CHAPTER THREE

Who Will Fight? The JSDF's Demographic Crises

Conventional wisdom would have one believe that the United States should have won the Vietnam War. The United States possessed superior firepower, technology, air and naval capabilities, economic resources, and latent power compared to the Viet Cong and North Vietnam. The United States did not restrain its overwhelming might; during the war, over seven million tons of bombs were dropped on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia—more than twice the amount dropped on Europe and Asia in World War II.[1] To this day, leftover ordnance maims and kills hundreds of Southeast Asians every year. Although they lacked symmetrical military capabilities, the North Vietnamese refused to surrender, and the United States was forced to leave by the end of 1973. Armed with weapons of war designed to challenge superpowers, the United States was unprepared for the North Vietnamese use of guerilla-style tactics. The United States fell victim to what sociologist James William Gibson refers to as the false logic of the "technowar," which he describes in the following quote:

> For the military as well as civilian policymakers, the enemy becomes a mirror image of ourselves, only "less" so. Military strategy becomes a one-factor question about technical forces; success or failure is measured quantitatively. Machine-system meets machine-system and the largest, fastest, most technologically advanced system will win. Any other outcome becomes *unthinkable*.[2]

Technology does not win the war over hearts and minds. The United States pulled out of Vietnam because the public, and ultimately Congress, were not prepared to "accept thousands of body-bags for what appeared to be a lost cause."[3]

For every foreign soldier sent to Vietnam, there were scores of native Vietnamese who knew every inch of their homeland and were willing to give their lives to defend it. Absent the political will, the United States simply lacked the boots on the ground to establish a long-term presence, firmly hold onto territory, and defeat the enemy. While technology can supplement human resources and reduce the number of soldiers needed, technology is not divorced from the individuals that operate it nor the contexts in which it is implemented. As one senior government official makes clear, "War is a very simple thing. A kind of naked violence. I am not a hundred percent sure we can preserve our deterrence by only relying on technology. It is not only about technology, but also our psychology. Deterrence is about psychology, ultimately."[4]

Political scientists, like government leaders, can be seduced by the neatness of the technowar narrative in which, with the right tools, warfare becomes a solvable problem. Consequently, when scholars discuss power projection, ability to balance against regional threats, and eventual Japanese remilitarization, their lens of analysis narrows in on the strengths of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), particularly its technological capabilities and training. But the logic of the technowar obscures the existence of other important variables that contribute to military power.

The technowar logic has framed the realist narrative concerning Japanese security policy. Its proponents have remained fixated on disproving the constraining power of norms while misguidedly ignoring the difficulties of adopting more aggressive security policies and practices once those norms erode. The logic goes that if Japan were truly threatened, the government would overcome the normative and political restraints imposed on the JSDF by the public and pursue more normalized security policies. In other words, realists believe the JSDF's weaknesses are a matter of choice. However, in war and politics, the easy things are difficult, and the difficult things can be next to impossible. Government leaders may have preconceived notions of what, when, and how they will pursue their agendas, but successful implementation is far from guaranteed. Despite the myriad of threats abroad, improvements to the capabilities of the JSDF have not met the ambitions of defense hawks.

The will to normalize, if it does exist in Japan, does not necessarily mean there is a way. The JSDF is significantly constrained by demographics and capacity. This chapter investigates the demographic social-structural hardware constraint

and argues that even if the government of Japan (GOJ) can overcome the high political, normative, and budgetary hurdles, the JSDF's power projection capabilities will still be limited by force size and defense infrastructure. The JSDF's weak recruitment is most directly tied to the aging and declining population, but normative forces, such as the public's aversion to joining the military and legal prohibition of conscription, further exacerbate the consequences of poor demography. As a result, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) regularly makes compromises to its security policy, and the JSDF chronically operates under suboptimal conditions.

The chapter is organized as follows: First, it outlines the current responsibilities of the JSDF. Second, the chapter compares East Asian military force sizes. The size and youth of the JSDF have an outsized impact on Japan's ability to counter international threats, project power, and respond to natural disasters. Third, the chapter discusses the impact of the aging and declining population on the JSDF. This section also analyzes the MOD's efforts to increase recruitment and the GOJ's efforts to address the demographic crises. The GOJ's use of female images and bodies reveal deep-seated cultural issues that obstruct the radical transformation necessary for unlocking Japan's latent power. This chapter concludes with an examination of how normative forces exacerbate the demographics problem. The content and direction of Japanese security policy is heavily shaped by social-structural constraints that affect the JSDF at the tactical and operational levels. The human resource problem is path dependent and reinforced by normative, cultural, political, and economic factors, all of which form the environment in which security and militarism are understood.

