

Lifestyle Change: The Shift to Leisure Activities

By Nakano Osamu

The baby-boom generation and the "New Family"

The so-called income-doubling plan, formulated by the government in 1960, was a great success, and over the next decade the Japanese economy attained an unprecedented high rate of growth, with the result that Japan built up an economic society that was the envy of the world. Social infrastructure reached unexpected levels thanks to the spinoff from the Tokyo Olympic Games and the World Exposition in Osaka. Of course, Japan was starting from scratch in this respect, so infrastructure building actually still had a long way to go.

Economic development was supported by fervent salaried workers. These people dedicated most of their private lives to the company, to society, to the whole. Some of them even sacrificed their health in the process. They were the last generation that inherited the work ethic of "for the world, for the people." From this point of view, time spent enjoying oneself outside of work was a luxury that had overtones of decadence. To some, free time was even considered a vice.

In the 1960s, another event was taking place alongside the enormous changes in Japan's economic climate: the rebellion among young people that occurred mainly in industrial countries. Young people expressed a dislike of the existing system—socially, culturally and educationally—and announced their intention to reject it all. They criticized and rejected the thinking that had built up and supported the existing establishment. In short, they rejected everything—capitalism and communism, the cultural patterns of the West and those of the East. And they sometimes expressed this in acts of violence.

There was unprecedented prosperity, but at the same time the problem of environmental pollution, which had its roots in this prosperity, was already beginning to rear its ugly head.

Consequently, there were not a few people who sympathized with the intentions and actions of the young people, and not a few adults who made statements critical of the existing establishment in a broad sense. Directly or indirectly, they were criticizing the principles of the modern age.

The young people of this period belonged to the baby-boom generation born in the years immediately following World War II. They challenged the establishment and engaged in radical and extremist actions. Generally speaking, the young people of that time can be divided into three categories. Some of them self-destructed; some fought as much as they could during their student days and then became adult members of society, inheriting the mantle of the fervent salaried worker; and some, although they went on to become adult members of society, saw work in a relative perspective and adopted a lifestyle that emphasized their private lives. Needless to say, the majority of them either worked hard for their companies or emphasized their private lives while working. And both types adopted a lifestyle that was quite different from that of the previous generation. The marketeers who foresaw the new demand that would arise gave this lifestyle the name of the "New Family."

The main characteristics of their lifestyle as described in magazines and other media in the first half of the 1970s were as follows: Husband-wife and parent-child relationships were like those between friends; family members dressed in the same fashionable clothes made from the same material; these new families lived in condominiums in central Tokyo, the interiors of which emphasized white and pastel colors; food and beverages centered on Western cuisine (the wine boom began at this time), and because both husbands and wives had jobs, eating out on weekends became the custom.

Weekend travel and resort vacationing also became established (with overseas travel becoming more popular), and purchasing foreign goods, beginning with imported furniture, automobiles, household electric appliances and other durables, became widespread. In addition, people of this generation had few or no children. Of course, this is an idealized picture of the lifestyle of the time. In practice, the members of this generation did not exactly lead this sort of life.

Nevertheless, the dominant trend of their lifestyle certainly moved in this direction. In other words, without putting up any resistance, they accepted the products supplied by the existing establishment (an industrialized society) that they had criticized so harshly in their student days. This phenomenon is both mysterious and surprising for the people who witnessed the rebellion up close (including me). In an attempt to somehow explain this situation, the paradigm of the "New Constitution Lifestyle" was put forward.

The new Constitution of Japan speaks only about principles and ideals. The accepted view of the new constitution until then had been that the Japanese people without question should strive to realize these principles. But for the people of this generation, what was written in the new Constitution was not principles but simply common sense. Thus, they believed and claimed that they were only living in accordance with the ideas of the new Constitution, and so it was only natural for them to purchase useful consumer goods. Freedom, equality, individualism and peace were not things that had to be fought for: they already existed. And if they did not exist, then naturally they could be achieved little need of force.

