

Will the Pensioner Baby Boomers and the Part-Time “Junior” Generation Bankrupt Japan?

By Miura Atsushi

The “Freeter” Worker: Product of the Past 16 Years of the Baby Boomer Generation

In July this year, I published a book called *Dankai Sedai wo Sokatsu Suru* (An Overview of the Baby Boomer Generation; Makino Publishing). As I had already published a book in 1989 on the baby boomer generation, I tried to fill in the 16 years from 1989 in this book.

Once past the age of 40, Japan’s baby boomers (the generation born between 1947 and 1949) found themselves living in stable times compared with the past, which had been characterized as the postwar dramatic changes. Unable to find a major theme to write about, I thought carefully for some time.

What has been the major change of the last 16 years in the lives of the baby boomer generation? What crossed my mind was not the generation themselves but their children. The biggest change in the baby boomer generation has been the process of their children entering school, moving on to high education then out into the job market.

Children are their most important achievements. A parent’s values have a great impact on how a child grows up. By looking at the picture of the baby boomers’ children, the truest values of the baby boomers may be revealed perhaps better than looking at themselves.

So what are their children doing now? Assuming all has gone well, they would be aged around 25 to 32 years old. In companies, they would be somewhere between young and mid-level employees. Many of them, however, have chosen the casual route. In 2001, part-time workers, or “freeters,” between the ages of 15 and 34 numbered 4.17 million (Cabinet Office estimate), and 2.95 million were in their 20’s. They would have been born

between 1972 and 1981.

This coincides with the most of the number of the baby boomers’ children generation.

Incidentally, the so-called “baby boomer juniors” is another way of saying: “the second baby boomer.” This is the generation of more than 2 million births a year from 1971 to 1974.

However, not all the “baby boomer juniors” were necessarily born during that period. The female baby boomers certainly entered their main child-bearing years from around 1971, but the peak for births occurred around 1974. (see Table 1, Column B) This was because men marry two or three years later than women, and the children of those marriages follow a little later naturally. As a result, most of the “juniors” were born between 1975 and 1978. (Column C)

Accordingly, a large number of children with either one or both parents belonging to the baby boomer generation (Column D) were born between 1973 and 1978. The ratio of the baby boomers’ children to the total number of births exceeded 50% each year from 1973 to 1980, and in 1976 and 1977 more than 70% had the baby boomer parents.

As a result, I have dubbed the generation born between 1973 and 1980 the “true baby boomer junior generation” in the sense that they are the real children of the baby boomer generation. In particular, those who were born between 1975 and 1978 most truly possess the character of the “junior” boomers.

The above-mentioned 3 million part-time workers in their 20’s recorded in 2001 would be included in this bracket. These are the “freeter generation” who make up more than 20% of the population. The biggest “achievement” of the baby boomers in the past 16 years is this generation of part-time workers.*

The Baby Boomer Junior Are a Generation of Part-Time Workers

Why do so many of the baby boomer juniors become part-time workers?

Naturally, it must be duly acknowledged that the prolonged worsening of the employment situation has had an effect. However, according to the *White Paper on the National Lifestyle* (FY 2003), the employment opportunities for university graduates in 1996 numbered 390,000, while 340,000 found jobs. The number of job vacancies had increased in 2002 to 570,000 but only 310,000 found employment. In other words, between 1996 and 2002, the employment situation for university graduates improved while the rate of those finding employment went down.

Those who graduated from university between 1996 and 2002 were born between 1973 and 1979, the true baby boomer junior generation. So it must be concluded that not only the employment situation but also their values had an effect on the increase of part-time workers. To go a step further, this increase is a reflection of the values of their parents, the baby boomers.

These values represent a desire to be true to oneself. This can also be expressed as a desire to play by one’s own rules, or a more relaxed approach to life. Or, to put it another way, it is about the importance of “seizing the day” – rather than worrying about the future. These were the core values of young people from the late 60’s onward, when Japan had already, to some extent, achieved high economic growth.

The public opinion surveys, conducted by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute every five years from 1973, found that an average of 31% of males and females aged between 20 and 24 in 1973 (born 1949-1953) supported hedonistic lifestyle goals of enjoying a free life and living from day to day. Subsequent surveys show this figure

*Note : In this regard, please refer to my work: *Shigoto wo Shinakereba Jibun wa Mitsukaranai* (It’s Only Through Work that We Discover Ourselves), Shobunsha.

fluctuating between 26% and 29%, but in 1998 the figure spiked to 35%, and in 2003 it stood at 33%.

