

RC06-VSA International Conference (2019-10-18 HaNoi)  
“The Family in Modern and Global Societies: Persistence and Change”

# Political Vocabularies and Localized Discourses on Demographic Transition

The emergence of the “syousika” problem in 1980s Japan

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# Local discourse

on low fertility by

- government
- mass-media
- academics

with what **vocabulary**?

**syou**

少

**small  
number**

**si**

子

**child**

**ka**

化

**change**

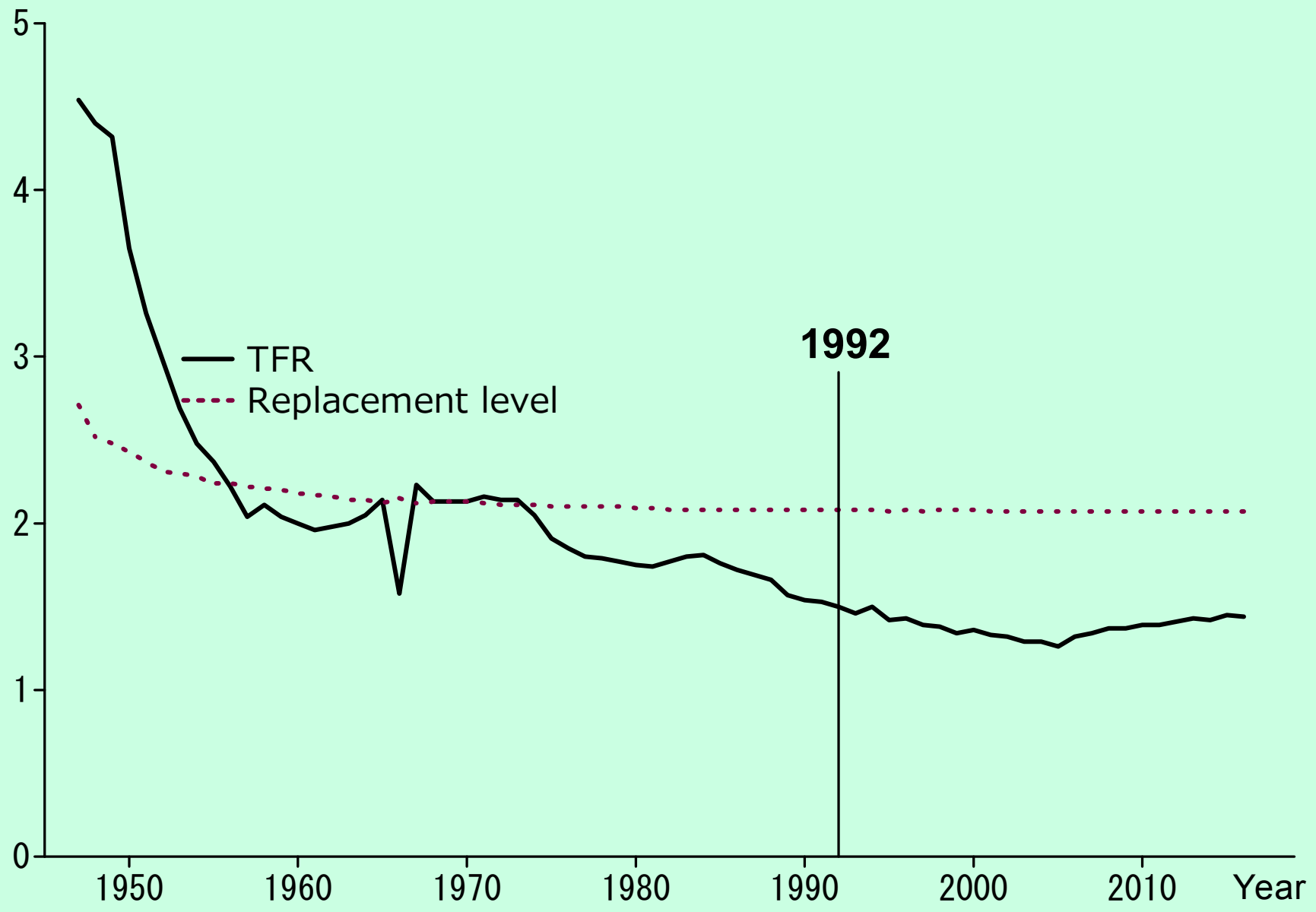
# When emerged?

