FUMIE KUMAGAI*

THE MECHANISM OF JAPANESE MODERNIZATION

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Japan's recent emergence as a major world economic power has created a surge of interest in the nation and its people. Japan today is economically powerful, culturally rich and politically free and stable, ranking in all these respects among the leading nations of the world. But how modern is modern-day Japan? In actuality, Japan is not nearly as modern as it presents itself; the essence of Japanese society is an integration of both modernity and tradition. Like the two-headed Janus, Japan can show one face at one time and a completely different face at another.

Some of the difficulty that people have understanding Japanese society today stems from the complex nature of Japan's modernization. Three major cultures have left an imprint on Japan: Oriental, European and American. Nevertheless, it is striking to note that throughout this process, Japan never lost its own identity and cultural specificity. In each phase of its modernization, there emerged a blending of cultures where the ideas and manners borrowed from outside cultures retained unique Japanese characteristics.

Part of this is no doubt due to Japan's geographical insularity: it is an island nation having little or no historical or cultural affinity with its Southeast Asian neighbors. While the Japanese government sent missions abroad to study the essence of other countries' technological, scientific and cultural civilization, only a very limited number of foreigners came to Japan to be directly involved in the modernization process. Never having been colonized by another foreign power, Japan's cultural assimilation lacked any sustained human contact with the outside world. As a result of this so-called cultural "self-colonization" (Suzuki, 1993: 5) nation's racial and ethnic homogeneity has remained intact, permitting Japanese to modernize society while still preserving a sense of their own special identity (Christopher, 1983: 39).

Orientalization

During the first phase of Japanese modernization from the sixth to eighth centuries, Chinese thought and practices permeated Japanese society. *Wakon*

* Fumie Kumagai, Kyorin university, Tokyo, Japonska.

kansai (i. e., Chinese learning and Japanese spirit) is the ground upon which modern-day Japan exists. It is unique blend of two diametrically opposed modes of religious perception: an intuitive, non reflective "mythic" mode represented by Japan's indigenous Shinto religion, and the "rationalistic" mode of confucian ideology adapted from China (Kitagawa, 1983: 293).

Confucianism has become a moral code of the Japanese, emphasizing personal virtue, justice and devotion to the family. Two Confucian concepts, namely subordination to one's superior and filial piety, continue to pervade the minds of Japanese today and to influence their social institutions. Nevertheless, Japan's religious and Ideological orientation contains other complex elements which allow it to maintain a distinctiveness all its own.

Europeanization

The second phase of Japanese modernization began during the Meiji Restoration (1868) when Japan enthusiastically absorbed Western civilization, mainly from Great Britain, Germany and France. *Wakon yosai* (Western learning and Japanese spirit) was the slogan adopted by the people at the time. The "Europeanization" of Japan during this period was so extensive that almost all spheres of Japanese society-governmental, political and legal systems, the army and navy, the system of education, and even manners, customs and habits-experienced some degree of Westernization. Even the centuries-old tradition of Chinese medicine was replaced by German practices. The phrase *wayo secchu* emerged to describe the co-existence of Japanese and Western life-styles. *Yofuku* (Western-style clothing) became fashionable over *kimono* or *wafuku* (Japanese-style clothing). Men's traditional hairstyles *(chon-mage)* and sword-bearing were formally prohibited. Similarly, women chose to adopt Western hairstyles over their traditional *Nihongami* (Japanese hairstyles). Vegetarian and fisheating Japanese began to eat meat and dairy products. Even in their living quarters, *yøma* (Western-style rooms) with Western-style furniture were incorporated into Japanese-style housing.

One of the few areas in which Japan remained independent of Western influence during this time was with regard to the institution of the family. Despite the modernization of lifestyles and many other spheres of Japanese society, *ie* (the traditional family system), which had previously existed only among the upper class, was codified and enforced throughout Japan regardless of social status.

Fortunately, perhaps, the Japanese zeal to imitate everything Western was later replaced with a reaction against Westernization, and many practices unworthy of imitation were discarded. What is most characteristic about Japan's effort to learn from the West is its spirit of independence in incorporating only those elements which would be advantageous to it. Japan succeeded in keeping its ethos and cultural spiritual traditions intact, while assimilating Western knowledge and technology. Thus Japanese society today has retained its hybrid culture of tradition and modernity.

