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Paper: Preventive Health Care in Contemporary Japan: Innovative Solutions to the Challenges of an Aging Population

### **Introduction**

Japan has one of the world's largest "silver" populations, with more than twenty percent of its citizens over age 65. Due to persistent low fertility, negligible migration, and mass longevity, the proportion of the elderly continues to grow. Population projections indicate that this percentage will rise to 28% by 2025.<sup>1</sup> Japan also boasts one of the world's highest longevity rates: on average, women live to 86 years and men to 79 years. These high rates are a testament to Japan's great public health achievements as a modern nation-state. At the same time, these rates raise major concerns for the government: the growing number of elderly poses a risk to the nation's social security system and even more to Japan's national health care and Long Term Care Insurance (LTCI) systems.

One of the most intriguing phenomena to develop in the context of the rising elderly population is the growth of communal leisure activities. Various leisure pursuits have become popular among older men and women including sports, language, and the arts. Fifty-five percent of Japanese citizens over age 60 are involved in a communal activity.<sup>2</sup> These leisure pursuits are undertaken in group environments, either in loosely structured hobby circles or in more formal schools of learning. The practices of learning together, getting along with others, and conversing with different people are considered important to maintaining health in old age. While many of these leisure activities also involve training of the body and thus have direct physical benefits, many practitioners articulate their contribution to health in explicitly interpersonal terms.

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<sup>1</sup> International Longevity Center, "Reforms of the Health Care System in Japan: The Aims of the June 2006 Partial Amendments to the Health Insurance Act, From *Japan Now* 2006, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> This represents a 12.5% increase in participation over the past ten years. See Prime Minister's Office, "*Kōrei Shakai Hakusho*" (White Paper on Aging). Tokyo: Government Publishing Bureau, 2007, p. 51.

This paper examines the promotion of healthy longevity through leisure from two perspectives: national policy and two case studies. Furthermore, it illuminates how this demographic phenomenon intersects with gender dynamics. It specifically shows how men participate in mixed-gender leisure communities to re-construct a masculine identity that they lose in retirement. Many consider heterosexual socializing to be extremely important to health in old age. Men make a direct link between this form of sociality and their ability to sustain vitality. This point is of crucial importance for understanding the stakes that individual men bring to bear on their pursuit of leisure in communal circles.

I begin by providing some background on recent reforms instituted by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare. I then explore the emergence of group leisure activities as a form of preventative health care. Next, I provide ethnographic case studies of two men in their 60s who engage in social dancing and foreign language conversation.<sup>3</sup> I conclude by showing the interconnections across shifts in government policy, the emergence of leisure communities, and individual men's pursuit of leisure.

### **Pro-Longevity Policies: Containing the Health Care Costs of an Aging Population**

Typically, population scholars have analyzed governments' attempts to deal with aging populations through *pro-natalist* policies that aim to raise the society's birthrate.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the Japanese case shows that attention must also be paid to the pursuit of what I call "*pro-longevity*" practices, which focus on maximizing the health of citizens in old age. These practices seek to increase the number of years senior citizens are mobile and independent, and reduce the years they require long-term care, thus narrowing the gap between healthy life expectancy and total life expectancy.

Historically, Japan has managed to keep national expenditure on health care at a relatively low level compared to other OECD countries. This is the case in spite of the fact that health care coverage is universal in Japan and guaranteed to all citizens

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<sup>3</sup> The vignettes are drawn from ethnographic interviews the author conducted in Japan in 2004.

<sup>4</sup> For studies of pro-natalist policies in societies dealing with population aging, see Elizabeth Krause, *A Crisis of Births: Population Politics and Family-Making in Italy*, Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2004 and Heather Paxson, *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004.

throughout their lives.<sup>5</sup> Under its Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) program, the government also guarantees care services to frail elderly citizens. The LTCI, which was initially implemented as the Gold Plan, provides a series of care programs, including institutional care, day care, and home helpers. It was created in response to the recognition that families could not shoulder the full burden of care for their elderly members.<sup>6</sup>

Low economic growth over the past ten years, combined with a public debt of 180% of its \$5.5 trillion economy, and a steadily increasing number of people over age 65, has nonetheless created a situation where financing health and long-term care for senior citizens has become a major fiscal challenge. A series of reforms have been introduced to reduce the cost of the Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) program by \$30 billion by 2025.<sup>7</sup>

The revisions of the health and long-term care insurance systems have two key features. First, the elderly must now pay, out of their own pockets, some of the costs of medical care, meals, and accommodation services that had previously been covered by the LTCI.<sup>8</sup> Co-payment rates for health care visits to doctors and hospitals for patients aged 70 to 74 have also been doubled, from 10% to 20%. The reforms increasingly transfer the cost of medical and long-term care to citizens and place the onus on citizens to proactively monitor the incidence of disease and debility that could place them at risk for requiring care in an institutional setting.

