit) approach grew stronger both in the first half and the second half of the decade. Contrary to what is generally believed, the proportion of people who thought highly of initiatives by the “public sector” gained a majority also in the first half of the 2000s. People who placed importance on initiatives by the “private sector” increased in the second half of the decade. However, it is reasonable to think that the increase is not because of “privatization” but rather because of the emergence of the NPOs, NGOs, and social enterprises. However, public opinion was divided into two camps: need principle/universalism and contribution principle/selectivism.

Keywords: Social Policy, Welfare State, Neoliberalism, High Cost, High Benefit, Low Cost, Low Benefit

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The Rise and Fall of Neoliberalism

First Half of the First Decade of the Twentieth Century

In the case of Japan, the first ten years of the twenty-first century can be roughly divided into two halves. In the first half, the influence of neoliberalism grew unprecedentedly strong over decisions pertaining to economic policy as well as social policy. The Economy Strategy Council established by the Obuchi Cabinet proposed “complete privatization” of welfare pensions in 1999. The discussion on privatization of public pensions quieted rapidly because of the scarce feasibility of the idea, but the proposal itself is of historic significance because it was made by a government agency. At a later meeting, the Koizumi Cabinet adopted several “large-boned policies” that stipulated basic keynotes of the government’s economic and social policies, and they incorporated many neoliberal proposals. The “large-boned policy” in 2003 especially contains outstanding ideas to utilize market mechanisms in the field of social policy with its proposal to establish a “designated district for regulatory and structural reforms,” in which private companies would be allowed to manage hospitals and special elderly nursing homes.

A policy to restrict social security, which went into effect since the 1980s, was also further intensified to realize the “small government” as the essence of neoliberalism. In 2002, the self-pay medical care rate for the elderly was raised while medical treatment fees were lowered. In 2003, the rates were lowered for both nursing care and unemployment benefits. In 2004, medical treatment fees decreased again, the age component of livelihood protection was abolished, and the pension reform unfreeze hikes in insurance premiums and set a ceiling on insurance rates. In addition, the macroeconomic slide system was introduced, and the natural increase of social security expenditure due to the aging of population was controlled. In 2005, food and dwelling expenses became subject to individual payment. These collective measures were part of the reform.

The Koizumi Cabinet that was in power in the first five years of the 2000s (to be exact, between April 26, 2001, and September 26, 2006) is well known for its high approval rating compared to past cabinets. *Asahi shimbun*, which conducted a nationwide survey, reported that the approval rating for the Koizumi Cabinet was 78% immediately after its inauguration (April 2001), the highest approval rate since *Asahi shimbun* first started this survey

(*Asahi Shimbun*, April 30, 2001, morning paper). Moreover, the approval rate skyrocketed to as high as 84% in May 2001. Although the approval rating fluctuated after reaching 84%, the Koizumi Cabinet recorded an average rating of over 50% and achieved the highest average rate among all cabinets of the Liberal Democratic Party, according to the seventy-six surveys conducted during the five years and five months in which the prime minister was in office (*Asahi shimbun*, September 20, 2005, morning paper). In addition, Prime Minister Koizumi won a great victory in the general election on postal privatization in September 2005. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party he led acquired 327 seats out of 480 seats for reelection.

Second Half of the 2000s

Unlike the first half, the situation in the second half of the 2000s was very different. One of them is that no cabinet was able to remain in power for a long period with a high approval rating like that of the Koizumi Cabinet. That held true whether the cabinet was a coalition cabinet made up of the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito or a cabinet of the Democratic Party. Each of the cabinets following Koizumi enjoyed a high approval rating immediately after inauguration, but the ratings subsequently plummeted so rapidly as to force the given prime minister to resign after merely one year in office. This pattern prevailed ever since Koizumi's resignation. The Abe Cabinet that succeeded the Koizumi Cabinet was in office for one year between September 2006 and September 2007, the Fukuda Cabinet that succeeded the Abe Cabinet remained in office for one year between September 2007 and September 2008, and the subsequent Aso Cabinet stayed in office for one year between September 2008 and September 2009. (Each of the three prime ministers announced their respective resignations in advance.) In Japan, regime change from the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito to the Democratic Party occurred in 2009. The Hatoyama Cabinet held onto power for a shorter period than the three previous cabinets, lasting only from September 16, 2009, to June 8, 2010. The Kan Cabinet was born on June 8, 2010, but the Noda Cabinet replaced it shortly thereafter in September 2011. As of the present (January 2012), nobody can tell whether the Noda Cabinet will repeat the pattern that has prevailed since the Abe Cabinet.