Americanization

The third and final phase of Japan's modernization occurred after World War II. As a result of its defeat in the war and the subsequent seven-year occupation by allied forces, Japan underwent total democratization, or Americanization, to be precise. The Japanese people spontaneously and enthusiastically supported the institutional reforms and new social systems implemented under the occupation, including political reform, equal rights for women, co-education and abolition of the traditional family system, to name a few. Enjoying the full support of the Japanese people, occupation authorities were able to implement these changes with astonishing rapidity. In yet another example of self-colonization, however, Japan adopted from American only those practices from which it would clearly benefit. As a result, Japan has become one of the leading nations in the world today, while still maintaining its own identity and culture.

Results of Japan's Modernization

Throughout the various stages of its modernization, Japan's stength has been in its ability to synthesize and internalize various contrasting social systems and cultural orientations. The coexistence of both tradition and modernity is the essence of the complex nature of modern-day Japan.

Figure 1. A Dual Structural Model of Japanese Society

MODERNITY
 The Western capitalism
 brought into a traditional
 agricultural society.

 Coexistence

DUAL STRUCTURE
Japanese Society Today

TRADITION
 Indigenous Traditional:
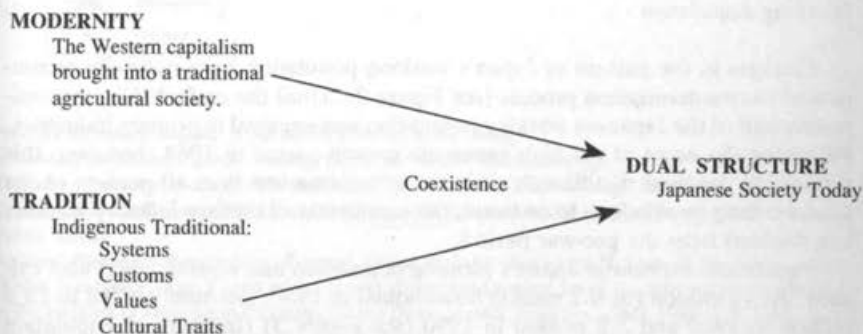 Systems
  Customs
  Values
  Cultural Traits

Figure 1 illustrates the essence of the dual structural perspective of Japanese society today where modern Western capitalism is incorporated into a traditional agrarian society. The contrasting elements of external modernity and internal tradition coexist in a single system, composed of two layers and resulting in a dual structure. Underlying this structural duality is a complex of cultural assumptions – some modern and some traditional, some borrowed and some uniquely Japanese – which determine the manners and customs of the Japanese people, including regional variations, patterns of the working population, religion, and national character.

Regional Variations

Cultural dichotomy by region – northeast versus southwest – has a long history in Japan, going as far back as the Kamakura period. Dichotomous regional varia-

tions account not only for differences in folklore and customs, blood-type, finger-prints, and eating habits, but also for patterns in intra-community relationships. In the north-eastern region, the binding force of the community is the hierarchical-vertical relationship among members, whereas in the south-western region hori-zontal-egalitarian relations are the norm.

Modern Japan has witnessed an excessive degree of urbanization in its met-ropolitan areas, accompanied by an equally excessive diminution of population (or *kaso*) in certain rural districts, particularly areas such as Kyushu, Tohoku, Hok-kaido, and Chugoku where economic and industrial activities have stagnated. Two striking demographic characteristics are evidenced in these kaso areas: acute attri-tion of children between 0 and 14 years of age (from 35.9 percent in 1960 to 19.3 in 1985); and a dramatic increase in the numbers of elderly (from 7.0 percent in 1960 to 17.2 percent in 1985) (National Land Agency, 1991: 29).[1] In 1990 only about 6 percent of the total Japanese population resided in half the entire land mass (National Land Agency, 1991: 15).

This imbalance of population distribution may at last partially account for the duality of Japan's modern social structure. Ultramodern urban living presents a sharp contrast to the traditional, rural lifestyles which a small segment of Japan-ese society is still obliged to lead.


