Political Vocabularies and Localized Discourses on Demographic Transition

The emergence of the “syousika” problem in 1980s Japan

TANAKA Sigeto (Tohoku University)

http://tsigeto.info/19x

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Local discourse on low fertility by
• government
• mass-media
• academics

with what vocabulary?
syou
child
change

少
子
化

small
number
When emerged?

1992 *White paper on the national lifestyle* by Economic Planning Agency

- Decrease in number of children / youths
- Decrease in TFR

経済企画庁 (1992) 国民生活白書 (平成4年版)
ISBN:4171904676

http://tsigeto.info/19x (2019-10-18)
Earlier examples

3 newspaper articles (*Asahi Sinbun* 1988-90)

- On the 1st demographic transition
- Different meaning from today’s
- By education scholar / agency


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Comprehensive search

Literature -1990

- National Diet Library (ndlonline.ndl.go.jp)
- CiNii (ci.nii.ac.jp)
- Diet record (kokkai.ndl.go.jp)
- BCCWJ (www.kotonoha.gr.jp/shonagon/)
- Google Scholar (scholar.google.com)
- Google Books (books.google.com)
- Newspapers (Asahi, Mainichi, Nikkei, Yomiuri)
Texts found (-1990)

Diet record: 6
White paper: 3
Academic paper: 33
Book: 6
Research report: 2
Newspaper: 15

* Note that old print publications are often not searchable
Results overview

Some texts mentioned TFR, but none mentioned sub-replacement fertility.

In many cases, “少子化” means decreasing sibling number, coupled with prevailing nuclear family.
Oldest use (Diet 1980-04-08)

**Context:** Bill to establish a corporation to manage Tokyo Olympic legacies.

Ministry of Education official answered to a question about youth’s situation.

No definition given.


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Urban nuclear family vs. rural extended family

Youths are too individualistic, materialistic, and oriented to private matters...

Due to social changes such as urbanization, increasing nuclear family, and 少子化 ...


http://tsigeto.info/19x (2019-10-18)
1982 *White paper on youth* by Prime Minister’s Office

- In a chapter on youth problems and family
- No definition
- Coupled with nuclear family
- Also mentioned: birthrate, TFR, number of household member

総理府 (1983) 青少年白書 (昭和57年版) 大蔵省印刷局

http://tsigeto.info/19x (2019-10-18)
1987 Textbook for sociology of education

- In a chapter on family problems and education
- Defined as decreasing number of children
- After the section on nuclear family
- Also mentioned: TFR, shrinking household

ISBN:447206961X
Academic papers

18 of 33 papers are on educational topic or by education-related researchers.

Most of them mentions it as a cause of worsening socialization mechanism for children.
Discussion

“少子化” in 1980s had no connotation of sub-replacement fertility.

It mainly means reduction of family size, with a focus on its dysfunction for children’s socialization process.

It was used in context of education.
After 1990s(1): Authorization by demographers

2002 and 2018 *Encyclopedia* of population by the Population Association of Japan


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2002 *Encyclopedia* referred “少子化” as a non-technical term used by government and mass-media.

2018 *Encyclopedia* used it as Japanese translation of “low fertility”.

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After 1990s (2): Creation of magic word

Today “少子化” also means the decline of the number of children and youth, even if it is not caused by low fertility (e.g., out-migration).

It now serves as a magic word to cover most aspects of population shrinking.