1992 *White paper on the national lifestyle* by Economic Planning Agency

- Decrease in number of children / youths
- Decrease in TFR



経済企画庁 (1992) 国民生活白書 (平成4年版)  
ISBN:4171904676



# Earlier examples

## 3 newspaper articles (*Asahi Sinbun* 1988-90)

- On the 1<sup>st</sup> demographic transition
- Different meaning from today's
- By education scholar / agency

Sakai H (2002) “少子化の社会的影響” 日本人口学会  
『人口大事典』 培風館. ISBN:4563051004 p. 814-819

# Comprehensive search

## Literature -1990

- National Diet Library ([ndlonline.ndl.go.jp](http://ndlonline.ndl.go.jp))
- CiNii ([ci.nii.ac.jp](http://ci.nii.ac.jp))
- Diet record ([kokkai.ndl.go.jp](http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp))
- BCCWJ ([www.kotonoha.gr.jp/shonagon/](http://www.kotonoha.gr.jp/shonagon/))
- Google Scholar ([scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com))
- Google Books ([books.google.com](http://books.google.com))
- Newspapers (*Asahi, Mainichi, Nikkei, Yomiuri*)

# **Texts found (-1990)**

**Diet record: 6**

**White paper: 3**

**Academic paper: 33**

**Book: 6**

**Research report: 2**

**Newspaper: 15**

\* Note that old print publications are often not searchable



# Results overview

Some texts mentioned TFR, but **none mentioned sub-replacement fertility.**

In many cases, “少子化” means **decreasing sibling number,** coupled with prevailing nuclear family.

# Oldest use (Diet 1980-04-08)

**Context:** Bill to establish a corporation to manage Tokyo Olympic legacies

Ministry of Education official answered to a question about youth's situation.

No definition given.

<http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/SENTAKU/sangiin/091/1170/09104081170006.pdf>

# Urban nuclear family vs. rural extended family

Youths are  
too individualistic, materialistic,  
and oriented to private matters...

Due to social changes such as  
urbanization, increasing nuclear family,  
and 少子化 ...

<http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/SENTAKU/sangiin/091/1170/09104081170006.pdf>

# 1982 *White paper on youth* by Prime Minister's Office

- In a chapter on youth problems and family
- No definition
- Coupled with nuclear family
- Also mentioned: birthrate, TFR, number of household member

総理府 (1983) 青少年白書 (昭和57年版) 大蔵省印刷局

# 1987 Textbook for sociology of education

- In a chapter on family problems and education
- Defined as decreasing number of children
- After the section on nuclear family
- Also mentioned: TFR, shrinking household

Sinbori M, Kano M (1987) 教育社会学. 玉川大学出版局, p. 183-185  
ISBN:447206961X

# Academic papers

18 of 33 papers are  
on **educational topic** or  
by **education-related researchers**.

Most of them mentions it as a cause of  
**worsening socialization mechanism  
for children**.

# Discussion

“少子化” in 1980s had no connotation of sub-replacement fertility.

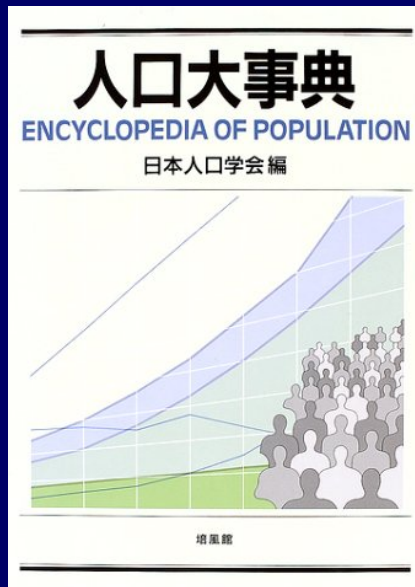
It mainly means

**reduction of family size,**  
with a focus on its **dysfunction for**  
**children's socialization process.**

It was used in context of education.

# After 1990s(1): Authorization by demographers

2002 and 2018 *Encyclopedia* of population  
by the Population Association of Japan



(2002) 人口大事典. 培風館.  
ISBN:4563051004



(2018) 人口学事典. 丸善.  
ISBN:9784621303078



2002 *Encyclopedia* referred “少子化”  
as a non-technical term used by  
government and mass-media.

2018 *Encyclopedia* used it as  
Japanese translation of “**low fertility**”.

# After 1990s (2): Creation of magic word

Today “少子化” also means the decline of the number of children and youth, even if it is not caused by low fertility (e.g., out-migration).

It now serves as a magic word to cover most aspects of population shrinking.