Another important difference is that, unlike in the first half of the decade, neoliberalism started to become less influential in the second half of the decade. The most dramatic change is that the world depression started

with the Lehman Shock on September 15, 2008. Paul Krugman insisted that the Lehman Shock put an end to the days of global neoliberalism:

Barack Obama said, "It does not matter whether a government is big or small" in his inauguration address and put the Reaganomics that pursued 'small government' behind. Bill Clinton thought that he still needed to agree with what Reagan preached, though he said that the days of a big government ended when he was elected as president. The Reagan period ended in the presidential election in November 2008. (Krugman 2009, pp. 99–100)

The above is a worldwide trend, and the movement inside Japan corresponded with it to a certain extent. However, some supplementary explanation is necessary. The Abe Cabinet was formed subsequent to the Koizumi Cabinet, and it declared its intention to continue the previous policy direction and, therefore, kept implementing the policies formulated by the Koizumi Cabinet. However, the fact remains that the Abe Cabinet was not as dedicated to neoliberal policies as was the Koizumi Cabinet. For example, the Abe Cabinet focused more on work-life balance than on deregulating the labor market. The Fukuda Cabinet established the National Council for Social Security, and the Aso Cabinet published its report and showed its resolve to "strengthen the function of social security." Under the Aso Cabinet, the policy to "constrain social security expenses by 220 billion yen per year" was withdrawn. Therefore, it can be said that fine adjustments to the Japanese social security policy started in the second half of the 2000s even under the Liberal Democratic Party-New Komeito Cabinet.

What is more decisive is that the Democratic Party won the general election in August 2009. This put an end to the 1955 regime in the sense that the Liberal Democratic Party had, until then, always been at the center of political power. Furthermore, the Democratic Party proclaimed the "people's life first" slogan in the general election of 2009 to make its position against "structural reforms," that is, neoliberal policy of the Koizumi Cabinet clear. The party won by campaigning with a manifesto that emphasized the difference in the direction of social policy from the first five years of the decade. As a result, the retreat of neoliberalism grew decisive in the social security policy addressed by the Abe, Fukuda, and Aso cabinets under the Liberal Democratic Party-New Komeito regime.

The Democratic Party, however, lost in the House of Councilors election in July 2010. This created the so-called divided diet, and the political

situation remains deadlocked even at present. It is clear that the new policies implemented by the Democratic Party Cabinet would suffer setbacks as a result. Furthermore, the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 took the limelight away from discussions on social security policy. As of January 2012, the discussion had not returned with the same degree of importance as in the first five years of the 2000s. In this sense, the difference between the first half and the second half of the decade is rather distinct.

This paper discusses the change in social consciousness as the background for policy changes witnessed in the first half and the second half of the 2000s, respectively, using mainly the following three data sources:

- “Consciousness Survey on Welfare and Life”¹ (normally known as the Social Policy and Social Consciousness Survey, or SPSC Survey) conducted by the Study Group on a Welfare Society in April 2004 that covered a total of 5,000 males and females, older than 20, nationwide.
- “Questionnaire Survey on Welfare and Sense of Impartiality”² conducted by the Department of Sociology, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo in November 2005 that covered a total of 3,000 male and female respondents, older than 20 but younger than 79, nationwide.
- “Conscious Survey on Social Security”³ conducted by Central Research Services, Inc. between June and July 2010, on consignment from the Department of Sociology, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo, covered a total of 4,000 respondents who are older than 20, nationwide.

¹ This survey was funded by a 1999–2001 grant-in-aid for scientific research (A) “Substantive Research on the Value of the Welfare State” (principal investigator: Shogo Takegawa). Two-stage stratified random sampling method was used, and data were collected using the placement method of door-to-door distribution and collection. Effective responses were 3,991 with a collection rate of 79.8%. See Takegawa (2006) for details on this survey. Survey data are open to the general public in the data archives of the Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo.

² This survey was funded by a 2004–2007 grant-in-aid for scientific research (A) “Sociological General Research of the Public Nature on Gender, Welfare, Environment, and Pluralism” (principal investigator: Chizuko Ueno). Two-stage stratified random sampling with door-to-door interviews was used as the research method. Effective responses were 1,320, and the collection rate was 44.0%.

³ This research was conducted in June and July 2010 as part of the survey funded by a 2008 grant-in-aid for scientific research (S) “Analysis of the Class Gap in the Aging Society with Fewer Children and General Substantiative Research on the Construction of the Public Nature” (principal investigator: Sawako Shirahase) (Issue no. 20223004). Two-stage stratified random sampling was used as the sampling method. Effective responses were 1,260 (collection rate: 31.5%) in June and 1,276 (collection rate: 31.9%) in July. See the introductory chapter of this book.

The three surveys mentioned above are very useful in studying the changes in the first ten years of the 2000s because they were conducted in 2000, 2005, and 2010, respectively, and because they contain the same question items each year. Each of them, however, contained a unique survey objective, and the number of question items available for comparison is limited. Please note that the following is somewhat of a patchwork analysis, given the nature of these surveys.