Working Population

Changes in the pattern of Japan's working population have naturally accom-panied the modernization process (see Figure 2). Until the early 1950s, approxi-mately half of the Japanese working population was engaged in primary industries. Following the onset of the high economic growth period in 1964, however, this proportion declined significantly; it has now become less than 10 percent of the total working population. In contrast, the proportion of tertiary industry workers has doubled from the pre-war period.

Significant attrition in Japan's farming population and households is also evi-dent. At 18 million (or 6.2 million households) in 1950, the numbers fell to 13.9 million in 1960 and 3.9 million in 1990 (see Figure 3) (Institute of Population Problems, 1993: 107). In three decades, the Japanese farming population has been reduced to one-fifth of the pre-high economic growth period, indicating the emergence of dramatic structural change in modern Japanese society.

The introduction of modern technology into farming as well as insufficient levels of income have contributed to a sharp decline in the number of full-time farmers and a rapid increase in the part-time farming population. Part-time farm-ing households fall into two categories: in Type 1, the primary source of income is agriculture; in Type 2, it is nonagricultural. Since 1960, farm families have been shifting to Type 2. In 1990, in a typical rural farming area in Japan, of the total farming households only 15.4 percent were full-time; 13.8 percent were part-time

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[1] Of the total Japanese population in 1985, the proportion of children between 0 and 14 years of age was 21.5 percent, and that of the elderly 65 and over was 10.3 percent (National Land Agency, Office of Depopulation Problems, 1991: 29, figure 2–8). In 1994, however, these proportions have changed significantly, namely, decreased to 16.5 percent for the former, and have increased to 13.9 percent for the latter, respectively (Japanese Management and Coordination Agency, 1994).

Figure 2. Changes in Labor Force Participation Rate by Industry:
1920–1992
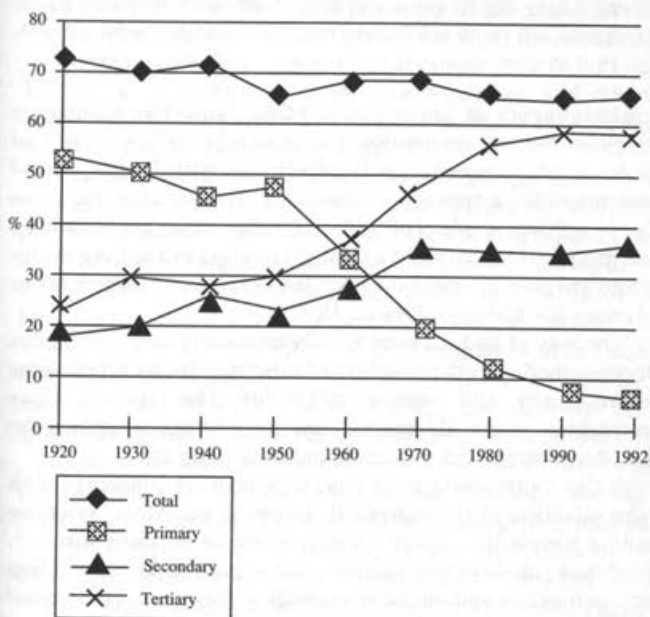
Primary Industries include: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.

Secondary Industries include: Mining, Construction and Manufacturing.

Tertiary Industries include: Wholesale and retail trade, Finance and insurance, Real estate, Transportation and communication, Electric power, gas and water supply, Service industries and Public service.

Sources: Sømuchø Tøkeikyoku, *Kokusei Chøsa Høkoku* (Statistical Bureau of the Priminister's Office, National Census Report of the census conducted October 1st of the referent year), reported in the Institute of Population Problems, *Latest Demographic Statistics: 1993*, 1993: 105, Table 8–5; and statistics for 1992 were from the Asahi, *Japan Almanac: 1994*, 1993: 97.

Type 1, and 70.7 percent were part-time Type 2 (see Figure 3) (Ministry of Agriculture, 1990: 11).[2]

The reality of farm families today represents the dual structure of Japanese society. Classified as engaging in the traditional farming occupation, these families

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[2] In 1992, the Japanese Government set a new target of reducing the total working hours per person to 1,800 hours a year by the end of the fiscal year 1996. The actual number of working hours in 1992 was 1,972 hours, 44 hours less than the previous year's actual and below the 2,000 hour level for the first time. This was due mainly to the fact that overtime work decreased due to the recession" (Asahi, 1993: 99). Therefore, with the recovery of Japanese economy, it is likely that the overall number of working hours of a Japanese worker will be back to over the 2,000 hour level again.

actually rely on a modern type occupations for their subsistence. These contrasting elements of modernity and tradition coexist within the Japanese farming institution without conflict.