CONTEXTUALIZING PEOPLE AND POWER IN EAST ASIA

Military power can be measured in numerous ways, such as defense spending, infrastructure, defense industrial base, and RDT&E (research, development, test, and evaluation) institutions.[5] Nevertheless, a military is only as strong as the individuals that comprise it. In warfare, it is preferable to have a preponderance of power than to have just enough, and absolutely preferable to have enough power to not enough. The importance of force size is particularly evident when discussing power projection, which implies force strength beyond defense.[6] The effectiveness of technology on the battlefield is heavily influenced by how

it is implemented and operated by the combatants. With all else being equal, a state would want the largest military possible because it would provide more raw power and flexibility on the battlefield; more operations can be conducted simultaneously, and fewer compromises need to be made. Boots on the ground are essential for holding onto occupied territories, protecting assets, and limiting enemy combatants' mobility. Simply put, human resources matter.

The relationship between demographics and security has long been a topic of interest across disciplines. Economist Thomas Robert Malthus and ecologist Garrett Hardin warned of the dangers of overpopulation and poor resource management for global stability.[7] Political scientists directed their attention toward how demographics relate to conflict. Mark Haas, for example, argues that an aging population can lead to increased stability in the international system over time because the costs of conducting war become prohibitively expensive for aging societies.[8] Others have called attention to a quiet revolution where population decline among nations disrupts the balance of power and stability in the current world order.[9] Population distribution is also consequential, especially when an excess of unmarried, single, and young men coupled with a deficit of opportunities often lead to domestic and international instability.[10] The literature makes clear, however, that demographics alone do not determine the level of state volatility. Political and socioeconomic conditions can mitigate, or exacerbate, the consequences of aging and declining populations. Japan is no exception to these trends, as its demographics have played a defining role in its security trajectory over the last century.

From the Meiji period to the end of World War II, the Empire of Japan was not only built on impressive technological advancements but also on a large and growing population, government policies promoting Japanese emigration to colonized territories throughout Asia, and effective mobilization of the public for warfare. From 1920 to 1945, the population of Japan grew from 55,963,053 to 71,998,104 at a rate of 5.6 percent to 7.9 percent annually.[11] The population was predominantly young, with over half of the population under the age of thirty and approximately 6 percent over the age of sixty-five.[12] Millions—many young and impoverished—left Japan to work the lands across the empire and beyond. Japan's power projection was synonymous with the occupation, and expansion, of colonial territories in order to protect the Japanese mainland. This expansion ultimately stretched Japan too thin, and the government was forced to

make sacrifices concerning which territories it could protect. In World War II, the United States exploited Japan's human resource limitations by utilizing a strategy of island hopping, or leapfrogging, to avoid pockets of Japanese military power. Although Japan possessed the largest battleships in World War II, technological strengths and almost fanatical willpower could not mitigate the lack of boots on the ground. The size of the Japanese population was not large enough to hold onto the empire but was sufficient for convincing American policymakers that an invasion of the mainland would be incredibly costly. The war was ended by the first and only use of nuclear weapons on a civilian population.

In the postwar period, Japan became an economic powerhouse that possessed significant latent power. However, this economic power was never converted to aggressive militaristic policies due to strategic, legal, and normative reasons. Moreover, unlike the prewar period, Japan was a thriving democracy fully embedded in the international system. Japan had little reason to remilitarize, even if it could. Over the last decade, Japan's latent power has diminished as the population aged and declined. According to one government official, "It is inconceivable that Japan is taking an expansive and aggressive foreign military policy. A declining birthrate encourages the tendency to preserve the status quo. Our mindset of national security is overly defensive. Very defensive. We just want to preserve our current territory."[13]

The Great and Growing Responsibilities of the JSDF

The JSDF possesses diverse responsibilities, and its effectiveness requires a large standing force. But with major changes in the regional balance of power, the emergence of new threats, a weakening domestic economy, and unbalanced demographics, the JSDF has to do more with less. The Japanese archipelago is comprised of 6,852 islands spanning 378,000 square kilometers. The JSDF and Japan Coast Guard (JCG) are responsible for protecting 29,751 kilometers of coastline and patrolling 4,470,000 square kilometers of territorial and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters, which is roughly twelve times the size of Japan's land area. As an island nation, Japan enjoys natural defense advantages but also endures several vulnerabilities. During war, blockades can sever Japan's access to vital resources and trade, which is especially problematic because it is resource poor. Japan's unique geography make defense officials particularly concerned

with Chinese antiaccess and area denial strategies that could limit the effectiveness of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

