

CHANGING CONSUMPTIN PATTERNS IN JAPAN

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Summary

This article examines Japanese mass consumption and possibilities of changing life styles. First, the article discusses the state of the art of consumption: shopping, background system of environment-related consumer policies, and carbon dioxide emitted by people's everyday life style. Second, it describes Japanese industry's attitudes and strategies towards environmental issues. Some sectors of manufacturing are very much aware of global environmental issues, but other sectors, especially service sectors, are not. Third, consumer attitudes for industries are discussed. Compared to Germany, people are less likely to trust in industry in Japan; this is because of the history of pollution caused by certain big companies.

1. Introduction

A senior researcher in a Japanese big chemical company once said: "We changed

people's lifestyles. When I was a child, we bought candies and other stuffs at a small candy store that was usually located at the town corner. When we bought candies, an old lady wrapped them and other small cakes in a small paper bag. But, after we invented vinyl film for food wrapping, this makes supermarkets enable to sell candies and small stuffs clean and safe. Now there are almost no small candy stores in a town. People buy food at the supermarkets". This is true. Nowadays, wrapping and packaging are one of the main issues in waste problems in Japan. Most materials for wrapping and packaging are vinyl or other similar films. The Japanese government enacted the "Wrapping and Packaging Recycling Act" in April 2000.

Thus, when we are talking about consumption, we often talk about recycling or domestic waste issues as well. Consumption and waste issues are thus closely connected with each other, but people are not aware that increasing consumption means increasing energy demands, and this means consumption affects climate patterns for the whole Earth (see *Environmentally Sound Management of Solid Wastes and Sewage-Related Issues*)

2. Objectives of this article

This article examines the possibility of changing people's consumption patterns in Japan. It discusses: 1) analysis of household carbon dioxide emissions from the family expenditure survey data by the Statistical Office of Japan, in order to give a holistic view of consumption, especially at home, 2) the results of a survey of industries in order to explore the changing production patterns, and 3) the results of a consumer survey by the National Institute for Environmental Studies, to investigate the motivation of people's changing behavior.

Japanese consumption patterns should be considered along with technological development and its diffusion. Industrial strategies always try to change people's lifestyle; this has happened everywhere on Earth, and most successfully in Japan. So, this article focuses on both consumers and industry. Looking at industry's recent environmental countermeasures, however, industries seem to be irritated by consumers, when they do not respond to their production of 'environmentally friendly products.' This article does not attempt to investigate the consumers' lack of reaction to industry's environmental countermeasures (see *Education, Public Awareness, and Training in Japan* and *Meeting Energy Needs in Japan*).

3. Background

3.1. Industry's environmental countermeasures

Pollution prevention has long been the center of Japanese environmental policy. This is solely because of the Japanese tragic pollution diseases—Minamata disease, Niigata Minamata disease, Itai-Itai disease and Yokkaich asthma. These pollution-related health issues had begun with the history of Japanese industry, especially mining, refining, chemical engineering and other heavy industries. From that time on, Japanese industry imposed pollution abatement efforts in every aspect of their action, and the government regulated them. Because of those strong relationships, Japanese industry survived two 'oil-shocks' in the early 1970s. They greatly reduced energy and other costs; the

automobile companies produced surprisingly efficient cars, and home appliance companies cut their products’ running cost by two thirds.

When global environmental issues arose and became prominent from the late 1980s, Japanese industry’s reaction was prompt. Keidanren (Japan Federation of Economic Organizations) sent a group to the Rio Summit to see how the Climate Treaty was discussed, and later they sent delegations to the ISO14000 series Technical Committees and other related meetings. So Japanese industry gathered information about global environmental issues literally “globally”, and adopted them. In the late 1990s, the Japanese Parliament passed several environment-related laws, including those on wrapping and recycling, green procurement, PRTR (Pollutant Release and Transfer Register), the basic law for promoting recycling in society, laws on waste from food recycling, waste from construction recycling and recycling of home appliances (e.g. refrigerators, televisions, washing machines, air conditioners, and personal computers). Recycling-related laws call on industry to “extended producer responsibility”, such as by collecting used products and treating them, and reporting their toxic release status.

