

Suicide and Unemployment in Japan after the Bubble Economy and Japan's Contingency Policies

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Abstract: In the study of Japanese history, the problems of the post-bubble economy era are of great research value. In the post-bubble economy, Japan's unemployment and suicide problems have been widely concern by the international community. This paper takes the unemployment and suicide problems in the context of the bubble economy era as the core of the study and thoroughly researches the creation of suicide and unemployment problems in Japan, i.e., the government's reflection, and at the same time, analyzes the relationship between suicide and unemployment. Through a series of research and analysis, this paper concludes that Japan's bubble economy environment led to the rise of the unemployment rate, which led to many unemployed people committing suicide, and the Japanese government has made a series of policies to improve the employment rate to change the suicide problem.

Keywords: Japan History, Social Study, Suicide, Unemployment

1. Introduction

In the study of modern Japan, the problems of suicide and unemployment in Japan are topics that cannot be avoided. After the bubble economy, Japan experienced a surge in the suicide rate and the unemployment rate at different times. This paper focuses on the problems of unemployment and suicide in Japanese society that arose after the bubble economy by examining a series of initiatives taken by the Japanese government to modulate the unemployment rate and control the suicide rate at different times. Whether the government policies achieved positive results on the social problems at that time and whether Japan has come out of the shadow nowadays are the main research objectives of this paper.

Japan's bubble economy occurred in the 1990s and had a huge impact on the country for the next thirty years. The effects of the bubble economy are still present today, and these economic and market problems have caused great social unrest, which led to the "Employee Ice age" in 1996-2005, which resulted in a poor employment environment, and in 2007-2008, which led to the outbreak of the "Employee Ice Age", which led to a poor employment environment. and the financial crisis of 2007-2008 led to a sharp increase in the suicide and unemployment rates in Japan during that period. The suicide rate and the unemployment rate are closely related to the social context of the bubble economy at that time.

1.1. Social Context Study

During the study, to analyze the problem of suicide in Japan, the most important thing to be explored is why there was a sudden surge in the suicide rate in Japan at a certain period. Not only to collect in a series of data, but more importantly, to combine the context of the time period, The Employment Ice Age (Japanese: 就職氷河期, romanized: Shūshoku Hyōgaki) is a term in Japan that refers to a period starting around 1994 and ending by 2004 [1]. In terms of the timeline, this time is the beginning of the unemployment and suicide problem in Japan, in which the employment rate in Japan gradually decreases from 70.5% in 1994, 67.1% in 1995, 65.9% in 1996, 66.6% in 1997, 65.6% in 1998 [2]. From this statistic, we can realize the huge difference in the unemployment rate in Japan during this decade. Only one out of two students who graduated in 2004 could find a job. Only one out of two students who graduated in 2004 could find a job. This shows how the young people in Japan were facing the pressure to find jobs in those days. This data and the time background also reflect the huge pressure of competition for jobs at that time, which invariably brought great psychological pressure and health problems to the working class, among which death from overwork and depression became the main health problems. According to 2007, the Japan Police Agency (NPA) revised the categorization of suicide motives to 50, with a maximum of three reasons listed for each suicide case. The result was a 65.3 percent rise in suicides among the unemployed and a 34.3 percent increase in those who were having a hard time making ends meet. Depression topped the list for the third year in a row [3]. It can be said that the Bubble Economy led to the emergence of The Employment Ice Age, and The Employment Ice Age became the main reason for the skyrocketing unemployment rate in Japan in the early twenty-first century, which in turn caused mental stress and health problems among the working class and thus contributed to the dramatic increase in the suicide rate.

