

# Viewpoint

The Battalion

April 22, 1977

## Aging: Japanese Style

By YASUSHI HARA

**TOKYO** — Nothing is more tragic than to read in newspapers here that a lonely old person has been found dead, perhaps in a slum apartment or in a rundown rooming house. For such reports, which are now appearing with alarming regularity, reflect important changes gradually overtaking Japanese society.

They indicate in the first place that the proportion of aged in the population, which has been lower in Japan than in the United States and Western Europe, is rapidly rising — largely as a result of improved health conditions.

But more significantly, these accounts point up the fact that growing numbers of old people are no longer supported as widely by relatives as families fragment under the pressures of industrialization and urbanization.

The prospect ahead, therefore, is for the government to intensify programs that guarantee sufficient benefits for the aged to survive in comfort. This would mean the construction of old-age homes and clinics for geriatric cases as well as increased social security expenditures. Only 2 per cent of people over the age of 60 now receive social security help.

Dynamic programs of this kind, however, would be an innovation in a land in which sons and daughters imbued with a sense of filial responsibility have traditionally cared for their parents.

Signs of a new awareness of the plight of the elderly are apparent everywhere here. One of the best-selling novels, called "Every Day is Sunday," depicts the tedious existence of a retired clerk to whom, as the title suggests, every day is like Sunday.

Thousands of old people currently visit special Buddhist shrines known

as "sudden-death temples," at which they pray that they may die quickly and peacefully without becoming a burden to their children.

This concern with a shifting demographic picture is mirrored in statistics. In 1970, people over the age of 65 constituted 7 percent of the population. By the year 2015, according to projections, they will represent nearly 18 percent of the population.

Although the future is expected to alter the situation radically, the Japanese family system is still strong. At the moment, consequently, most aged persons can rely on relatives.

In contrast to the United States, where only 22 percent of old people live with their children, nearly 80 percent of aged Japanese reside with their sons or daughters. Nearly 50 percent of elderly people here depend on their children for financial support — and only 10 percent count on pensions, annuities or welfare assistance.

Opinion studies show that the Japanese are generally conscious of their obligations to the elderly. A recent government investigation found, for instance, that 46 percent advocated parents and grown children living together; 38 percent favored joint households if the parents were in poor health, and only 16 percent expressed hostility to either arrangement.

Surveys of young Japanese women, moreover, have revealed an understandably shifting pattern. Most favored being alone with their husbands immediately following marriage. But a majority, including many who wanted to work, welcomed parents under the roof after the birth of children in order to serve as baby-sitters and to help with domestic chores.

The economic boom of a decade ago put something of a dent in these preferences, since apartments in industrialized cities were usually too small to accommodate both married couples and parents. In an effort to keep families intact, government housing projects being built at present feature apartments with a separate room for parents.

Despite their knowledge that they can fall back on their children, about one-third of elderly Japanese continue to work — which is another contrast with the United States, where only 16 percent of people above the age of 65 hold jobs.

This stems in large measure from the fact that Japanese companies are themselves like families, and in assuring cradle-to-grave security, they often retain retired employees at reduced salaries.

The government is encouraging the business community to extend the retirement age from 55 to 60, partly on the grounds that seasoned employees can contribute valuable experience to their firms and partly in order to avoid big public expenditures on social security.

But many companies have been hard hit by the recession of the past few years, and their tendency has been to tighten their labor force. This has, of course, hurt older workers who have sought to stay on the job.

Over the long run, it seems to me, Japan cannot either expect filial duty or corporate benevolence to endure. Eventually, therefore, it will probably have to become more of a welfare state — with the huge social security budgets that plague Americans and Europeans.

(Hara writes on social and economic issues for the *Asahi Shimbun*, the Japanese daily.)

## Tradition isn't dead

Tradition isn't dead at A&M — it just needs a gentle nudge from time to time.

Yesterday's Muster crowd proved that, even though tests, term papers and assignments are piling high, A&M students care enough to honor fellow Aggies.