Religion

Despite the extensive influence of Chinese civilization, Japan has maintained a distinctive multi-religious cultural orientation which incorporates a variety of religious beliefs. Indeed, most Japanese view themselves as both Buddhists and Shintists, and Japanese households typically contain two separate altar for these devotions. Of Japan's 124 million people, 106 million say they believe in Shintøism and 96 million espouse Buddhism, obviously a double-counting in religious orientation. By contrast, there are only 1.5 million Christians in Japan, and much fewer Muslims and Jews (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1992).

Literally meaning "the way of god," **Shinto** is the earliest and only indigenous religion of Japan. Unconcerned with the problem of afterlife, Shinto emphasizes the veneration of nature, purity, and everyday family life. The Japanese today adopt Shint-rituals to celebrate major life events, such as weddings, baptisms, the well-being of children, the construction of homes and buildings, etc.

● *Buddhism*, which first came to Japan in 538, is principally concerned with life after death and the salvation of the individual. Growing out of this religious orientation, the Japanese people developed a strong sense of ancestor worship. Thus, many of the Buddhist rituals practiced today are organized in conjunction with the afterlife, such as funerals and ancestor worship at the time of the vernal and the autumnal equinox and the *obon* festival in the summer.

● *Confucianism* has become a moral code of the Japanese emphasizing personal virtue, justice, and devotion to the family, including the spirit of one's ancestors. Two Confucian concepts have consistently been stressed in Japanese formal education, namely *chu* (subordination to the emperor or superior), and *kø* (filial piety) – a philosophical orientation which persists in the minds of the Japanese today.

● *Christianity* was brought to Japan by the Jesuit missionaries in 1549 and then banned during the Edo era. Under the Meiji Restoration, however, the Protestant ethic was reintroduced by various sojourners in Japan. As a result, Christianity has contributed to the modernization of Japan and is often regarded as a modern way of thought. Today, its adherents are less than 2 percent of the total population, divided fairly evenly between Protestants and Catholics.

National Character and Human Relations

Japan is more racially and ethnically homogeneous than almost any other modern nation. In fact, less than one percent of the total Japanese population is comprised of non-Japanese nationals (Institute of Population Problems, 1993: 22). As others have recognized, this national homogeneity may be one of the primary reasons why the Japanese have been able to modernize their society and yet preserve a distinct sense of their own special identity (Christopher, 1983: 39).

Japan's national character is defined by a unique set of human relations and a special code of human conduct. First, Japanese are socialized to value "group-

ism" over "individualism"; the welfare of the group as a whole is always given priority over the well-being of any one individual. Inter-human dynamics of the *oyabun-kobun* (superior-subordinate) and *sempai-kohai* (senior-junior) relationships illustrate how the interdependency of the group can simultaneously permit loyalty from subordinates and protection from the superior.

Groupism also occounts for the Japanese style of bottom-up decision making. The essence of this style is the group-oriented and consensus-seeking process which requires all parties to be in agreement with a decision before any major course of action is officially proposed.

Second, Japanese society is conformist. People care very much about how they are viewed by others and if they are following the accepted social norms in the prescribed fashion. Thus we find that the working hours of the Japanese salaryman are notoriously long, and they have less holidays among the industrialized nations of the world. In the manufacturing sectors in 1990 the average annual working hours of a Japanese worker were 2,124 hours, and they had 118 holidays, whereas 1,948 hours and 139 holidays of an American worker (Ministry of Labor, 1992, reported in the Asahi, 1993: 99). To be treated as an insider, the Japanese salaryman must contribute to the work ethic, and therefore the cohesiveness of the group, by spending an inordinate amount of time in work-related activities.

Japan is perhaps best viewed as an "age-cracy", where one's major life events (i.e., entrance into college, employment, marriage, and childbearing) must take place at a certain age or else one falls off the golden path of social acceptability.