1.2. Social Background Check

According to statistics released by the Japan Police Agency, financial problems are another major cause of the strong relationship between consumer loan companies and the suicide rate. In the context of the post-bubble economy era, the concept of the "hedger" emerged, that is, the purchase of stocks and real estate at a high point, but the value of the industry gradually declined, and at this time, some stock and real estate holders are not willing to sell immediately, or there is no one to buy to take over, resulting in losses. This was not uncommon during the bubble economy, and the resulting inability to repay debts led to a financial crisis. This happens to businesses and individuals of all sizes. People or companies go bankrupt in large numbers in everything from housing and land to the stock market and financing. Most of the losers and ordinary families who bought properties at a high point become debtors [4]. According to the Japanese Police Department, a quarter of all suicides are related to finances. Such deaths are known as "blame suicides" (引咎自殺) [5]. This problem has led to many indebted people who are under great pressure to commit suicide, and there are two types of suicides due to financial problems: one is "blamed suicide", and the other is suicide to pay off debts to obtain high insurance premiums. 17 consumer loan companies obtained 4.3 billion yen from 4,908 borrowers in 2005, and this number is about 4.3 billion yen. In 2005, 17 consumer loan companies received 4.3 billion yen from 4,908 borrowers to pay for their suicide policies, which accounted for about 15 percent of the number of suicides in 2005 [6]. And in Japanese society at that time, most suicides were men. This is also closely related to Japanese culture, which is undeniably a male-dominated society, with more men in the Japanese working class, leading to a predominance of men in the debt crisis and unemployment, which also leads to a predominance of young and middle-aged men in the suicide group.

2. Unemployment and Financial Problem

2.1. Unemployment Research

Against the backdrop of financial problems and surging unemployment, there is another factor that has become overwhelming for wage earners. That is, Japan gradually outlawed the traditional lifetime employment system in 1997 when the market environment was not good. Lifetime Commitment (LTC), i.e., lifetime employment system, which defines that an employee joins a company from graduation from school until retirement, during which time the company will not fire the employee for reasons such as inefficiency or unsuitability, but the relative employee will not be transferred to a higher paid position in the company even if his or her salary is low. However, even if the salary of the employee is low, he/she will not be transferred to a position in a company with a higher salary [7]. As Japan's economy declined, the system of lifetime employment was changed to manpower dispatch to increase the employment rate and to select better and more efficient employees. This shift put unprecedented pressure on graduates competing for jobs at the time as well as those already working in the workplace, and Japan had a serious problem with implosion. Employees worked a lot of overtime to keep their jobs and cut back on vacation and sick days, leading to increasing stress, which was a contributing factor to suicide. This is also the main cause of overwork death as well as depression as mentioned earlier. In the early days of the suicide problem in Japan, the Japanese society and government did not pay much attention to this kind of problem, and until 2005, the Japanese government did not intervene much in the suicide problem, and the news media and the public did not pay much attention to it. This is related to the background of the bubble economy era and traditional Japanese culture, in which Japanese society had a "tolerant" attitude toward suicide, and in many cases suicide was regarded as a morally responsible behavior [8]. This is contrary to the traditional values that view suicide as a renunciation of life and harm to loved ones, which is why there was no timely intervention in the early years of the suicide problem in Japan.

2.2. Case Study

Although in the early days, neither the government nor society in Japan paid much attention to the problem of suicide. However, the impact of the problem of suicide in Japan on society must have been far-reaching. Yamagami Tetsuya 徹也/やまがみ てつや (September 10, 1980-) is a Japanese national who is a suspect in the July 2022 assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe [9]. The assassination of Shinzo Abe by Yamagami has received much attention, but in his biography, it was found that his family's tragic experiences and his own upbringing story were also linked to social problems such as suicide and unemployment in post-bubble economy Japan. The family fell from grace after Yamagami's father committed suicide by jumping from a building due to stress and resentment that his wife had abandoned her husband and son because of her religious beliefs. This happened during the bubble economy. His mother joined the Unification Church in 1998 and donated all the 60 million yen in insurance money she received after her husband's car accident to the Unification Church. His mother was brainwashed by the Unification Church and lost her family's fortune, and the Hill considers Abe to be the most influential figure among Unification Church supporters. Putting aside the social problems caused by cults in Japan as well as economic problems, look at the issue of suicide. The suicides of some of Japan's top family members, namely male workers and fathers, sons and husbands, have had a heavy impact on families.