So the lifestyle that I have described above was, in the minds of its advocates, nothing other than the principles of the new Constitution being put into practice. Since the basis of this lifestyle

lay in the constitution, there was nothing to be ashamed of! Therefore, it was believed that the time and leisure one enjoyed after being liberated from work was precisely what was required for the realization of the life values (cultural life) stipulated in the new Constitution.

The dominant concept of the 1960s, that leisure was in preparation for the following day's work, was scrapped, and probably for the first time, leisure was given the above meaning. Thus, it was not a question of pursuing leisure for some reason but rather of achieving something within leisure itself. From this time, leisure itself became the objective.

The "an•an-non•no" crowd and consumer culture

Until the 1960s, most statements in academic and journalistic circles had been heavily political or ideological in tone. The publications that people read were strongly influenced by whether or not they supported the existing establishment. By the time the political and cultural struggle had come to an end in 1970, not only young people but a lot of adults too were quite fed up with noisy political arguments. The feeling was that the age should not be dominated by political conflicts and ideology.

Probably for this reason, the political journals that had been prominent until then began to be replaced by catalog and information magazines. The *Asahi Journal* ceased publication, and *Pia* and *City Road* appeared on the shelves. These two magazines increased their circulation through the support of mainly young people. They both gave information about times, places, and events to be enjoyed, without any value judgments, and they listed information impartially without any relationship to the objective significance of events or the degree of enjoyment to be gained. Of course, it was leisure time that was to be enjoyed. And it was left entirely up to readers to decide what they wanted to enjoy, how they should enjoy it and how much they would enjoy themselves. This was the reason these magazines sold.

At around the same time, the magazines *an•an* and *non•no* appeared. These were targeted mainly at young women in their late teens and early twenties, who had graduated from high school or junior college and would be working as secretaries in offices for a few years until marriage. The purpose of these publications was to provide fashion information in a broad sense. Thanks to the period of high economic growth, there were increased opportunities for young women to find employment, and they received reasonable salaries. Even after putting away some savings for their wedding expenses, there was some disposable income left over. These two magazines, in a way, suggested ways in which this money could be spent.

In other words, what these magazines were suggesting was a lifestyle for young women who had relative leeway in terms of time and money. Of course, this was the age of catalog and information journals, so the magazines did not recommend any specific lifestyle with values or norms. But they increased their circulations among readers, and the information for pleasure that they supplied, which frequently became the topic of conversation among women, became a kind of tacit authority. They came to offer the norms that were shared at least among women and those values that had been taken up by the mass media, so that in the end they came to have a strong influence on readers.

Thus, for example, these magazines covered more than just fashion. They introduced provincial towns that still had buildings and spaces dating from the Edo and Meiji periods, and these became popular tourist spots. Since young women visited these places in such numbers that they threatened to harm the quality of life of the people who lived there, and since their motivation for making the trips came from these two magazines, they came to be known as the "an•an-non•no," or "an-non," crowd.

Further, these young women did not enjoy events or make trips to traditional towns in order to recharge their batter-

ies for work the next day. Rather, they used the leeway in time and money that they had gained to enjoy what were considered to be fashionable activities so as to liberate themselves from the monotony of work and everyday living. That is to say, they enjoyed fashion or events or trips for their own purposes. When they visited old towns, they did not learn about the area's history, traditions, culture or historical relics. It was natural for them, for example, to come home without any souvenirs from the trip, because the purpose of the trip was to enjoy an extraordinary experience using time and space divorced from their ordinary lives. What they were left with after the trip was a bag full of memories of the experience and a feeling of temporary liberation. And that was all they wanted.

The "an-non" crowd is the post-baby-boom generation. The "New Family" lifestyle of the baby boomers of seeking a purpose in living was the same as that of the post-baby-boom generation, which was symbolized by the practice of taking trips for no reason at all. In other words, the significance and meaning of leisure that had been dominant until the 1960s had reversed nearly 180 degrees, and the new concept was taking root.