Also, from 1973 to 1988, the number of 20 to 24 year-olds favoring a hedonistic lifestyle and those demonstrating a more materialistic approach of planning carefully to build an affluent life remained generally equal, but by 1998 a large gap appears to have emerged, with the hedonists reaching 35% and their more materialistic counterparts 22%.

Because those aged 20 to 24 in 1998 were born between 1974 and 1978, they represent the peak of the true baby boom junior generation when most of the baby boomers' children were born. Just under 70% of the 9.23 million children born during those five years – 6.27 million – were the offspring of the baby boomers. Rather than planning for the future, this generation strongly favors to live for the day.

Passing on a More Relaxed Approach to Life

The baby boomer generation has not negated these “live-for-the-day” values of its children. In fact, they have probably condoned or encouraged this attitude, because the baby boomers were strongly attracted to such an approach themselves when they were young in the early 70's. Subsequently, however, they got married, had children, took out mortgages to buy homes even while suffering the effects of two oil shocks, and in the end were forced to abandon their hedonistic aspirations. These aspirations still survived as latent values, and consequently, the baby boomers seemed to want their children to live these values out on their behalf.

According to a 1985 survey entitled “Lifestyles and Consciousness of the New 30's” by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Bureau of Citizens and Cultural Affairs, many respondents described the type of job they would like for their children as “a job that gives them plenty of free discretion,” “where they can acquire skills,” “where they can make the most of their own strengths,”

Table 1 Number of Children Produced by The Baby Boomers

Year	A Total number	B Baby boomer mother	C Baby boomer father	D Baby boomer mother or father	D/A
70	1,934,239	513,172	133,196	538,845	27.9%
71	2,000,973	730,468	241,936	772,686	38.6%
72	2,038,682	935,308	380,938	985,035	48.3%
73	2,091,983	1,081,963	529,546	1,143,114	54.6%
74	2,029,989	1,124,995	739,691	1,311,068	64.6%
75	1,901,440	1,014,624	813,541	1,301,837	68.5%
76	1,832,617	907,456	860,026	1,304,946	71.2%
77	1,755,100	772,632	857,742	1,228,478	70.0%
78	1,708,643	643,855	835,236	1,119,582	65.5%
79	1,642,580	510,285	766,136	987,180	60.1%
80	1,576,889	388,935	671,019	839,036	53.2%
81	1,529,455	297,373	573,283	699,157	45.7%
82	1,515,392	230,015	487,313	588,323	38.8%
83	1,508,687	175,815	407,726	489,129	32.4%
84	1,489,780	131,414	331,260	390,933	26.2%
85	1,431,577	93,501	257,405	326,201	22.8%
1970 – 85 total	27,988,026	9,551,811	8,885,993	14,025,549	—
Percentage of total	100.0%	34.1%	31.7%	50.1%	—
1973 – 80 total	14,539,241	6,444,745	6,072,937	9,235,240	—
Percentage of total	100.0%	44.3%	41.8%	63.5%	—

Source : Compiled by the author from Vital Statistics, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

Note : Some parts are estimated by the author.

“a job they can remain passionate about all their lives,” “a job that will allow them to act individually instead of as the times dictate,” “that allows self expression,” and “not a job they are forced to work by others.” In general, the values emphasized were trueness to oneself, self-expression and individuality.

While it was easy to find a job during the high-growth period when the baby boomers were looking for employment, times were still not affluent enough and did not allow enough freedom for them to choose freely the jobs they really liked. With men tending to go into industrial or technical areas, and women into commercial or service-sector jobs, the division of roles was far stronger than it is now. So they want their children not to be bound by the expectations of society, but to be able to decide how they will live and to find jobs that will suit them.

The baby boomers is a generation has more “love matches” than traditional

arranged marriages, and it was natural for them to choose their marriage partner themselves. So naturally, life's other major choice of career was one that they wanted to make for themselves rather than letting society or others choose for them.

The baby boomers, however, could not exercise as much choice in their career path as they wanted. This desire seems to be expressed as a leniency or indulgence toward their own children's choice of employment, which has led to the increase in the number of part-time workers.

The baby boomer pensioners and their juniors, who include large numbers of “freeter” workers, make up two parasite generations on the state that could well bankrupt Japan in the near future. This is what I fear. **JS**

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