Third, Japan's racial and ethnic homogeneity have contributed to a mode of non-expressive, "high context" communication in which the spoken word is often less important than nonverbal communication skills. These include eye contact, *ishin denshin* (mind-to-mind communication), and facial expressions. There are also a number of high-context Japanese values, such as *amage, giri* and *on*, which have no meaningful English language equivalent. These words are derived from one's dependent and interdependent relations to others as a member of a group rather than as an individual, and reflect the deep concern of the Japanese for harmonious human relations within the group.

Fourth, implicitness and indirectness are valued over explicitness and straightforwardness. This tendency toward ambiguity is perhaps best evidenced in the Japanese language itself which shows no distinctions between singular/plural or gender and does not use definite person's stated reasons (tatemae) differ from his real intention, motive or feeling (honne).

Fifth, the Japanese socialization process tends to perpetuate a hierarchical orientation in human relations, despite the constitutional equality of the people. Formal behavior patterns and honorific language forms clearly reflect this hierarchical orientation of Japanese culture. Anyone who has ever attempted to learn Japanese will appreciate the critical relationship between the honorific forms of the Japanese language (i.e., expressions showing respect, expressions demeaning oneself, and polite expressions) and the continued importance of hierarchy in Japanese society.

Sixth, perhaps as a by-product of the hierarchical orientation of human relations, is the behavioral reserve of the Japanese people. Candid expressions of one's feelings and the ability to quickly establish friendships is alien to the Japanese culture. At the same time, however, friendships with Japanese tend to be deep and long-lasting.

In the professional arena, this cautious feeling-out process of the Japanese is

epitomized in *nemawashi*, which literally means the gentle turning around of roots before transplanting a tree. By making every effort to achieve an informal agreement from all parties concerned before formally presenting a proposal, they obviate the possibility of direct personal conflict which they find antithetical to the Japanese cultural assumption of group harmony.

From Modernization to Internationalization

Modern day Japan has proven to be a complex nation struggling to combine traditional attitudes and mores with the political and social demands of an advanced industrialized economy. As discussed above, this struggle to balance the past with the present has had a significant impact on the structure of human relations in Japan, particularly in the areas of family dynamics and lifestyles, education and socialization of youth, the role of women, and support for the elderly. In all cases, we find a dual structure where traditional values and modern practices coexist.

As an emerging world leader, the struggle to define and shape the structure of human relations in Japan today is becoming even more complex, involving not only elements of the past and present within Japan, but a new set of forces imposed by the process of Japan's internationalization. As in the past phases of its modernization, Japan must once again learn to adapt its practices to the accepted norms of the international arena, while at the same time retaining those customs and values from which it will continue to benefit. The effort of Japanese families abroad to accommodate their lifestyles and values to those of the communities in which they reside provides just one example of this ongoing struggle.

The Issue of Culture in Internationalization

"Internationalization" emerged as a primary goal of the Japanese in the 1980s. For the most part, however, internationalization has meant simply learning foreign languages, traveling overseas or studying abroad in order to gain knowledge of advanced technologies, and has only just begun to include opening Japanese culture to outside influences by welcoming foreigners to study, work or live in Japan. In this sense, Japan has remained an exclusionist country where foreigners continue to be referred to as *gaijin* or outsiders. Much as it has in the past, Japan has chosen a selective course of internationalization: learning what it can from the outside while retaining its own cultural uniqueness on the inside.

Unfortunately, Japan's inwardly closed society has resulted in a number of cross-cultural communication gaps between Japanese and other peoples. Indeed, a growing number of scholars and others who are concerned about international relations have begun to point to the significance of cultural factors in maintaining positive relations among nations. Iriye, for example, has argued that culture plays a far more important role today than it did in the past, when issues of national defense, diplomacy and trade tended to dominate the international agenda (Iriye, 1989: 62–63). Culture itself has become a tool with which nations can communicate beyond the boundaries of parochial nationalism (Kato, Umesao, Kato, Ito, and Mizutani, 1989: 66).

Recognizing that intercultural understanding is essential to revolving such

issues as the trade imbalance and the north-south problem, governments of leading nations have already begun to increase their efforts to promote international cultural exchanges. Although individual nations will certainly retain their own culture-specific orientations, they must learn to come together as equal partners on an fair and equitable international playing field.