The JSDF deploys the majority of its forces to protect the main islands, strategic islets, airspace, and surrounding waters. Over the past few decades, North Korean abductions, illegal fishing in Japanese territorial waters, and Chinese and Russian intrusions into Japanese airspace have made it clear that the JSDF's capacity and capabilities are increasingly stressed. Pressure on the JSDF has become more glaring as China's strength and boldness grows. Since 2006, Japan Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) scrambles against Chinese aircraft increased year-over-year, peaking at 851 in 2016. Chinese incursions decreased to five hundred in 2017 but scrambles against Russian aircraft increased by 89 times compared to the previous year. The reprieve was short-lived, as total scrambles increased to 999 against foreign military aircraft in 2018, the second highest on record since Japan implemented the measures against airspace violations in 1958.[14] In November 2013, the Chinese government unilaterally declared the "East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone," which includes airspace over the disputed Senkaku Islands. Since Japan "nationalized" the Senkaku Islands in September 2012, Chinese vessels have intruded into Japanese territorial waters over one hundred times.[15] Japan is locked in territorial disputes with countries to its north, east, and south, forcing the JSDF to be vigilant across diverse territories and against formidable militaries.

The area in which the JSDF operates has increased with its growing global responsibilities. Prominent conservative politicians have sought to increase Japan's security roles abroad, including playing a greater role in the U.S.-Japan alliance, adopting collective defense, and addressing new threats such as terrorism and piracy. For example, since the end of the first Gulf War, Japan has dispatched over twelve thousand personnel on twenty-seven missions, including fourteen UN PKO missions.[16] Under Prime Minister Abe's proactive contribution to peace doctrine, the JSDF will likely continue to increase its activities abroad in noncombat but labor-intensive operations.

The JSDF also has nontraditional security responsibilities at home that require significant human resources. Authorized by General Douglas MacArthur, the JSDF originated as a National Police Reserve (NPR) on September 8, 1950 and has slowly adopted additional security roles over time. The SDF law was adopted in 1954 and has been amended 163 times (as of December 2020)[17] to meet

the changing and growing needs of the JSDF. Beginning in the 1990s, the JSDF was most often deployed to conduct disaster relief operations, which was not the original intent of the Japanese or American governments.[18] The GOJ has been particularly willing to mobilize the JSDF for disaster relief and public works projects because it has found these activities effective in improving the image of the JSDF and maintaining positive relations with communities most impacted by bases and military exercises.[19] Between 1951 and 2011, the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), and its predecessors the NPR and the National Safety Force, were deployed to disasters approximately twenty thousand times and dispatched approximately fourteen million personnel.[20] Perhaps the most notable operation was the deployment of more than one hundred thousand JSDF personnel to the Tōhoku region of Japan following the great Tōhoku earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, which was its biggest disaster relief effort in Japanese history.[21] In 2014, JSDF personnel were deployed to Hiroshima after devastating mudslides and to Mount Ontake after a volcanic eruption. Thousands of JSDF personnel were again dispatched to the southwestern region of Japan in 2018 after another major flood. Due to the increased frequency and magnitude of environmental disasters caused by climate change, it is likely that these nontraditional security operations will comprise the majority of JSDF missions going forward.

The JSDF's admirable work in disaster relief serves as a reminder of just how active the forces have been in nontraditional security activities in the last twenty years (discussed in chapter 6). Consequently, according to one senior MOD official, the entire "security apparatus" has grown and both the "civilian component and uniform services" will require "greater policy oversight."[22]

Numerically, the JSDF is rather large. With 247,150 authorized personnel (150,850 GSDF, 45,350 Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), 49,950 ASDF), the JSDF ranks eighteenth in the world in force size.[23] In terms of overall force size (including regular and nonregular military), the JSDF drops to thirty-third in the world.

Japan's forces are much smaller than its regional rivals (see figure 3.1). China possesses the world's largest standing military with 2.03 million active personnel. Japan's forces are smaller than those of North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and Taiwan, and the second lowest ratio of military personnel (including reserve and paramilitary) to civilians in East Asia, with 2.49 JSDF members per 1,000.[24] China