Second, the reforms focus on preventive health care programs that include a broad array of health care practices for the elderly, including nutritional and walking programs, calisthenics exercises, and weight training exercises called “power rehabilitation” that improve strength and flexibility. These programs seek to generate citizens’ investments in the “epistemological rules” of healthy longevity, so that they come to see the pursuit of

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<sup>5</sup> The Japanese health care system is funded through a combination of taxes and the national health insurance system.

<sup>6</sup> John Creighton Campbell, “Population Aging: Hardly Japan’s Biggest Problem,” In *The Demographic Dilemma: Japan’s Aging Society*, Asia Center Special Report, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 2003, p.11.

<sup>7</sup> International Longevity Center, op cit., 2006: 2.

<sup>8</sup> For example, until 2006, the cost of meals in a long-term care institution for an elderly patient was 24,000 yen (approximately \$240). Since 2006, the cost has increased by 75% to 42,000 yen (\$420). International Longevity Center, op cit., p. 3.

health in later life as conducive to enhancing their own wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> Advocates of these dietary and nutritional changes claim that by adopting these practices, the elderly are not only likely to increase their healthy longevity but reduce the number of years they require long-term care, and thus indirectly address the fiscal problems that derive from a society where the support ratio between old and young continues to fall.

Prevention also takes the form of mandatory health checks. As of April 2008, all citizens between ages 40 and 74 are required to undergo annual health exams. Middle-aged citizens are seen as a matrix of risk factors that must be monitored in order to prevent the development of full-blown illness. This comprehensive health screening includes measurements of patients' waistlines as well as their blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and Body Mass Index. The purpose is to detect lifestyle diseases at an early stage, identify groups that are at high risk for conditions such as metabolic syndrome, and provide them with guidance on nutrition, exercise and lifestyle-related diseases.<sup>10</sup> By 2012, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare seeks to reduce by 10% the number of people in the high-risk categories and in doing so reduce the cost that poor health will place on national economic productivity.

### **Forging Ties in Groups of Leisurely Socializing**

A key phenomenon that has emerged in the context of population aging is the rise in importance of communal leisure activities. No longer simply a form of relaxation, leisure is now a vehicle for engaging in preventive health and remaining healthy in old age. Some leisure groups are loose-knit communities where senior citizens pursue hobbies together in a relaxed format. Other groups are more structured and take the form of a study group or class where the elderly gather to learn a skill under the guidance of a teacher. Students embark on field trips together, stage recitals, and even compete in international competitions. Many of these communal leisure groups are created by senior citizens themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> Adriana Petryna. "Science and Citizenship under Postsocialism." In Jonathan Inدا, ed. *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p163.

<sup>10</sup> Masako Osako, "International News: Japan," *ILC Policy Report: Longevity News and Trends in the U.S. and Abroad*, 2008, p. 3. See also Shigeo Morioka, "Challenges of Productive Aging in Japan." In M. Robinson, C. Pearson, and L. Norris, eds., *Global Health and Global Aging*, AARP Foundation, 2007.

Activities at circles and schools include dance, gateball (a sport similar to croquet), singing, cooking, and hiking. They typically entail an active use of the body. This may suggest that their value lies in counteracting the sedentary lifestyles that come with old age. Yet it is critical to note that even when these activities have physical benefits, practitioners articulate their contribution to preventing decline in old age in explicitly *social* and *interpersonal* terms. Senior citizens believe that conversing with different people in these groups and getting along with other members is important to their health. Some invoke the concept of *kinchō*, or productive tension, to explain the benefits that come from sociality. *Kinchō* denotes a state of preparing oneself and remaining alert in anticipation of social intercourse. While too much *kinchō* can be debilitating, many Japanese believe that they must have the appropriate amount of *kinchō* to avoid declining into a state of indolence. Senior citizens who remain in their homes are considered to be at greater risk of decline than those who maintain an active schedule of social activities. Pursuing a leisure activity in a group is thus considered preferable to doing so alone in one's own home. They also state that pursuing dance as a communal leisure activity helps them remain conscious of their appearance, comportment, and interactions with others.