Small Government and Privatization: The Value of Neoliberalism

Various understandings are available on what neoliberal public policy means. Financial institutions of advanced countries, the IMF, and the World Bank agreed on the “Washington Consensus” to address the accumulated debts of developing countries. Williamson organizes the discussion of the “Washington Consensus” into the following ten items (Williamson 1990): (1) Fiscal discipline, (2) priority of public spending, (3) tax reforms, (4) interest rates, (5) exchange rates, (6) trade liberalization, (7) foreign direct investment, (8) privatization, (9) deregulation, and (10) property rights. The agreement on these aspects of public policy was originally based on the issues of developing countries, but it is also the rule that has governed the public policy of advanced countries since the 1980s. Accordingly, most people presumably agree that the content of neoliberal public policy is organized along the lines of these ten items.

Of these ten items, the items related to social policy can be further classified into three groups: (a) Small government (items 1, 2, and 3), (b) privatization (item 8), and (c) deregulation (item 9). Regrettably, the three surveys mentioned above do not contain question items concerning the rights and wrongs of deregulation, but they contain questions on small government and privatization. Public opinion about these two items is discussed first.

“Small Government”

With regard to “small government,” the three surveys asked the following question:

(Q) Of the two ideas given below, which is closer to your personal opinion if

you were asked to decide?

Idea A: The national and local governments should make social security more satisfactory even if tax and social insurance premium are raised.

Idea B: The national and local governments should reduce tax and social insurance premium even if the standard of social security is not improved.

Idea A represents the principle generally called “high cost, high benefit,” and idea B embodies that of “low cost, low benefit.” It can be safely said that the former is the “high-cost, high-benefit approach” and the latter the “low-cost, low-benefit approach.” It is possible to say that people in favor of “high cost, high benefit” support “big government” because they agree to increase public spending even if such an increase means increased burden for individuals. In contrast, people in favor of “low cost, low benefit” support “small government” because they give the highest priority to decreasing the burden of social insurance premium and tax.

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses to this question item. The total number of respondents answering “close to A” or “somewhat close to A” is counted as people in favor of “high cost, high benefit,” and the total number of respondents saying “close to B” or “somewhat close to B” is classified as those in favor of “low cost, low benefit.”

The survey results indicate that the number of supporters of “big government” exceeded that of “small government” and commanded a majority in all three survey responses. Furthermore, the percentage of supporters of “small government” decreased more than 10%, from 44.3% to 31.2%, in the first five years of the decade and remained at 31.0% in the five years that followed. As far as the table shows, not only was the principle of “small government” as the essence of neoliberalism not supported, but the number of supporters also decreased from the days when neoliberal social policy was most eagerly pursued.

Privatization

What were the results of privatization? The question item on privatization reads as follows:

(Q) Of the two ideas given below, which is closer to your personal opinion if you were asked to decide?

Idea A: The public sector (the national and local governments) should be responsible for supplying and managing pensions, medical services, and

TABLE 1
HIGH COST, HIGH BENEFIT OR LOW COST, LOW BENEFIT

	High cost, high benefit	Low cost, low benefit	Initiative by the public sector	Initiative by the private sector
Nationwide 2000	54.7	44.3	71.8	27.4
Nationwide 2005	59.2	31.2	71.9	21.0
Nationwide 2010	68.2	31.0	68.4	31.3

(%)

social security services as much as possible.

Idea B: The private sector (companies and NPOs) should be responsible for supplying and managing pensions, medical services, and social security services as much as possible.

Idea A encapsulates the attitude that the public sector should take the initiative in providing social security services, while idea B indicates the attitude that social security services should be privatized. As in the case of “high cost, high benefit,” the total number of respondents saying “close to A” or “somewhat close to A” is classified as people in favor of the “initiative by the public sector.” The total respondents saying either “close to B” or “somewhat close to B” is classified as those in favor of the “initiative by the private sector” in the table.

The above table indicates that around 70% of the respondents support public sector initiatives in this regard, and supporters of “privatization” are a minority group throughout all ten years. Interestingly, the support rate of “privatization” decreased 6 points from 27.4% to 21.0% in the first five years of the decade, but contrastingly, it increased by 10 points in the second five-year period.

The above analysis indicates that the support rate of the cabinet actively promoting neoliberal public policy was very high throughout the first half of the 2000s, but both the “low cost, low benefit” and “initiative by the private sector” principles did not necessarily enjoy a high support rate. In addition, their support rate dropped in the first half of the decade. It can safely be said that a change of social consciousness in the first five-year period was the background for the change in social polity in the second half of the decade.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that the support for the “low cost” approach remained low during the first five years, while the idea of emphasizing public sector initiatives grew. (Although the two trends seem to

be contradictory, they are far from being a contradiction if the public sector is responsible for financial resources and the private sector is responsible for supply, as is the case of nursing care insurance and medical insurance.) This finding complements the rise of such ideas as the “new populace” and “new public” in the second half of the decade. The Hatoyama Cabinet proposed “new public” as a government policy, while the Liberal Democratic-New Komeito regime had used the term “new populace.” The National Spatial Strategies adopted at a cabinet meeting in July 2008 under the Fukuda Cabinet advocated building communities based on the “new populace” notion.