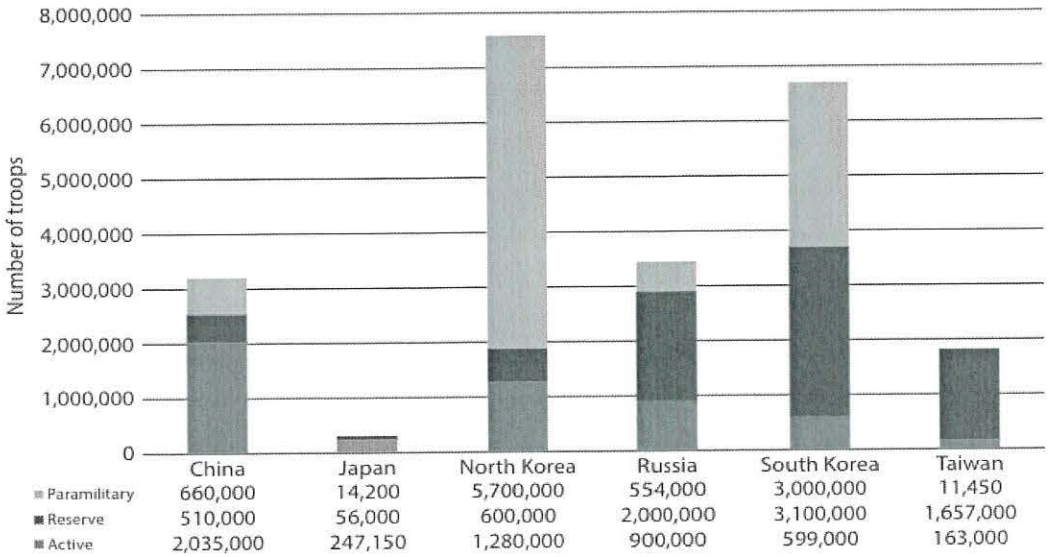

FIGURE 3.1 (Authorized) Armed forces size in East Asia.

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (London: Routledge, 2020).

ranks lower with a 2.27:1,000 ratio due to its large population (1.39 billion). North Korea (297.6:1,000), Russia (23.98:1,000), South Korea (131.9:1,000), and Taiwan (79.71:1,000) possess much higher ratios due to conscription.

Japan's reserve forces are also meager. China (0.51 million), North Korea (0.6 million), South Korea (3.1 million), Taiwan (1.65 million), and Russia (2 million) maintain reserve forces larger than the entire JSDF. These figures indicate that states routinely possess significant latent power because the majority of their forces are on reserve. On the other hand, Japan only possesses 56,000 reserve forces and 13,740 paramilitary (forces that train approximately five days a year). Unlike its regional rivals, Japan is fully utilizing its human resources; there is no untapped potential. For Japanese power projection, what you see is what you get.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CRISES AND FAILED REFORM

The MOD's difficulty with addressing the force size problem reflects a convergence of demographic, normative, economic, and cultural forces. The public aversion to joining the JSDF ebbs and flows with the strength of peace movements,

the effectiveness of government recruiting efforts, the perception of regional threats, and sensitivity to occupational hazards. However, population decline and the aging of society are constant constraining forces that are difficult to overcome because of economic and cultural realities that have developed over decades. Moreover, ideational forces, such as gender norms, impact the content and direction of government policies that address the demographic crises and their impact on the JSDF. The GOJ has pursued two interrelated objectives: (1) institute measures to increase the fertility rate, and therefore the supply of potential recruits; and (2) promote the JSDF as an admirable and nonmilitaristic entity to gain popular support and increase enlistment.[25]

According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS), based on medium fertility rate projections, Japan is entering into a long period of population decline (see figure 3.2). The population is expected to decrease to approximately 119.1 million by 2030, to 101.9 million in 2050, and to 88.1 million by 2065. The projections for 2060 vary widely—from