Another reason for the emphasis on leisure activities derives from changes in the composition of Japanese households. Since the 1970s, Japan has seen a steady rise in the number of single and two-person households among the elderly. Although this trend is more prominent in urban areas, rural towns have also experienced a similar trend.<sup>11</sup> In 1975, 8.6% (611,000) of the nation's one-person households were inhabited by elderly persons aged 65 and over. In 2004, the proportion had risen to 20.9% (3,730,000 households). Households comprised of couples age 65 and over have also increased steadily. In 1975, 6.2% (443,000) of 2-person households were inhabited by people 65 and over. By 2004, this proportion had increased to 21.8% (3,899,000 households).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Out-migration of young people from rural areas to urban centers for education and work has led to an increase in the number of rural households that have no co-resident son and daughter-in-law to provide support. For analyses of the challenges of aging in rural Japan, see John W. Traphagan and John Knight, eds., *Demographic Change and the Family in Japan's Aging Society*, Albany: State University of New York, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, *Population Statistics of Japan*. National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2006, p. 89.

The change in household composition means that many elderly must find opportunities for social exchange outside of the home rather than expecting to engage with extended family members residing in the same household. As one researcher states, these leisure and learning communities help “mutual strangers” (*tanin dōshi*) in Japan’s aging society to “construct a human network.”<sup>13</sup> It is important to note the coupling of the words network and strangers. It foregrounds the importance of learning and leisure in later life as a vehicle for unrelated people to come together. These communities serve as fictive families in aging Japan, where ties are forged through a common pursuit of a leisure activity rather than simply through familial blood ties.

### **State Support of Communal Leisure and Learning**

Local governments are one of the chief advocates of communal leisure activities. They view these activities as one vital means to bring senior citizens out of their homes to gather in public spaces and maintain their health through social interaction.

As a local government official in the city of Saitama near Tokyo explained:

Senior citizens have to get out of the house and mix regularly with others. Without this, they become weaker both psychologically and physically. They may withdraw and hibernate (*hikikomoru*) in the space of the home. Going out and conversing and mixing with others in a place where some activity is being held is really important.<sup>14</sup>

Local governments in other municipalities similarly encourage senior citizens to leave their homes and mingle with others in public spaces. For example, Shinagawa City Ward in Tokyo has devised an innovative program called “bath of encounter” (*deai no yu*). This

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<sup>13</sup> Shigeo Koike, “Kōreika Shakai to Shōgai Gakushū” (Aging Society and Lifelong Learning). In H. Sasaki and Ogawa eds., *Shōgai Gakushū o Torimaku Shakai Kankyō* (Social Issues Surrounding Lifelong Learning). Tokyo: Gakubunsha, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Yoichi Nakamura, Saitama City Office, Lifelong Learning Promotion Division, August 2005.

program distributes weekly discount passes for senior citizens to use at local public baths. Senior citizens bathe together, and after bathing, sing karaoke.<sup>15</sup>

State support of leisure and learning among the elderly extends back to the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> Following a UNESCO conference on adult education in 1965, Japan's government incorporated the term lifelong learning (*shōgai gakushū*) into policy discussions. It subsequently introduced a wide range of classes for citizens over 60. The Prime Minister's Office established a special council on lifelong learning in 1984, and the Japanese Diet enacted the Law for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in 1990.<sup>17</sup> Today, lifelong learning divisions exist in most local government offices around the country, and they place special emphasis on facilitating learning and socializing opportunities among senior citizens.

Shinagawa City Ward has established the Silver University<sup>18</sup> for its residents aged 60 and above. It offers two forms of education. One is the “encounter and mingle” (*fureai*) academy which offers a three-year program; the second is a prep school (*juku*). In the *fureai* academy, first-year students enroll in discussion seminars and explore topics such as designing a lifestyle after retirement or maintaining mental health after 60. They also embark on field trips. In the second year, students enroll in more formal courses where they study academic subjects in their chosen fields. They graduate after fulfilling six semesters' worth of credits. The other educational program available to students within the Silver University, called the “prep school for preventing dryness” (*uruoi juku*), offers a diverse range of classes under headings such as health and sports, culture and beauty, cooking, and tea and flower arrangement. Students must be 60 and older to join

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<sup>15</sup> Shinagawa City, “*Kenkō zukuri (Kenkō suishin; Shōgai Gakushū): Shinagawa Deai no Yu*” (Creating Health (Promoting Health through Lifelong Learning): Shinagawa's Bath of Encounter) [www.city.shinagawa.tokyo.jp/hp/menu000002200/hpg000002166.htm](http://www.city.shinagawa.tokyo.jp/hp/menu000002200/hpg000002166.htm). Accessed January 28, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of Japanese state interest in promoting leisure and recreation activities, see David Leheny's *The Rules of Play: National Identity and the Shaping of Japanese Leisure*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Yutaka Shiraishi, *Alternative Approaches to Financing Lifelong Learning*. Geneva: OECD, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Of Shinagawa's population of 342,700, 20% is over the age of 65. See <http://www.city.shinagawa.tokyo.jp/toukei2/jinkou.html#002>, Accessed January 28, 2008.

this school as well. The prep school has a less structured format than the Silver University. Students may enroll in one class for one semester or in multiple classes without seeking to attain credits that count toward a degree.