Support for a Welfare State: Changes in the Ten Years

The above discussion has made clear that the support for “low cost, low benefit” decreased and remained low in the first half of the 2000s and that the idea of private sector-led initiatives gained ascendancy in the second half of the decade even if it failed to command a majority. Then, how did the attitudes of people involved in a welfare state change? This paper discusses that issue in the next section.

The “small government” approach discussed in the previous section is opposite to “high cost, high benefit.” That trend is reconfirmed in the former’s support rate:⁴ The support rate was 54.7% in 2000, and it increased to 59.2% in 2005. Subsequently, it increased to 68.2% in 2010. The support rate for “low burden” remained low in the latter five years of the decade, but that of “high benefit” continued to increase steadily. This agrees with the observed change in social policy in the second half of the 2000s as mentioned in the first section.

An analysis was immediately made of factors that contributed to “high cost, high benefit” for the data from 2000 (Takegawa 2008, 2009) and 2005 (Takegawa 2010). It was found that demographic factors such as being “male,” “age between 30 and 69,” and socioeconomic factors like “high educational background,” “high income,” and being a “white-collar worker” were

⁴ This can be regarded as the support level for “income redistribution.” According to Ohtake (2005, p. 116n), however, the responses differed between this question and that pertaining to income transference from high-income to low-income people. The 2010 survey adopted the direct question about income redistribution, “correction of the income gap between the rich and the poor;” but the approval rate of the correction of the income gap was lower than the approval rate of the high benefit approach.

statistically significant in determining attitudes in favor of “high cost, high benefit.” That is, potential support for a welfare state is strong among the middle class in Japan. At least in terms of matching the Japanese social consciousness, the European “conservative regime” and “social democratic regime” have greater resonance than the American “liberalistic regime” as per Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen 1990).

Principle and Method of Redistribution

A welfare state is a nation that redistributes income. Different ideas exist as to the principles by which, and methods upon which, income redistribution is conducted, and the changes in the different ideas that occurred in the ten years from 2000 to 2010 are examined now.

With regard to the redistribution principle, there is the idea that cash benefits and social services should be provided to those who need them in proportion to the amount they need. This idea can be called the need principle, and public assistance, medical services, and welfare services emphasize it. Apart from this, the idea to provide social security benefits to people in proportion to the amount of their contribution (i.e., cumulative value of insurance premiums people paid toward social security) is strongly rooted. This can be called the contribution principle. It is deeply rooted in certain types of social insurance, such as pensions and employment insurance. The three surveys mentioned above adopted the following question to distinguish between these two redistribution principles:

(Q) Of the two ideas given below, which is closer to your personal opinion if you were asked to decide?

Idea A: Social security should be provided to recipients when they need it regardless of the amount of insurance premiums they paid.

Idea B: Social security should be provided to recipients in proportion to the amount of insurance premiums they have paid.

The contribution principle consistently received stronger support over the need principle in response to the question item above. Only a slight change can be observed in the answers to this question item, showing a clear contrast to the trend in which support for “high welfare” increased steadily while “low burden” decreased in the first half and remained low in the second half of the decade. This presumably is a clear indicator of the particular type of Japanese social consciousness concerning social security. However, it is

TABLE 2
PRINCIPLE AND METHOD OF REDISTRIBUTION

	Redistribution principle		Redistribution method	
	Necessity principle	Contribution principle	Universalism	Selectivism
Nationwide 2000	44.8	54.3	—	—
Nationwide 2005	38.6	53.4	45.2	48.0
Nationwide 2010	41.8	57.7	48.0	51.5

noteworthy that the difference between the “contribution principle” and “need principle” in terms of public support is not as big as the difference between “initiative by the public sector” and “initiative by the private sector.”

Another important point is the redistribution method, which is generally based on selectivism if obtaining benefits requires a means test (assets test) and based on universalism if benefits do not require a means test. Selectivism corresponds with the needs principle on the surface, but that is not always true because of various reasons.⁵ In some cases, redistribution according to the method based on universalism is more effective to realize the need principle. Of the above three surveys, that in 2000 was eliminated from comparison because its question item was worded differently from the other two.⁶ Here, comparison is made only by considering the change between 2005 and 2010. The two surveys asked the following question:

(Q) Of the two ideas given below, which is closer to your personal opinion if you were asked to decide?

Idea A: Social security should be provided only to those who have a small amount of income and fortune.

Idea B: Social security should be provided to all people under the same conditions regardless of their income and fortune.

⁵ As to this issue, see Takegawa (2011, pp. 114–9).

⁶ The 2000 survey used the wording “The provision of social security should be regulated for those who have large a income and fortune” for selectivism. Masato Shizume, however, advised that this wording would result in an excessive orientation toward selectivism, and based on this advice, the wording was revised to read, “The provision of social security should be limited to those who have a lower income and fortune.” In reality, those showing a tendency for selectivism accounted for 60.8%, given the wording used in 2000, but the rate decreased to 48.0% with the wording used in 2005. Of course, it is possible that people’s minds changed during the five years, but the change in the wording is assumed to have some effect.