G. Rollie White Coliseum was filled and unlike most concerts here, everyone stayed until the end. The roll call showed, unfortunately, a larger number of students who died this year. And this year's speaker showed that former students who fought for their country are more than just names in a history book.

If the purpose of Muster is to honor the dead, it also serves to unite the living. To the thousands who attended the 1977 Campus Muster: You saw Aggie tradition at its best.

— M.W.

## Readers' forum

Guest viewpoints, in addition to Letters to the Editor, are welcome. All pieces submitted to Readers' forum should be:

- Typed triple space
- Limited to 60 characters per line
- Limited to 100 lines

Submit articles to Reed McDonald 217, College Station, Texas, 77843. Author's name and phone number must accompany all submissions.

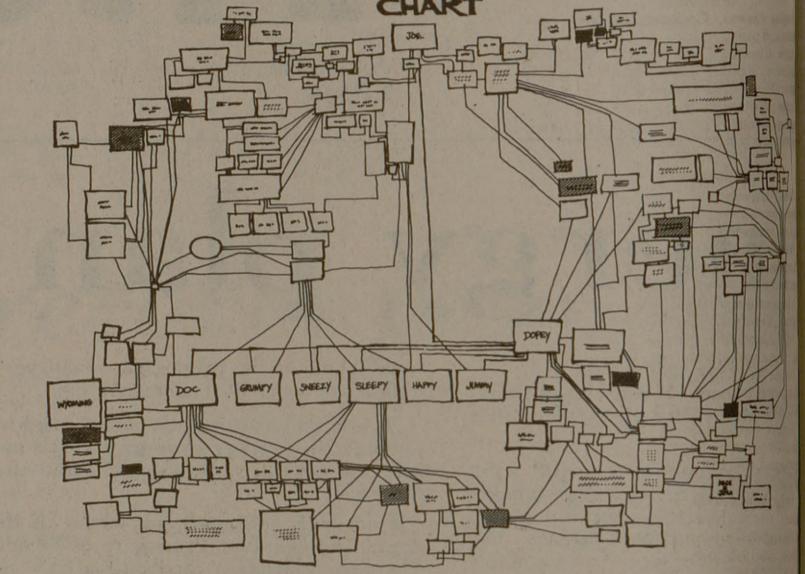
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  - ⑤
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## A message for Robert Harvey

Editor:

Would you please inform Mr. Harvey, before he assumes his role as Student Body President, that he has not been elected to a fascist organization. (Webster defines fascism as "a political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation and race above the individual...").

I suggest that he read the First Amendment of the Constitution. Then, I suggest that he lay aside any military oriented mentality that he might have acquired in order to gain a more democratic appreciation of his duties as Student Body President.

— P.G. Fleer

P.S. If you are puzzled as to what this letter refers to, review Mr. Harvey's actions in the Student Senate this past year and notice the trend he has taken.

## Raise rates for foreigners

Editor:

I write this letter in response to Colin Crombie's "Tuition Threatens Internationals" in last Wednesday's Battalion.

I must agree with him that the Texas Senate is going a little overboard in attempting to register international students after the first day of classes. I must also agree that the Texas Legislature is definitely discriminating in favor of Texas residents by raising the foreign tuition rates from \$14 to \$40 per credit hours.

## MORE POWER TO THEM!!!

Behind every dollar paid in fees by a Texas resident are two more paid by the Texas government from tax revenues. The government, that's US! T-Sips and Ags and everything in-between! We paid for it and we damn well better get the first shot at it! And having secured for ourselves the opportunity for an education, must we sell out our out-of-state brothers by charging them three times the amount charged to foreign students whose parents haven't paid state and national taxes all their lives so that a fine institution like A&M can exist for their children to attend.

And to the ushers, hooray to you for wearing your formals and in keeping the casual spirit, common sight at radical hippy concerts from growing and spreading. If the students had had a good time, they might want more concert of that nature. Keep 'em studying always say.

And to those of the student body, hooray, you struck the greatest for our cause. You know who we are. You bright young members of your group who make it a point to expand your knowledge of music. Keep those AM radios blaring. We could have lost the battle if you knew more songs than "Amen". We praise you for leaving in the middle of the concert and showing those so and so's they aren't welcome here and aren't appreciated.