### **From Providing Enrichment to Encouraging Self-Sufficiency**

While communal leisure and learning activities for the elderly have been available since the 1960s, an important shift has occurred in the national discourse about the significance of these activities. Initially, education for senior citizens was conceptualized as providing *enrichment* to their lives. The elderly were viewed as a neglected group that had suffered immensely during World War II.<sup>19</sup> Various services and programs, including clubs, were created specifically for them. For example, between 1969 and 1974, local government spending in the category of “welfare for the aged” jumped tenfold from 41 to 450 billion yen.<sup>20</sup> Pension benefits for current recipients were doubled, and medical care and health care services for the elderly were expanded.

The rationale for providing these programs has shifted radically since the 1960s, from enriching the lives of senior citizens to ensuring that they will remain self-sufficient and independent in their old age. These programs ask citizens to reflect on how they each and collectively can become more self-sufficient. A popular onomatopoeic phrase, “*pin pin korori*,” describes how the ideal elder should live in old age. The words “*pin pin*” suggest an elderly person bouncing and bursting with health, while “*korori*” evokes a motion of their dying a swift death. Senior citizens’ groups in Nagano Prefecture first popularized the “*pin pin korori*” exercise programs.<sup>21</sup> Nagano then garnered national acclaim for being the prefecture with the highest longevity rates for men and the lowest rate of hospitalization. Senior centers around the country have followed Nagano’s lead and begun their own *pin pin korori* exercise classes.

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<sup>19</sup> John Creighton Campbell, *How Policies Change: The Japanese Government and the Aging Society*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Campbell, *op cit.*, 1992:9.

<sup>21</sup> Chizuko Ueno, “Ohitorisama no Rōgo” (Old Age for the Single Elder). Tokyo: Hōken, 2007.

## Case Studies of Communal Leisure

As an ethnographer of Japanese longevity and the elderly, I focus in particular on the ways in which the healthy elder seeks to embody self-sufficiency on a daily level. As senior citizens themselves describe taking better care of the self, they offer important reinterpretations of the meanings of self-sufficiency that the state promotes. The following case studies are drawn from longitudinal qualitative research conducted with 40 senior citizens in urban Japan between 2004 and 2007. The men I interviewed defined health-seeking behavior in terms of their capacity to engage in interpersonal relations with women.<sup>22</sup> They were far more likely than women to define health in terms of their capacity to be conscious of and engage in interpersonal relations with the opposite sex. They participate in leisure communities to sustain a healthy self not only through exercise and interpersonal exchange but specifically through heterosexual sociality. I use the phrase “heterosexual sociality” to indicate a sexual dynamic that is not about intimate sexual exchange but is nonetheless anchored in comporting the self as a sexual being.

These cases demonstrate that the expression of gendered, sexual dimensions of the self in interpersonal relations is of central importance to men’s perception of their own health and vitality. They also illustrate how men join leisure circles to constitute a new social fabric after losing previously available sources of masculine identity, such as a marital relationship and full-time employment.

Men who have devoted their entire adult lives to work, sometimes in one institution, are particularly susceptible to decline in old age; retirement brings a sudden loss of social networks and institutional affiliations. Many cultural jokes exist about men who languish in the home after retirement.<sup>23</sup> In comparison, women are considered less likely to experience social isolation in their 60s. Women have been involved in multiple domains of social life throughout their adult lives: from children’s education and neighborhood activities, to part-time work and hobbies. Through these activities, they have built up a large array of social networks which they may continue to tap into during their 60s and onward.

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<sup>22</sup> For an analysis of women’s membership in communities of leisure, see Katrina Moore, *Voices of Aging: Gender, Embodiment, and Power in Urban Japan* (forthcoming).

<sup>23</sup> See Sayoko Nishida, *Teinen Hyōryū*. (Drifting Retiree) Saitama: Saitama Shinbunsha, 2003.

## **Dancing the Rhumba**

Kubota-san, age 68, is a self-employed electrician who lost his wife to cancer when he was in his early sixties.<sup>24</sup> He has four children and ten grandchildren and lives in Yokohama. He converted part of his home into a dance studio when he was in his mid-60s.