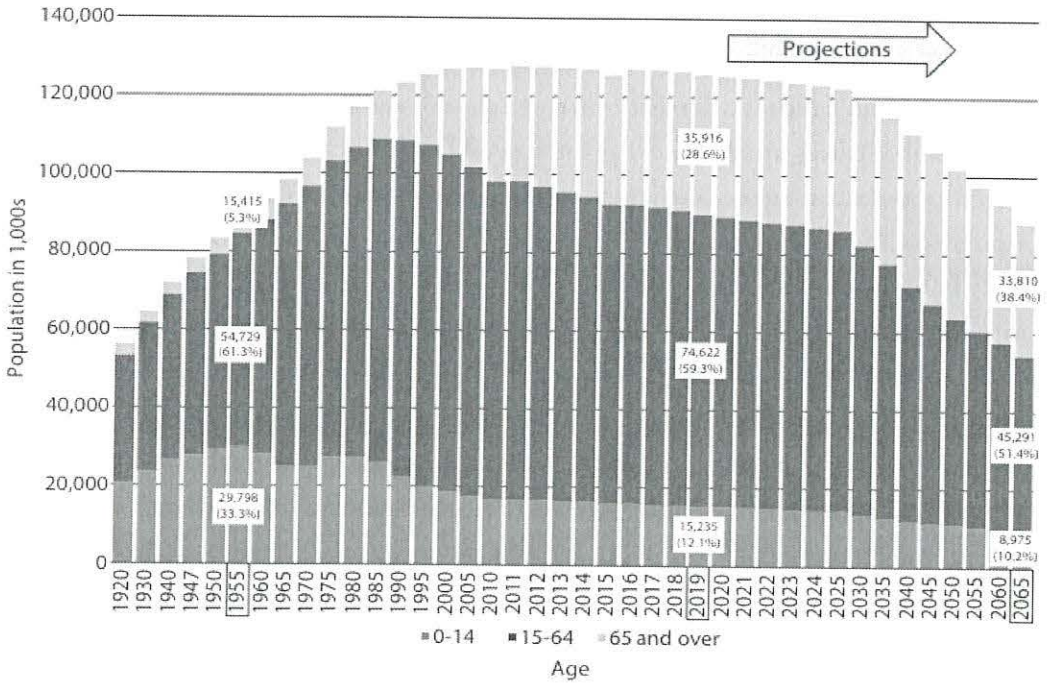

FIGURE 3.2 Population projections of Japan, 1920–2065.

Source: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, "Social Security in Japan 2014," accessed November 30, 2020, http://www.ipss.go.jp; and Statistics Bureau of Japan, "Search Statistics Surveys and Data," accessed November 30, 2020, https://www.stat.go.jp/data/jinsui/new.html.

82.1 million to 94.9 million; the more pessimistic scenario would result in a 35 percent decrease in population since 2010.

Japan has long been under the population replenishment rate threshold due to its anemic fertility rate, which fell below 2.1 in 1974, where births slightly outnumbered deaths. Though the precipitous drop was momentarily halted in 2005, and the replenishment rate slightly rebounded to 1.41 in 2012, the cause is unclear, and few officials believe the rate will increase to a level necessary for sustaining population equilibrium. The 981,000 births in 2016 marked the first time the figure fell below one million since such data was first compiled in 1899. This figure amounted to less than half the annual births of 1973, when signs of population decline began to emerge. In 2016, 1,296,000 deaths were recorded—the highest number since the end of World War II—a startling figure given that the Japanese enjoy the longest average life expectancy in the world. The full impact of the declining population will be even more apparent in a few decades when today's children become adults. The under-fifteen population has decreased from 27 million in the early 1980s to 15.1 million in 2020. The IPSS projects that the population of young Japanese will be only 8.9 million by 2065, which is one-fourth the size of Japanese over retirement age. Even the most bullish government estimates predict a fertility rate of 1.8, still short of replacement level. The demographic crises are uniquely pronounced because Japan never enjoyed a prolonged population surge like most industrialized states. The average age of the population increased by twenty years between 1947 and 1970, but the *dankai no sedai* (baby boom generation) lasted only four years due to the Eugenic Protection Act passed in 1948 that made abortion legal, among other factors.[26] As a result, Japan's birthrate dropped 40 percent. The GOJ is thus seeking to reverse a trend that has been developing for the majority of the postwar period. One can look toward the struggles of China, where even the most authoritarian social engineering measures have not reversed the consequences of the one-child policy.

The low fertility rate is not purely a numbers game. Strongly embedded cultural practices in both public and private spheres, such as declining marriage rates, a corporate culture not conducive to a healthy work-life balance, and a stubborn aversion to immigration, mitigate the effectiveness of government policies. Although bureaucrats predicted the decline in fertility rate early on, it was not until the 1.57 shock of 1989 that a sense of urgency about stemming the oncoming crisis emerged.[27] This precipitous drop has been attributed to a greater

proportion of never-married women in their twenties and early thirties and a decline in marital fertility rates. Following a boom in the 1970s, which saw ten marriages per thousand, marriage rates have halved to 4.8 per thousand in 2019 (598,965 couples). According to the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, the mean age of women on first marriage was 29.6 in 2019, up 3.7 years from 1990. Moreover, the mean age of women on the birth of the first child was 30.7, up 3.7 years over the same twenty-eight-year period.[28] The reasons for later marriages vary. Some individuals simply prefer to remain single and avoid marrying unsuitable partners.[29] Others would like to get married but only once they are financially stable, a status increasingly delayed in Japan's stagnant economy. Later marriages decrease the chances of having multiple children because the window of opportunity for childbirth is smaller. Of course, women can have children outside of marriage, but societal stigma in Japan makes it an uncommon occurrence, with only 3 percent of children born out of wedlock. There are many reasons why some women choose not to have children, including financial concerns, career aspirations, and personal preference.