TABLE 3
PENSION AND LIVELIHOOD PROTECTION

	Pension		Livelihood protection		Unwilling to work should the gap disappear	
	Intergenerational cooperation	Intergenerational impartiality	Limited to people without the ability to work	Unrelated to the ability to work	Agree	Disagree
Nationwide 2000	19.1	80.1	—	—	—	—
Nationwide 2005	20.9	72.3	64.4	29.0	65.6	28.7
Nationwide 2010	21.9	78.2	67.4	32.0	63.7	32.2

Idea A shows selectivism, and Idea B embodies universalism. Selectivism had more supporters than universalism in both 2005 and 2010, but the difference was very small. The support rate for both universalism and selectivism increased by 3% throughout the five-year period due to a decreased number of non-respondents. It is safe to say that public opinion is divided along universalism and selectivism, and that this two-way division is fixed.

Pension and Livelihood Protection

An examination is conducted on how people's thoughts changed regarding specific policies besides the more general discussion on principles. Here, pension and livelihood protection are discussed. The following question was asked about pension:

(Q) Of the two ideas given below, which is closer to your personal opinion if you were asked to decide?

Idea A: Partiality between generations is unavoidable because public pensions require cooperation between generations.

Idea B: Pensions consistent with paid insurance premiums should be provided to prevent partiality between generations even in the case of public pensions.

Idea A places importance on “intergenerational solidarity” and “intergenerational cooperation,” and this kind of assertion comes to the fore if a pay-as-you-go pension scheme is adopted. Idea B emphasizes “intergenerational impartiality,” and it leads to the assertion that public pensions should be as close as possible to a funded system. Responses to this question make it clear that Japanese people consistently attach importance to “intergenerational impartiality.” In contrast, the proportion of those who place emphasis on “intergenerational solidarity” remained at about 20% throughout the ten years. Concerning the public pension system, the nation has consistently emphasized intergenerational support, which asks the active generation to support the elderly generation.⁷ This implies that when the population ratio between the active generation and the elderly generation changes, the annual amount of pension received will also change (meaning that a gap between paid insurance premiums and annual amounts received arises.) Responding to this implication, there are many discussions that criticize the “intergenerational partiality” of the current pension system. The results of social consciousness surveys show that people placing greater emphasis on “impartiality between generations” command the majority, and this trend has not changed much over the ten years analyzed.

Next, the following question was asked about livelihood protection:

(Q) Of the two ideas given below, which is closer to your personal opinion if you were asked to decide?

Idea A: People who have the ability to work should not receive livelihood protection, however poor they may be.

Idea B: Poor people should be allowed to receive livelihood protection whether they have the ability to work or not.

Because the survey in 2000 used different wording for this question, I again examined only the data from the 2005 and 2010 surveys.⁸ Japan’s Public

⁷ For example, see <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/nenkin/zaisei/01/01-02.html>. Accessed May 25, 2011.

⁸ In the 2000 survey, A reads, “Because livelihood protection is the right of the people, all eligible people should receive it as a right,” while B reads, “Even those who are eligible to receive livelihood protection had better not receive it as much as possible.” The former indicates the public position of law, and the latter shows people’s real intentions. A and B received 65.7% and 33.4% in support, respectively. On the assumption that few people refuse the livelihood protection as a right, the wording in the 2005 survey was revised to the wording mentioned in this paper. As a result, an overwhelming number of people replied, “Those who have the ability to work should not receive livelihood protection even if they are eligible.”

Assistance Act stipulates, “The decision of the provision is based on the condition that needy people utilize everything available including assets, capacity, and everything to maintain the minimum level of living” (article 4); it does not ask whether needy people have the ability to work or not. That is, livelihood protection is available even to those who are members of the working poor. Both in the 2005 and the 2010 surveys, however, the percentage of people saying that protection should be given only to those who are unable to work hovered around 60%, and the percentage of people saying that protection should be given regardless of the ability to work stood at about 30%. It is generally accepted that livelihood protection is a right, and this can be confirmed by the survey in 2000. However, when it comes to a discussion on who is eligible for protection, the *de facto* “disqualification requirement” appears to matter.

I summarize the above discussions as interim results. Support for “high cost, high benefit” increased throughout the first half of the decade, and support for “low cost, low benefit” decreased in the first half and remained low in the second half. These are changes observed clearly in the first ten years of the twenty-first century.

The idea that the public sector should take the initiative in providing social security and social services slightly diminished but still enjoyed a high support rate of about 70% at the time of the last survey.

These facts combined make it possible to conclude that the social consciousness in Japan shifted from embracing neoliberalism to embracing a welfare state from 2000 to 2010.