As I have already indicated, *Pia* as far as possible carried full listings of times, places, and events for enjoyment and left any judgments to the readers; it did not claim any authority at all. The same is true of *an•an* and *non•no*. The various styles of enjoyment that they propose, in a way, are a kind of simulation of a lifestyle without any value judgments. In practice, events and trips are experienced as carbon copies of that simulation. And there is not just one simulation. Indeed, there are so many simulations that readers get confused wondering which ones to choose. Accordingly, in terms of choice, the readers (maybe I should really call them consumers) are relatively free. While the scope of choice is not infinite, it is broad enough to confuse people who have to choose. In this sense, I say that readers are relatively free. But after making their choice, they copy the



Media-induced leisure activities: Pleasure in virtual experiences (the first issues of an-an and non-no)



Photo: MAGAZINE HOUSE

chosen simulations almost to perfection. So in this sense, the young women are relinquishing their freedom. In reality, of course, given also the cost and danger, it is certainly not easy to step outside the simulation.

Before the period of high economic growth, leisure was monopolized by certain privileged segments of society, but now even young office secretaries (perhaps the stereotype of the masses) can enjoy equality in terms of leisure, disposable income and cultural opportunities. The lifestyle of seeking your own purpose in life, which in the Middle Ages had been dominated by the nobles in the imperial court, is now becoming the lifestyle of the common people. To achieve equality in the acceptance of this lifestyle, the mass media (information magazines) that I have already described, the ways of presenting information, and the mechanism of simulation and copying are indispensable. To put it another way, the popularization of consumer culture—in other words, consumption in an advanced industrial society—depends

on the mass media, its simulations and copying as conditions for its development.

Lifestyle of pleasure

Looking at the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, although there might have been some slowdown and stagnation along the way, basically we can see that the advance of industry and the modernization of people's mindsets have been taking place at an accelerating pace compared with the previous age. The rapid speed of this has given rise to widening gaps and differences between generations—to such an extent that people say now that they cannot even communicate with people who are just a couple of years different in age.

In the 1980s, we had the so-called “new breed” of young people, with

older generations lamenting that these young people were beyond their comprehension; then there was the “new new breed”, and then the “baby boom juniors” (the children of the first baby-boom generation). Then a generation gap appeared between the new breed and the baby-boom juniors, who both claimed that there were cultural differences between them. Or so they say. Standing back a little bit, however,

we can see that actually they are very similar in terms of the individualistic and self-centered aspects of their lifestyle, which they seem to have taken over and further refined.

Thus, the mode of living that began with the baby-boom generation, by which the individual speaks, decides, and asserts him or herself, was realized and became entrenched. Of course, the so-called individualism of Western countries and the individualism and individualization that took root in Japan in the 1980s are certainly not the same thing. But at least in terms of fashion and so on, people began to become conscious, even excessively so, of their differences from others, the opportunities to behave as individuals increased, and “individualism” became a keyword for evaluating lifestyle.

The unprecedented overseas travel boom that began in Japan (though not only in this country, it seems) in the 1980s developed into a kind of fashion, with every Tom, Dick and Harry going abroad and at all times of the year. At first, Japanese traveled abroad in groups, as symbolized by the agricultural cooperative package tours, and these groups of Japanese tourists became the object of ridicule wherever they went. From the latter half of the 1980s, however, the number of young people traveling overseas alone gradually increased. However, it is extremely doubtful whether in fact individual Japanese travel abroad based on their own selective will and self-responsibility. That is to say, the overseas travel boom is still continuing, but its style and meaning appear to be a continua-

tion of the domestic trips to traditional towns in Japan by the "an-non" crowd.