2.3. Social Issue Study

The problems brought about by the bubble economy were not only economic and financial, but also a series of chain reactions that gave rise to a variety of social problems. For example, cults, triads,

and social violence. People who lost information and motivation in life joined various cults. Examples include the Mother on the Hill and the famous Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan at the end of the twentieth century. Aum Shinrikyo is widely regarded by society as a cult and a terrorist organization, and this cult has brought about a series of violent social problems, the most famous of which is the "Tokyo Metro Sarin Gas Incident," which took place on the morning of March 20, 1995, in the morning of March 20, 1995, during which the perpetrators of the five organized attacks on subway cars operated by the Tokyo Metro in the rush hour were killed. In five organized attacks, the perpetrators released sarin nerve agents on three lines of subway cars operated by the Tokyo Metro during rush hour, resulting in the deaths of 13 people, including many passengers, staff, attendants, and those who helped rescue victims [10]. Terrorist activities such as these have dealt a huge blow to the social stability of Japan. The main period of Aum Shinrikyo's rapid growth was in the post-bubble economy, and at its peak, in 1995, the organization had more than 15,400 members in mainland Japan [11]. This reflects that the social impact of the bubble economy problem was not only on the economic and livelihood level but even triggered terrorist attacks.

3. Presentation of Data and Survey on Suicide

3.1. Survey

The suicide rate in Japan peaked after 2003. Prior to that time, the Japanese government and society ignored the problem of suicide, which gradually spiraled out of control. In 2009, the number of suicides increased by 2% to 32,845, exceeding 30,000 for the 12th consecutive year, which is equivalent to 26 suicides per 100,000 people. This horrific growth rate has attracted great attention from the Japanese government, which has divided its program to control suicide into two main areas. Firstly, in 2007, the Japanese government announced a nine-step program, namely the "Anti-Suicide White Paper", which is a detailed survey on the number of suicides each year and the classification of the causes by regions and was released to the Japanese public. The main purpose of the White Paper is to give the Japanese people a new understanding of the suicide problem and to change the mainstream concept of suicide in Japan. Moreover, the White Paper aimed to encourage the investigation of the root causes of suicide to prevent suicide, change cultural attitudes toward suicide, and improve the treatment of those who have failed to commit suicide [12].

3.2. Data Presentation

This approach has had some success, and the number of suicides in Japan has indeed shown a downward trend since 2009. Another Japanese initiative to address suicide was the establishment of a public counseling service for stressed debtors and depressed individuals in need of treatment, for which the Japanese government invested 12.4 billion yen in suicide prevention assets [13]. But the main factor of suicide in Japan is the social and work pressure such a problem Japan has also introduced a series of related policies to improve, including the working class for welfare, vacation, etc. However, the impact and damage caused by the bubble economy requires both policy adjustment and time to improve. In terms of policy alone, Japan's actions have brought positive benefits and feedback. However, the fact is that the improvement of the suicide problem is mainly dependent on the recovery of the Japanese economy and the improvement of the employment problem.

4. Conclusion

To summarize, Japan has reacted quickly to both the suicide problem and the spike in unemployment. Both in terms of economic reforms and encouraging social welfare, the Japanese government has made some changes and achieved some results. However, at different times, the unemployment and

suicide rates in Japan have risen, which proves that the problems have not been fully solved. Japan has achieved an increase in employment through fierce social competition and expansion of employment. But in essence, the Japanese people have sacrificed their health and survived in an unbalanced social environment in exchange for a seemingly stable economic environment, but it is still a vicious circle. As a result, when Japan was hit by the economic crisis, natural disasters and Covid19, both the suicide rate and unemployment rate rebounded. The implications for the future are, in general, both good and bad. To summarize the good impacts, culturally, the dominant culture in Japan has changed the perception of suicide, which is the main purpose of the White Paper on Suicide Prevention. People no longer see suicide as desirable and worthy of respect but are looking for new values and joys in life. The social status of women in Japan has also improved, with many companies and sectors reserving jobs for women, a practice that has changed the traditional image of women as housewives in Japanese society and has led to more stable social development. However, from the root cause, essentially, both the suicide problem and the unemployment problem are due to the poor market economic environment and low happiness index. From a future perspective, Japan needs to maintain social stability to realize a virtuous cycle, and this is a difficult problem that will test the Japanese government and those in power.

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