However, no clear or distinctive difference arose on the desired type of welfare state in the ten years studied. That is, in discussions about whether the need principle or contribution principle is preferred and whether universalism or selectivism is preferred, the latter has always been preferred over the former in both cases. Nevertheless, given that the difference between the response groups was not distinctive in the two cases, it is reasonable to say that society is divided into two groups on these two conflicting ideas. Both the idea that places importance on “intergenerational solidarity” in the public pension scheme and the idea that people can receive livelihood protection, whether they have the ability to work or not, are minority opinions. Here, we can see the type of a welfare state envisaged by the Japanese.

Responsibility of the Government

The survey in 2000 adopted some question items that were the same as those adopted by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP survey) to allow for comparison with the same kinds of surveys conducted in Western countries.⁹ They contained question items on the “responsibility of the government,” and they were used with some modifications both in later 2005 and 2010 surveys.

The survey in 2010 used the following wordings:

- All people willing to work should be employed.
- Patients can get medical service.
- Elderly people should enjoy a normal life.
- Industry should get necessary support for growth.
- Even the unemployed should have a normal life.
- Income differences between the rich and the poor should be made smaller.
- Students from poor households should get financial support.
- People who cannot afford to buy a house should be provided with a place to live.
- A law should regulate companies to prevent them from devastating the environment.
- Caregivers should be provided with infant- and child-rearing services.
- Elderly people should be offered nursing care when required.
- Impaired people should be offered assistance and nursing care when required.

For each of the above items, the four alternatives were given: “Clearly government’s responsibility,” “government’s responsibility,” “more than likely not government’s responsibility,” and “not government’s responsibility.” Table 4 shows the total responses for the first two alternatives. Although the 2000 survey contained the question item “stabilize commodity prices,” this was eliminated in the 2005 survey because it does not fit with the present time.

Table 4 clarifies some patterns in the changes in people’s ideas about the government’s responsibility. One trend involves the items in which the number of people who attribute responsibility to the government decreased

⁹ NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute conducted the ISSP’s survey on the “role of the government” in Japanese (Onodera 1996).

TABLE 4
GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY

	2000	2005	2010
Employment	55.2	63.5	67.1
Stability of commodity prices	89.8	—	—
Medical services	75.2	82.9	86.4
Support programs for the elderly	76.0	81.6	82.6
Growth of industry	61.0	56.9	76.0
Support programs for the unemployed	45.3	67.4	80.7
Income redistribution	43.4	49.1	52.9
Scholarship	53.8	69.3	60.8
Housing provisions	34.0	43.0	39.7
Environmental protection	82.5	90.0	86.0
Infant rearing and child rearing	61.2	84.7	81.3
Nursing care for the elderly	—	91.7	92.3
Aid for the impaired	—	93.8	93.6

in the first half of the 2000s but increased in the second half of the 2000s. The government's responsibility for the development of industry is one such area. It is well known that credit relaxation and the yen's depreciation prompted the recovery of the Japanese economy in the mid-2000s. Possibly because of this, the idea that attributes responsibility for the development of industry to the government decreased in popularity by 4 points. Because of the Lehman Shock in 2008, however, the economic recession became entrenched, and the idea that the government should bear responsibility for the development of industry increased nearly 20 points, standing at 76% as of 2010.

In contrast, some ideas showed an increase in support both in the first and second halves of the decade. The first is the employment question. Support for the statement in the survey increased by 8 points in the first half of the decade and by 4 points in the second half. For comparison's sake, support was only 48.8% in the NHK survey conducted in 1996 using the same wording. Japan's welfare state regime in the fourth quarter of the twentieth century was designed to keep the level of social spending relatively low on the assumption that full employment could be achieved (Takegawa 2010). Anxiety over employment, however, increased consistently regardless of whether the economy was booming or not, given the low level of social spending. The idea of attributing responsibility to the government is not as widespread in employment security as in other areas of social policy. Judging from the consistent growth of the notion of government responsibility in this

area, it has the possibility to grow as widespread as in the case of medical services and pensions.

The second category pertains to medical services. Support for the question item also increased by 8 points in the first half of the decade and by 3 points in the second half. It is noteworthy that the increase is particularly great in the mid-2000s, where the “collapse of the medical care system” (Komatsu 2006) attracted public attention as a result of the policy to control social security expenses in the first half of the decade.

The third point concerns life security of the unemployed. Support for the survey statement increased by 22 points in the first half and by 3 points in the second half of the decade, increasing in total percentage from 45.3% in 2000 to 80.7% in 2010. This is also a great change. Japan’s unemployment rate that used to be lower than 3% exceeded 4% in the late 1990s and remained higher than 5% in 2002 and 2003, according to the Labor Force Survey. In the second half of the 2000s, rising discontinuities in regular employment and growing unemployment occurred after the Lehman Shock in 2008, and the growth of a tent city for the jobless in Japan was covered by the media on a large scale.