Finally, John W. Tynes, we can forget you and your brilliant article. No one will ever guess that you don't know what you're talking about. That you helped our faction by giving a one-sided review of a "supposedly boring, mediocre concert. It's a good thing you didn't know what you were looking for in a good concert. You would have found them. Bravo you all.

— D.I.S.C.O.  
Delegates Interested in Stopping Concert Openers

— Marc Sherman

— Erik Lehman

— Arlene Haines

— John Bohm

## More primaries, but who cares?

**WASHINGTON** — There's some disturbing news this week for those who believe that the degree of democracy we enjoy in this country is proportionate to the direct participation of citizens in choosing their leaders.

In 1976, more presidential primaries than ever were held, offering more people the chance for a personal voice in the selection of the presidential candidates. Unfortunately, most people looked at the opportunity and said, "No thanks."

Austin Ranney, a past president of



David S.  
Broder

the American Political Science Assn. and now a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, has

pulled together the discouraging figures on who voted — and who didn't — in those primaries.

The study, published last week makes pretty bleak reading. Between 1968 and 1976, the number of states holding presidential primaries increased from 17 to 30; among them, those 30 states had more than three-quarters of all the nation's potential voters.

Unfortunately, only 28 percent of the voting-age residents of those states took part in the presidential primaries. Worse, Ranney says, in

12 of those states that offered contests in both parties in both 1972 and 1976, the turnout was 4 percent lower than last year. That was true despite the fact that the Republican contest was hard-fought in 1976 and only nominal four years earlier.

Nor was this an isolated trend, Ranney says. Looking back to the competitive primaries in the 1948-1968 period, Ranney found the average turnout dropped from 39 percent in the earlier period to 28 percent in 1976 — a falloff of almost one-third.

The decline in voting in America is not a new story, of course. It's occurred in the general elections for President, even though the decline there has been less steep than in the presidential primaries.

President Carter has offered his own solution to the problem by proposing instant registration-and-voting on election day. But Ranney says that "registration laws do not explain as much about turnout in primary elections as they do about turnout in general elections."

And the Carter instant-voting plan would be used only on general election day, so it offers no answer to the problem of participation in the primaries in any case.

Other rules changes might have a marginal effect. But Ranney's evidence shows there doesn't seem to be any close relationship between the form of the ballot, the inclusiveness of the candidate field, the date of the primary, the closeness of the contest or the binding character of the results and the turnout of voters.

Contrary to his expectations, Ranney found that turnout was better in states with closed primaries — where only registered Democrats could vote in the Democratic primary and only Republicans in the Republican primary — than in those with crossover primaries, where anyone can vote on either party's ballot.

His guess, he said in an interview, is that in those closed-primary

states, "parties have a more visible existence and the stress on party may make voting in the primaries more important."

What does seem to affect turnout is the amount of money the candidates spend campaigning in the state. That's not surprising, since much of the spending is designed simply to let voters know an election is about to happen. His inference is that if greater participation is desired, it's going to cost more.

But no change that can be made in the rules, Ranney suggests, is likely to change the fact that "turnouts in presidential primaries will always be substantially smaller than those in presidential general elections."

Overall, in 1976 the primary vote in a state was about half the size of the general election vote.

Ranney, like others, is concerned that the relatively smaller turnout in the primaries may distort the presidential selection system in ways that advocates of participatory democracy are reluctant to concede.

The voters in primaries, he said, have been shown in a number of studies by himself and other scholars to be "unrepresentative of the electorate in socio-economic terms and to some extent politically as well." They are better educated, more issue-conscious and to some extent "more extreme" than their fellow-partisans who only show up on election day.

Yet it is a fact that the 187,000 people who voted in New Hampshire in the February presidential primary had a lot more impact on the choice of the President than the 333,000 New Hampshire men and women who voted in the general election.

It's a strange paradox of this form of participatory democracy that it can yield situations where, quite literally, less is more.

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