Some Japanese industries also adopt voluntary environmental management system, such as ISO14001 certification and eco-labeling (Eco-Mark), and by establishing and joining the Green Procurement Network. ”

The eco-labeling system was designed to assist consumers’ decision- making on what to purchase from an environmental point of view. By 2001, 4849 items had been certified as eco-mark labeled items (see Figure 1). The number of eco-labeled items arose dramatically from its start in 1989. It doubled every year in the first three years. But still the recognition is low. According to our 1995 survey, 42.4% of respondents answered ‘I have never paid attention to the eco-mark’, and 25% answered ‘I have never seen such a mark.’

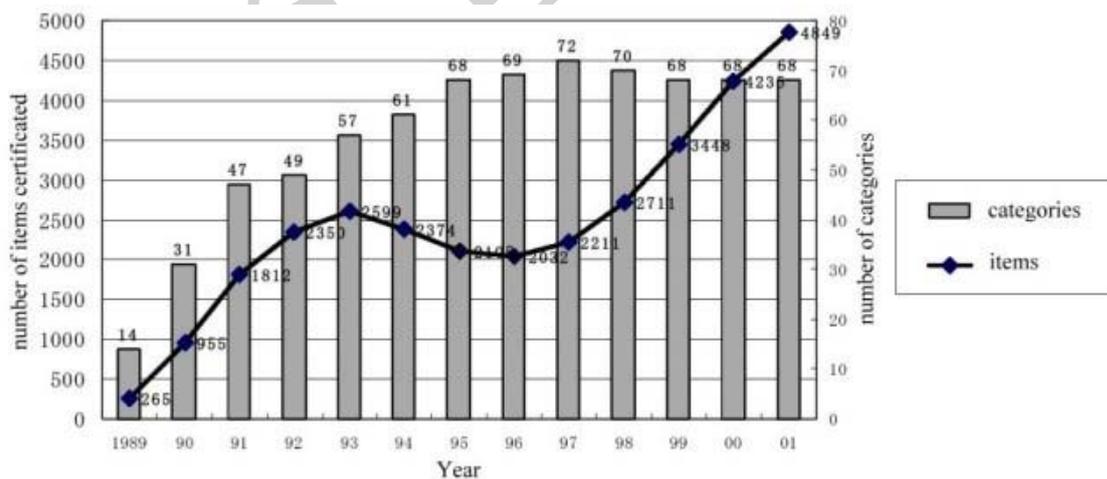


Figure 1. The eco-mark system in Japan

Another system is the Purchasing Network for Green Procurement. Governments and companies are also consumers as they purchase their everyday items. This system is for diffusing ‘green procurement,’ which aims at organizations such as government and

companies to encourage them to purchase environmentally friendly goods.

The Ministry of the Environment presented their “Environmental Housekeeping Book” in 1997 (see Figure 2). This has “a conversion table” from electricity, kerosene, or other energy consumption to carbon dioxide emission, and also “tips” for environmentally friendly life styles. Many local governments now also encourage households to maintain an ‘Environmental Housekeeping Book.’



Figure 2. Environmentally friendly life style “Tips” in the environmental housekeeping book

This system enables people in households to be aware of everyday carbon dioxide emission from their household, the amount of waste produced from the kitchen, and quantities of bottles, papers and cans to be recycled. The Japanese Consumers Co-operative Union and Hiroshima Health and Welfare Association are the largest organization to monitor and collect data on environmental housekeeping. Their practices have a similar perspective to the GAP (Global Action Plan) system in Europe (see also *Technology Transfer and Agreements: Climate Change Convention*).

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Biographical Sketch

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