In response to the low fertility rate, government leaders and bureaucrats (mostly middle-aged men) scrambled to institute policies to incentivize women to have more children. In 1994, the government adopted the Angel Plan, which created additional childcare spaces with extended hours, and it established consultation centers to support new mothers.[30] Since the initial Angel Plan, various new programs have been implemented, such as modest subsidies for childbirth and childrearing, couples counseling, and measures to assist female labor force participation after childbirth. However, these policies have been misguided and ineffectual.

First and foremost, coaxing women with monetary incentives to have more children to support the economy, and ultimately Japan's security, is really not within the purview of government—particularly when it is predominately men who design these family planning programs. Concerning the relationship between the birth rate and national security, one government official concludes, "The population question is a matter of personal freedom. You do not have to have babies if you do not want to. If you want babies, you can do it and the government will support it. But to argue that we have to increase the birthrate because of our national security, it is a very difficult thing to put in the right context."[31] Finding the right context is exceedingly difficult when women are not at the forefront of the policymaking process. In 2018, women made up less than 15 percent of policymakers in the Diet, and when they speak on the demographic crises, they are occasionally

met with sexist derision.[32] During Abe's last year in office, only two members of his cabinet were women. The current Suga Yoshihide government has only one woman serving in the cabinet. Treating the low fertility rate as a state problem and not as a problem of inequality results in a disconnect between policy objectives and women's rights. Policies designed to improve the position of women in society have insufficiently addressed fundamental weaknesses in a patriarchal system. Despite all the discussion of work-life balance, there have not been significant improvements to family care infrastructure, mainly regarding childcare and senior nursing, where women take up a disproportionate amount of responsibility. Yashiro Naohiro, an economist and councilor for the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy during the Abe and Fukuda Yasuo administrations, argues that Japan's protected welfare system has made it difficult for the government to make industries both cost-effective and attractive to new workers.[33]

Second, changes to the work, welfare, and family-planning cultures require a degree of social engineering far beyond the capabilities of the government. In 2002, the Plus One Plan was introduced to alleviate some of the household work burdens on women. It called on employers to offer parental leave immediately after a child is born. The objective was for fathers to bond with their newborns and to establish a commitment to raising the child over the succeeding months and years. The policy was adopted, but few firms promoted the "daddy week," and only about 10 percent of fathers participated in the program.[34] The reluctance of fathers to utilize the plan and to do more housework reveals how deeply embedded gender roles are in Japanese society. As Sasaki Kaori, businessperson and CEO of ewoman, Inc., puts bluntly, "changing the law can only do so much; our value system has to change, too. When we rebuilt the economy after the war, our society forged a powerful 'boys network,' with a common set of goals and values."[35] Indeed, much of Japan's economic woes can be attributed to a rigid work culture that developed during the economic boom. Men are expected to be *sararīman* (salaried workers), or the breadwinners, and they take for granted that women are responsible for the unpaid household and care work—regardless of their commitments to the public workforce. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance remains difficult, where 70 percent of working women quit their jobs either at marriage or at their first birth.[36] For women who remain in the public workforce, they are essentially doing double the work if men are not doing their fair share at home. Without changing these expectations, there is a "market failure" where the "asymmetry in the consequences of marriage by gender has brought about a trade-off

for women between work and marriage."[37] When women are forced to quit their jobs at marriage or at childbirth, a vicious cycle forms where companies are reluctant to employ or promote women out of fear that they will take parental leave. Without equal opportunities—Japan has the third highest gender pay gap among OECD countries—women are more likely to give up their jobs than their partners. This vicious cycle is completed, according to Yashiro, "when a company hires a man, they are also hiring the spouse in the sense that she must remain at home and take care of all house duties so that her husband can work long hours at the office, sometimes living separated from the family.[38] Yashiro concludes it would be culturally difficult for Japan to change its economic structure because of "fixed social roles for men and women, both at work and at home."[39]

Immigration and What It Means to Be Japanese

A potential solution to the population crisis is immigration. According to a survey of over 42,300 employers in forty-three countries, Japanese firms reported the highest difficulty in filling jobs, at 86 percent.[40] The world offers a ready supply of young workers who can contribute to the economy and possibly join the JSDF, although the latter is unlikely given the citizenship requirements of the JSDF and Japan's strict citizenship laws. Japan's restrictive policies have led political scientist Michael Strausz to conclude, "Japan is unusual as an advanced industrialized country in that it hosts comparatively few labor migrants, virtually no refugees, and relatively small number of foreign residents who migrated for other reasons."[41] The scale of the GOJ's policies have not matched the demands of the private sector nor the long-term economic and security needs of the nation.