The fourth item involves correction of the income gap. As mentioned above, supporters of “high cost, high benefit” are not necessarily in favor of correcting disparities in wealth. At the same time, the percentage of supporters of income redistribution from high-income people to low-income people is low as compared with the rate of supporters of “high cost, high benefit.” However, even support for correction of the income gap increased by 6 points in the first half of the 2000s and by 4 points in the second half, becoming the majority opinion in 2010.

Some items showed decreasing support rates continuously throughout the ten years. In addition, we observed two trends in items. The first is items that had increasing support rate in the first half of the 2000s and increased support rate remained high in the second half; the second is items that had increasing support rate in the first half but decreasing support rate in the second half of the 2000s.

For example, life security for the elderly is an item whose support rate increased in the first half and remained high throughout the decade: Support increased by 5 points in the first half and remained around 80%. In a sense, support for this measure is “saturated.” Care for the elderly and the impaired was not included in the 2000 survey, but it gained more than 90% of support in both 2005 and 2010 and consistently recorded a high rate.

Support concerning childcare and environmental protection provisions

increased greatly in the first half (23 points and 18 points, respectively) and remained higher than 80%, despite a decrease in percentage terms in the second half of the decade. It is safe to say that these two items follow from the above three items.

In contrast, the fields that showed a different trend from the above are scholarship and provision of housing. The number of those who attributed them to being the government's responsibility increased in the first half, but decreased in the second half of the decade. In addition, the support rate was small as compared with the support rate for other areas of social policy.

What can be unquestionably learned from table 4 is that the idea of broadening the government's responsibility for social policy has been spreading during the first ten years of the new millennium. In the 2010 survey, more than 80% of people thought that the government should be responsible for not only medical services and allowing the elderly to lead a normal life, but also for life security of the unemployed, environmental protection as well as care for the elderly, the impaired, and those with children. As of 2010, more than 60% of people thought that the government should be responsible for employment and scholarship. At the same time, merely 40% of people thought that the government should be responsible for income transfers between high-income and low-income people in 2000, but the rate exceeds 50% per the most recent survey. In contrast, the proportion of people who consider housing as the government's responsibility is relatively low at around 40%. Nonetheless, changes that differed from the days under the strong influence of neoliberalism were observed overall.

What Changed and What Remains Unchanged

Changes in the First Half of the Decade

The comparison between the 2010 survey and the earlier 2000 and 2005 surveys is limited because the 2010 survey asked fewer questions than the 2000 and 2005 surveys. Luckily, however, the 2000 and 2005 surveys contain more common items on the welfare state and social policy. Let us now examine what changes occurred or did not occur in the first five years when the support rate of the cabinet calling for neoliberalism was high. (The points that were examined in the previous three surveys have not been included here.) Table 5 shows the changes between the two surveys on five major items.

TABLE 5
CHANGE OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE DAYS OF THE KOIZUMI
ADMINISTRATION

		2000	2005
Is society impartial?	Impartial	34.5	26.6
	Partial	65.2	70.4
Poverty	Scarcely exists	3.4	3.6
	Less than 2%	9.2	7.9
	2-5%	14.9	15.8
	5-10%	14.5	17.3
	10-15%	11.9	17.3
	More than 15%	16.3	22.0
Reasons for poverty	Bad luck	7.5	5.5
	Insufficient efforts	27.4	27.6
	Partial society	27.2	25.1
	Unable to keep pace with change	18.6	28.4
Welfare services provide a strong support system	Agree	53.0	46.8
	Disagree	46.9	50.1
Family members no longer provide nursing care	Agree	65.9	64.2
	Disagree	33.9	32.5
Utilizing welfare services is not respectable	Agree	4.8	5.5
	Disagree	95.1	92.4
Being admitted to a facility is not respectable	Agree	6.8	—
	Disagree	93.1	—
Ultimate decision maker on service utilization	The elderly himself or herself	42.0	41.6
	Family, relative, and close friends	40.1	44.5
	Staff and/or agency providing nursing care	3.6	3.8
	Professional like a doctor	6.8	4.9
	Care manager	—	1.5

One of the most notable changes in the first half of the 2000s is poverty and inequality. While 34.5% of people in 2000 agreed with the idea that the “present society is generally impartial,” the rate decreased to 26.6% in 2005. That is, the proportion of respondents who thought that Japanese society is partial increased to more than 70%.

In addition, there was another notable change on the question as to how many people are poor. The two surveys in 2000 and 2005 asked, “Of the

Japanese population, what percentage do you think is so poor as to cut down even on food and utility costs?" The respondents saying that more than 10% of the population matched this definition of poverty was 28.2% in 2000 but increased to 39.3% in 2005. By comparison, the relative poverty rate in 2009 released by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare was 15.3% in 2000 and 15.7% in 2006.¹⁰ (Each of these years means the year actually covered by the survey.) Although some say that the index authored by the OECD is far from the actual situation, 20% of people thought that poverty existed at a higher rate than that estimated by the OECD in the mid 2000s.

