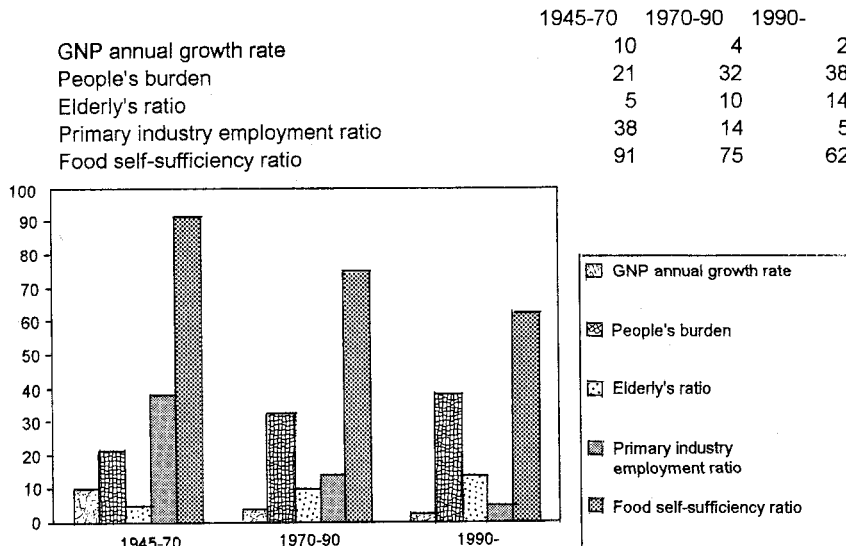


Chart 1. The Postwar Japanese Society



about 100,000 annually. The Ministry of Health and Welfare says that by 2000, 2.8 million seniors will need such care (*The Nikkei Weekly*, December 15, 1997). To cope with the prospective increase of elderly care expenses, the government passed on December 9, 1997 a law to create public nursing-care insurance to be run by the local governments, which is scheduled to be in effect by April 2000. It is mandatory for every citizen 40 years or older to pay a monthly premium of ¥2,500, in order to be covered by the insurance.

The aging problem is not confined with the 'money' problem alone. Basically, the value system, which facilitated and encouraged the economic growth after the War, is "instrumental activism." It values performance (what one can do), capability, and speed, and devalues inactivity, imbecility, and slowness. Functional excellence is the target of applause. When people become old, however, it is inevitable that they become incapable, inefficient, and slow in action. It is natural, and it is exactly what aging is about. It was once true that in Japanese society the elderly people, even after they retired from the job, could retain some power and mandate respect in the social framework of Japanese family system. Now this type of the family structure has gone, and the Japanese elderly today are facing a difficult social setting as the socially and physically weak sector of the population. Today, one out of four Japanese die of cancer, and statistically every person has to be in bed-ridden state about eight months on average before they die.

Contemporary problems as 'ambiguity'

To understand social phenomena is to 'construct' them in a meaningful way to the observers by using some logical (and theoretical) conceptual framework. Modern society can be best understood, at least to some 'positivist' sociologists, by the Cartesian dichotomous categories, with ideological seasonings like evolutionism and individualism. The modern social structure thus depicted was fully understandable, because modern people themselves behaved and constructed society by rational logic and progress-oriented individualism. Human civilization was distinctly interpreted by means of the dichotomous categories such as culture versus nature, or God versus Man. In a similar way, politics was understood by conservatism versus liberalism; family