In 2019, 2,933,137 registered foreign nationals resided in Japan, or 2.3 percent of the total population.[42] In the past five years, the GOJ has instituted policies to increase so-called high-skilled and middle-skilled labor to increase the competitiveness of the Japanese economy and to fulfill needs in the care and service industries. It should be noted, however, that these policies seek to import labor, not people, because long-term residency and citizenship are still difficult to obtain for migrants. For example, the Japanese language exam failure rate of immigrants in the critical area of nursing was so high that the GOJ was forced to ease the requirements and provide test takers with additional time.[43] Recent graduates face similar difficulties securing employment. In 2007, only 11,000 of

130,000 foreign students studying in Japan found jobs.[44] Ten years later, a record 25,900 out of 298,980 foreign students landed a job.[45] Although Japan has been successful attracting more international students—experiencing approximately 10 percent annual growth between 2013 and 2018—employment figures have not kept pace. The percentage of students securing a job only increased by one-fifth of a percent over the last decade. Liberal immigration policies would likely face significant opposition, especially from more conservative rural prefectures. In five surveys conducted of Diet members between 2009 and 2016, not once did support for increasing foreign labor rise above 40 percent.[46] More importantly, support for increasing labor has been extremely volatile among LDP Diet members,[47] demonstrating a lack of long-term and sustained support necessary for the transformative immigration policy reform required for meeting Japan's diverse needs. More conservative parties, such as Jiseidai no Tō (Party for Future Generations), have been more discriminatory. It proposed a bill in 2014 that aimed to exclude non-Japanese residents, many born in Japan or had lived there for most of their lives, from receiving welfare benefits. The unpopular far-right party rebranded as Nippon no Kokoro (Party for Japanese Kokoro, or Heart of Japan) in 2015, and eventually dissolved in 2018, however some of its members found a home with the LDP. Moreover, although it was considered a fringe party, prominent politicians such as Osaka mayor Hashimoto Tōru and Tokyo mayor Ishihara Shintarō were members.

Japan has a history of making life difficult for individuals who do not fit preconceived notions of "Japanese." In the 1980s and 1990s, the GOJ instituted programs that repatriated Brazilian-Japanese to fulfill labor shortages in the manufacturing sector. The effort was a spectacular failure. Language barriers and discrimination made it difficult for Brazilian-Japanese to integrate smoothly into mainstream Japanese society. Some Japanese held prejudices and believed the immigrants were lazy and troublesome.[48] One can find similar right-wing propaganda against immigrant workers in Japan today, where they inflate crime rates of migrants from Southeast Asia. When the economy slowed, the Japanese government sought ways to send the immigrants back to Brazil, even offering large sums for them to pack up and leave.[49] This episode left many Japanese wary of immigrants because if *Japanese* could not assimilate, how could non-Japanese? This narrow framing on what it means to be Japanese reveals deep-seated biases that result in policies that seek to gain everything from immigrants *but* the person themselves.

It is unlikely that Japan can adopt immigration on the scale necessary to mitigate the population crisis. According to the former director of the Tokyo Immigration Bureau, Sakanaka Hidenori, Japan can pursue two policy options; a small option that restricts immigration and pursues a "compact society," or a big option that welcomes immigration and a restructuring of Japanese society to its core.[50] The big option would require 20 million immigrants over fifty years, or 400,000 a year, which according to Sakanaka, would be difficult for Japan to take in such a large number so suddenly. This figure would be more than four times the current rate of migration, which would lead to migrants comprising 20 percent of the total population by 2030.[51] Such an approach would require Japan to "transform itself into a land of opportunity, building an open, fair society which guaranteed equal opportunity, judged people on their merits, and allowed everyone to improve their social status regardless of origin or ethnicity."[52] For many, this transformation may be prohibitively expensive. To assimilate immigrants—which by no means is the only or optimal model of immigration—the GOJ would need to provide language training, social welfare benefits, and assimilation programming not just for immigrants but for native Japanese as well.

Age Is Just a Number, Until It Is Not

Given these difficulties addressing the shrinking population, the GOJ has settled on managing a graceful decline over meaningful growth. Optimists argue that population decline is manageable because even the most conservative projections would leave Japan with more people than it had in the 1960s when the economy was doing well. However, Yashiro reminds us that Japan's "economy and society implicitly depend on increasing the size of the population, particularly the working age population."[53] Although the current population size would be the same as in the 1960s, it would be significantly older and decreasing in size.