The percentage of people who attributed poverty to bad luck, insufficient efforts, and partiality of society did not change much; the percentage of people with the response, "It is unavoidable to eliminate people unable to keep up with the changes of modern society," increased in the first five years of the decade.

At the same time, the percentage of people who thought "welfare services provide a strong support system" decreased 6 points in the first half of the 2000s, as is easily imaginable from what has been discussed so far.

In contrast, it is necessary to note that the awareness of the necessity of welfare services did not change much. That is, two-thirds of the population thought that families "no longer provide long-term care for older people" throughout the first half of the 2000s, and more than 90% of the people do not think "utilizing welfare services is not respectable." There is not much difference in the distribution of responses about the ultimate decision-maker for utilizing such services between 2000 and 2005. In short, the supply side changed greatly (due to the policy to control social security expenditures), despite the unchanged structure of the need for and demand for social services, consequently producing growing dissatisfaction with welfare services in general. This is the trend of Japanese social consciousness in the first half of the 2000s, and it consequently might have led to the trend observed in the second half of the 2000s.

Evaluation

As mentioned in the opening sentence, the underlying trends in public policy differ greatly between the first five years and the second five years of the opening decade of the twenty-first century in Japan. In the earlier period,

¹⁰ <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2009/10/dl/h1020-3a-01.pdf> (2011/05/29)

support for neoliberalism was strong, and the entire public policy direction, including social policy, was oriented toward neoliberalism. In contrast, orientation toward neoliberalism diminished gradually in the second half of the decade, and subsequently, the actual trend of social policy changed greatly because of the regime change. The media have generally observed this shift.

However, the story will be somewhat complicated if the discussion touches on abstract policy, concrete policy, or the fields in which the changing orientation was observed. If the situation is analyzed on a more abstract level, orientation toward “small government” (low cost) waned in the first half of the decade and remained low in the second half of the decade. In contrast, the orientation toward a “welfare state” (high benefit) approach grew stronger both in the first half and the second half of the decade. In 2010, nearly 70% of the people surveyed supported the “high cost, high benefit” position. Contrary to what is generally believed, the proportion of people who thought highly of initiatives by the “public sector” gained majority also in the first half of the 2000s. People who placed importance on initiatives by the “private sector” increased in the second half of the decade. However, it is reasonable to think that the increase is not because of “privatization,” but rather, because of the emergence of the “new populace.”

As discussed above, it is generally true that the orientation toward a “welfare state” grew stronger and the orientation toward “small government” weakened during the ten years in discussion here. However, as far as the precise type of “welfare state” sought by the people is concerned, survey results did not show so much notable changes related to “high benefit” and “low cost” supporters in the ten years. As for the question on whether the “need principle” or the “contribution principle” and on whether “universalism” or “selectivism” should be prioritized in redistribution, more people supported the “contribution principle” in the former question and “selectivism” in the latter question. These oppositions, however, are not as clear as in the first opposition (high benefit vs. low cost), and it is more precise to say that public opinion was divided into two camps. (Regarding this point, it may be possible to say that the liberal idea about benefits has not been strongly established; rather, social democratic ideas and conservative ideas compete.) At the same time, more people attach importance to “intergenerational impartiality” rather than to “intergenerational solidarity” in terms of pension, and the idea that livelihood support should be limited to “those who do not have the ability to work” is dominant.

Change in attitude toward the perceived responsibility of the

government for social policy varied by specific item in the ten years analyzed. The proportion of people who consider employment, medical services, and life security of the unemployed to be the government's responsibility increased consistently, and the percentage is high. In addition, the percentage of those who attributed responsibility to the government was high regarding the issues of life security for the elderly and nursing care for the elderly and the impaired before a change appeared. The support rate for correcting the gap between high-income people and low-income people was about 40% in 2000, but it increased to more than 50% in 2010. The proportion of those who consider provisioning of housing and scholarships to be the government's responsibility has consistently not been so high, indicating the fact that these two items cannot be important issues in social policy in Japan.

In the first five years of the decade alone, many people came to feel that society had become partial and that poverty had spread, despite the fact that consciousness about utilizing welfare services did not show a notable change. That is possibly because the necessity for social policy grew as a function of industrialization, urbanization, and because individualization of the family grew stronger; this change became gradually reflected in people's consciousness in the beginning of the twenty-first century. On the other hand, support for neoliberalism grew stronger for different reasons than for supporting social policy, and consequently the disparity between required social policy and actual social policy expanded. That seems to be the picture of the first half of the decade. In the second half, it is possible to say that people's consciousness of the disparity grew stronger, and consequently, actual social policy adjusted gradually.

Another question remains, however. Why did people give so much support to neoliberalism in the general sense? Although it is true that overall support for the welfare state has been growing stronger in the ten years covered by this paper, the nature of the welfare state (need principle vs. contribution principle, universalism vs. selectivism) remains a subject of debate that divides public opinion into two. Will this split be resolved or unresolved in the future? Because these are questions beyond the scope of this chapter, I hope other researchers will address them in the future.

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