As a phenomenon, certainly the individual is behaving alone. Individual Japanese are traveling to various regions around the world. But are they really making an effort to communicate with foreign ethnic groups, cultures, languages, customs and traditions? No. Rather appears that they are just moving around in a foreign culture, keeping contact with the outside world to a minimum. Whatever region they go to, they consider the world to be the same in that it stands outside their everyday life. Reminiscing about their trips, they say unanimously that it was "interesting" or "pleasant" or "I got to see a foreign culture." They do not discriminate, for example, between the numerous cultures that exist in Europe and their differences. In other words, the individual simply moves around in solitude, without making contact with the outside world, so no psychological change of any kind occurs as a result.

As a matter of fact, overseas travel bears remarkable similarities to the computer games that this generation loves so much. While enjoying the games, the individual is nothing more than a couch potato, sitting glaring at the computer screen in isolation. They might talk about virtual reality, but actually it is just a fabricated fantasy world. The viewers see an extraordinary world, and they play inside it. Emotional energy is consumed for the viewer's own purpose, so it has a cathartic effect and produces a sense of

satisfaction. However, the entertainment itself does not lead to any internal change in the individual; it is just pure fun.

Overseas travel from Japan now takes in destinations all around the globe. At the same time, thanks to the Internet, playing armchair games in your own room has increasingly become a more private, isolated, inward-looking affair. Globalization and privatization—these are the two main paradigms that must be considered when trying to understand the structure of contemporary civilization.

And leisure, it seems, is no exception. As these two paradigms indicate, in terms of mode of behavior, overseas travel and computer games are at opposite ends of the pole. Essentially what should be gained from each activity is quite different. But as I already pointed out, in terms of satisfying the desire for the extraordinary, experiencing the extraordinary, receiving a mental stimulus from the experience and so on, for the person involved the two are very much alike. This fact symbolizes the core of contemporary leisure.

Playing with computer media owes a great deal to today's advanced information and media technologies and related devices. Moreover, the play is completed entirely inside the world fabricated by this equipment. Such play, or such a leisure style, could not possibly exist outside the world of media. So the media here no longer have a function as a means and a tool; they have acquired their own objectives.

Overseas travel, meanwhile, depends heavily on such things as guidebooks with such titles as "How to Explore the World," advertising pamphlets produced by travel agencies, and travel programs and articles on television or in magazines. Recently, the developing countries of Asia have become popular tourist destinations, but even such adventurous, poor-man's travel is becoming fashionable and is strongly influ-

enced by the media. In the same way as with the "an-non" crowd, media introductions are basically simulations, and the actual trips are copies of these simulations. That is to say, the simulation story has already been written, and the actual travel develops as a replica of this composition. It is the same as with the "an-non" crowd.

Groups of middle-aged men and women hiking in the mountains near Tokyo, senior high school boys and girls gathering in Shibuya on the weekends, middle-aged women going shopping in department stores on weekday afternoons, young men and women attending social parties with people other than their school or company colleagues, tennis, skiing, golf, karaoke, car driving, hobby and educational club activities—these are the leisure activities of the Japanese today.

The points that I have made in this article apply to all these activities. The things that people are conscious of when engaging in these activities are fashionableness, originality and individuality that attracts the attention of others, relief from the hated ordinariness of life, and the stimulation that comes from the activities. To what extent can these desires be satisfied? If they are satisfied, then the activity is enjoyable. Yes, what people alike want is a feeling of pleasure and enjoyment; they are not interested in what the leisure is for.

Boldly speaking, I would say that the common denominator here is hedonism. It is this hedonism that has been constantly affirmed since the end of World War II. The first generation to adopt this principle of behavior was the baby-boom generation. It is only natural that the style of leisure and the attitude toward leisure have changed decisively since then. And needless to say, what has changed is the whole lifestyle, of which the style of leisure is no more than a part.

Nakano Osamu is a Professor in the Faculty of Sociology, Hosei University. He is the author of several books specializing in media studies and critiques of contemporary culture.



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