The aging population poses the most immediate obstacle to the GOJ's efforts to bolster the economy and to increase the JSDF's force power. Demographers consider a society aging when 7 percent of the population is older than sixty-five, and aged when 14 percent of the population is older than sixty-five.[54] Japan has the dubious distinction of being the world's first hyper-aged society, where 20 percent of the population is of retirement age. Figure 3.3 illustrates Japan's increasingly constrictive population pyramid. A desirable expansive population

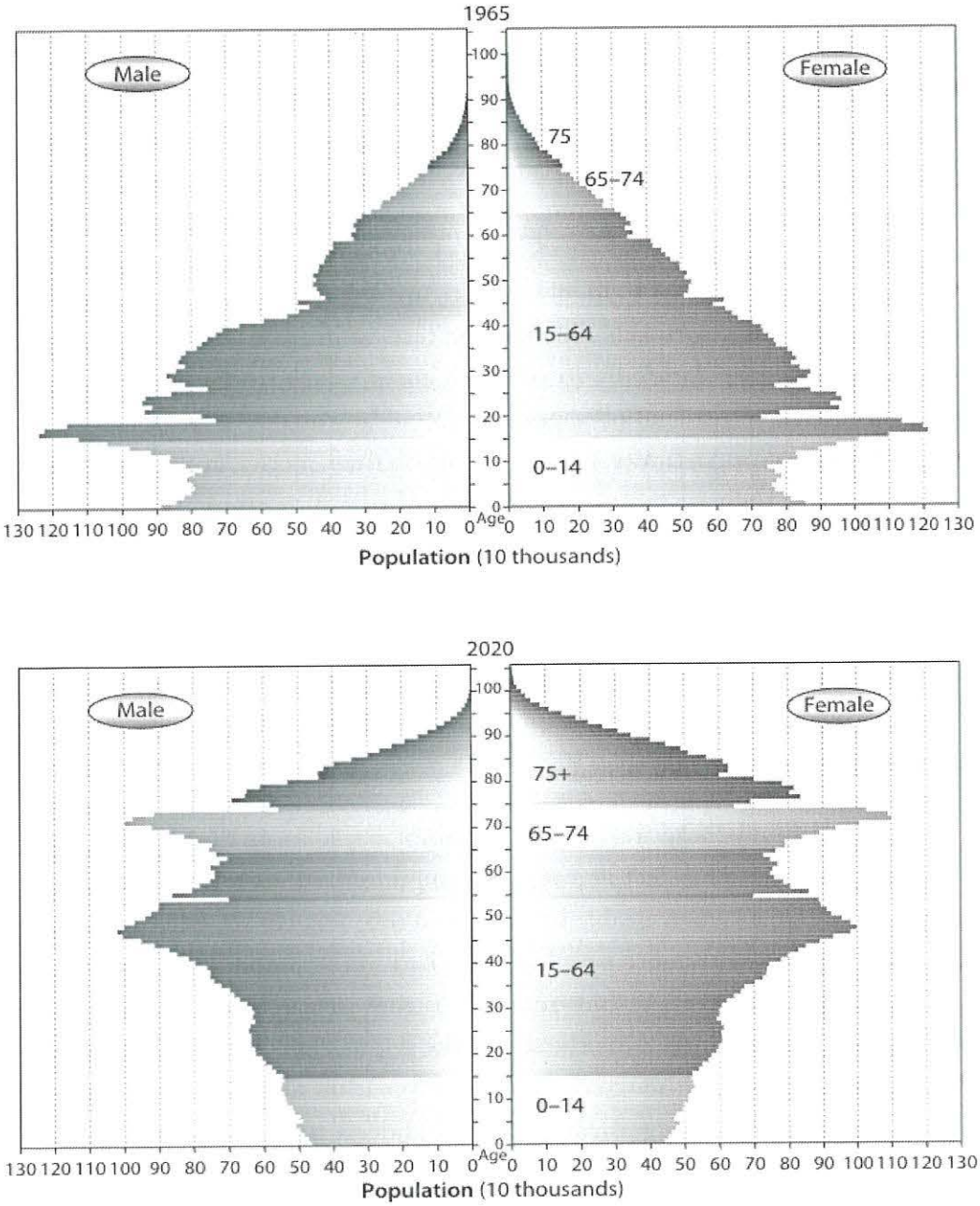

FIGURE 3.3 Population projections of Japan, 1965; 2020; 2030; 2065.

Source: Census (1965–2015) and National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, "Population Projection for Japan: 2016–2065" (Medium-fertility [medium-mortality] projection), 2017, http://www.ipss.go.jp/index-e.asp.