

entertainment, make friends, attend neighborhood markets, and show pictures to distant relatives— without leaving your desk or armchair.” Contrary to this rosy picture of the information revolution, Japanese people are almost submerged in overwhelming media information, both ‘hard’ and ‘soft.’ Media information in general and commercial advertisement in particular, now influence (or even determine) social behaviors, what to buy, where to go for leisure, and even what party to vote for. Between 1960 and 1995, the total advertising spending in Japan increased by 31.2 times. Roughly in the same period, the number of subscriber telephones increased by 16.5 times.

Certainly it is not bad that people have more information and more choice in deciding their behaviors, but fragmented and trivialized information may simply lead them to confusion and sometimes indifference. The starting of the cable TV with five hundred channels, pocket pagers (or mobile telephones) for all high school girl students, is this a jubilant development of civilization given the fact that prime time TV are already full of ‘odds and ends’?

Generally speaking, communication technology, and all technology for that matter, is always a double-edged sword. It makes our social life more convenient in the way that Gates told us. Therefore, it is meaningless to damn it. Greater dependence on information technology, however, may lead to less human contact, and this, in turn, may result in the easy confusion of ‘real’ reality and ‘virtual’ reality. The news report of the Gulf War is not clearly distinguished from the super-modern war movies in the living room. In a sense, information on TV is instantly ‘consumed,’ just going through TV watchers’ sense organs. It evokes emotional (or expressive) senses, but less intellectual (or cognitive) ones. At the same time, although Japanese people today are surrounded by a great wave of information, they are excluded from access to some of the important information concerning governmental and corporate activities, especially their wrongdoing. For example, the Ministry of Health and Welfare has long denied its responsibility for permitting the sale of unheated blood products, which caused about 2,000 hemophiliacs contracted HIV. The notorious relationship of ‘big’ corporations with *Yakuza* has long been hidden. It is worth to note here that information is very vulnerable to manipulation.

#### 4) Aging

The fourth underlying change in contemporary Japanese society is the aging of the population. Japan’s life expectancy at birth, both male and female, was highest in 1994, 76.57 years for male and 82.98 years for female. The birth rate reached a comparatively high level of 19 per 1,000 population during the so-called second baby boom from 1971 to 1973, but it has since declined sharply, registering its lowest level of 9.6 in 1993. In 1994, the total fertility rate (the average number of children born to each woman) was 1.50. The total population was calculated as 125,257,061 at the end of March 1966, and this was a 0.27% increase from the previous year. The population growth in fiscal 1995 was 0.12%, the lowest figure on record. In 1996 the number of people aged 65 or older increased 3.85% to some 19.33 million, or 15.43% of the total population, and the ratio has been and is increasing faster than any nation in the world. It is estimated that if the present pace of aging continues, the ratio of the elderly population (65 years and older) will become as high as 25.8% in 2025, the largest in the world.

This demographic fact has an enormous impact on Japanese society. The graying population generally means inactivity and stagnation, although more Japanese elderly stay working longer than their Western counterparts. In addition, it means the increase of pension and health care costs, for more retired people depend on pensions (Since the revision of the Pension Law in 1985, the National Pension Plan provides a pension for all citizens.), and they are more vulnerable to various diseases than younger people. As shown in Chart 1, the so-called people’s burden today is almost 40% of their total income on average. Take for example medical care costs. The Ministry of Health and Welfare announced recently that medical care for the elderly pushed up overall spending on health care to a record high in fiscal 1995, which equaled 7.1% of national income. Medical expenses per person on average are ¥214,000. The elderly over 71 years old spent ¥633,000 per person, whereas the figure for people under 70 was ¥125,000. In addition, the demand for nursing care for the elderly is rising. Roughly 2.3 million elderly people in Japan need full-time care, and the number is rising