Toward the Successful Internationalization of Japan

Only through cross-cultural experiences will the Japanese people be able to recognize the differences which exist between modern Western societies and Japan and to learn from them. In this process, the best of Japanese tradition can be maintained, while significant progress can be made in a number of areas previously stalled in the name of tradition, most notably balanced and spiritually fulfilling lifestyles, creative and innovative education for the young, equality for women at work and at home, and support structures for the elderly.

These are but a few facets of Japanese society today presented here in an attempt to "unmasking Japan today". Yet, they revealed themselves to contrast one another the differing yet parallel lifestyles and realities of modern-day Japanese society. As Japan proceeds in its transformation from merely a world economic super-power to a world political power, which would seem a long way ahead, the Japanese people will feel even stronger urge to identify themselves, not just as "Japanese" as they have done in the past, but as indviduals holding unique socio-cultural characteristics, as we have witnessed here.

The continuity of contemporary Japanese society, entailing the harmonious co-existence of tradition and modernity simultaneously, is an essence which traces back to the very beginning of the history of Japanese society. At the same time, it will be the thrust to Japan's future of internationalization, if it is ever to be accomplished. In this sense, the dual-natured structure of Japanese society is not an exception to undergo radical changes during the process of Japan's internationalization.

At the same time, by opening Japanese culture and traditions to outsiders, other nations will learn from Japan how to achieve a better balance between the elements of tradition and modernity within their own societies. Strong family values, the importance of education, and respect for the elderly need not exist separate and apart from economic growth.

Having successfully traveled the road of modernization to become a leading international economic power, Japan must now move forward in the process of internationalization – a process not only of learning from its equally advanced neighbors, but of sharing with them all that it has come to know.

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Figure -3. Changes in the Farm Household Proportion by the Type of Participation
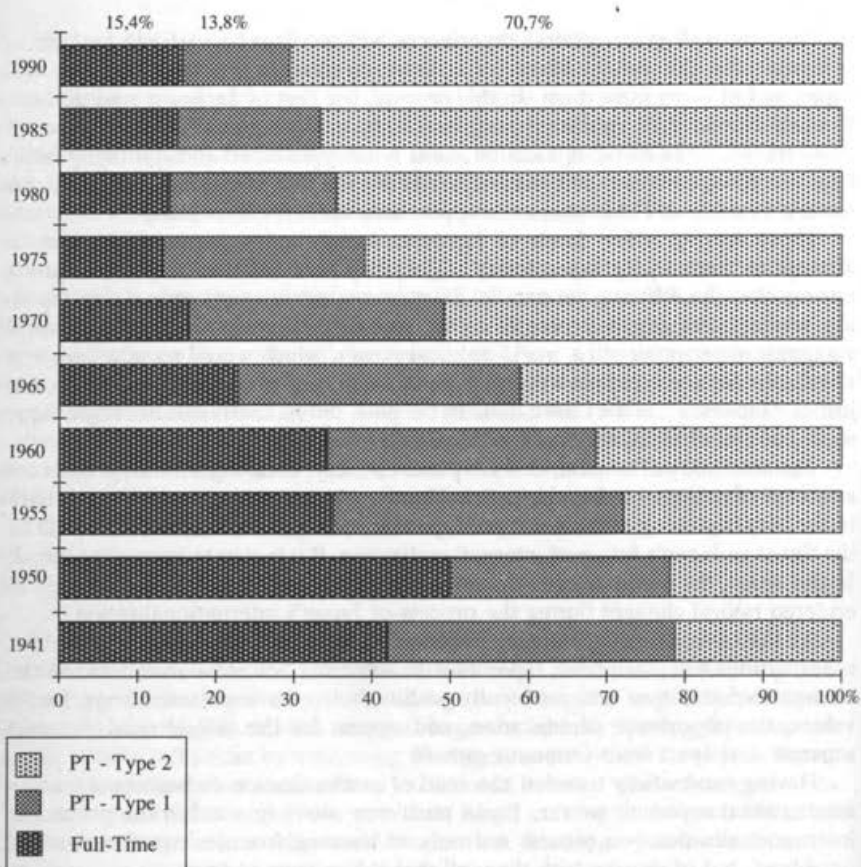
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