After my wife died, the house was quiet. I was lonely. I had a very bitter experience with her death, and I feel at some level that I failed. Surviving on my own after my wife died – cleaning, cooking, laundry – was so tough. It was so tough that I felt like maggots were growing inside my body. I just couldn't do it. It was about a year after my wife's death that I decided to open the dance hall. Dance parties I attended when I was an employee at Hitachi inspired me to open my own small dance hall. I used to go to the parties. I liked the tango, rhumba, cha cha, and waltz.

I put posters up around the neighborhood and people came. Now about ten people come to my circle: three of them are men and seven are women whose ages range from 53 to 70. The men have partners – they come with their partners. Most of the women who come are single. They're divorcees or widows. Widows say that now their husbands have died, they feel liberated and don't want a new husband. I dance with all of the single women, one after another.

Eventually, the women who came to the dance hall offered to help him out with his laundry.

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<sup>24</sup> With the exception of government officials and other public figures whose names and behavior are a matter of public record, the names and identifying details of all of my informants have been changed. This is meant to ensure confidentiality and protect the anonymity of individuals, families, and institutions involved. Where necessary, certain other identifiable details of these individuals have been slightly altered to better protect their identities. All Japanese names are written according to Japanese practice, surname first, except where the person publishes in English, in which case the given name appears first. All translations from Japanese to English are mine unless otherwise indicated.

You see, when there is a man who is single at this age like me, women want to help. If the man's a creep, of course they won't want to help him. But if he's a good guy, like me, they want to help. It's their instinctive maternal feeling. And what I'm doing is simply cleverly using this feeling. I'm really fortunate. [chuckles] Maybe this is a bit cunning of me. In return I dance with them. Because there are a lot of women, I graciously dance with them. I get tired because I have to dance with about four of them.

I made this dance space to enjoy my retirement, not to earn money. But I do take in a bit of money. I charge 1000 yen [approximately \$10] for each session. So I guess it pays for my food expenses. If I am to live well until 90, I need to do something like dance. I want to be famous in my 90s as the notable elder who has his own dance studio and dances for health. I have this strong belief that one mustn't let emotional stress pile up or one will get sick. I want to live happily, cheerfully.

### **Speaking in English**

Yoshida-san, age 64, retired from a manufacturing firm where he had worked as a salaryman for nearly forty years. He lives with his wife, daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren in Saitama.

My father used to be a high school English teacher. He's now in his 90s and is a volunteer interpreter for the local community... He is very active. I decided that if I want to be like my father when I'm in my 90s, I had to do more in my retirement. It was about a year after I retired that I decided to enroll in classes at the citizens' hall. I visited the hall and saw posters for a social dance class and an English conversation class. My only experience learning English was in middle and high school, and I've never been overseas. I thought it would be a good challenge for me to begin

learning English again. Taking part in the classes at the hall is good. First of all, we get out of the house, and we make friends. Through those contacts, we get into a lot of circles. In those circles we have a lot of interactions with a lot of different types of people. We absorb a lot of different opinions on varied subjects. That's my view on how we avoid developing diseases like Alzheimer's. It follows in that order. If we're at home all the time, and doing nothing and lying around watching television and not meeting anybody, we would age quickly.

Yoshida-san continued on to explain why he felt learning in a communal environment was crucial to sustaining health.

Mingling with fellow classmates, especially women, helps me retain my vitality... I chose this English class over another class because in the other one, all the students were men....The mixed-sex context makes me take care of my appearance. The days when I go to class, I always spend a half-hour selecting my clothes. [chuckles] I guess you noticed at the English conversation class how everyone comes dressed up. It's because they want to appeal to the opposite sex. Even the married women care about this. They'd never say it, but I'm sure this is what they're thinking. The granny, 73-year old Hoshino-san, comes to class looking for romance.

Human beings have two desires: food and sex. The second doesn't disappear. I feel nervous before each class. It's a positive kind of stress. Do you know the word *kinchō*?<sup>25</sup> When I get up in front of the students to give speeches, I feel a lot of good *kinchō*. I try my best to use new vocabulary words that Sensei taught us and also crack jokes in English to make everybody laugh. Without this type of stress, men age quickly. It's the same with the dance class. Most of the students there are women and I feel *kinchō* dancing with different women.

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<sup>25</sup> *Kinchō* denotes a state of preparing oneself and remaining alert in anticipation of action.

Of course, the women and I only interact in the classroom. I never ask them out for tea, because I'm married and I'm not looking for romance. Besides, my wife would find out. But I find it very enjoyable to go out to restaurants twice a year with the women in a mixed-sex environment.

It is illuminating to explore the individual men's motivations to pursue active lives. Kubota-san's aspiration to be known as the "notable elder who dances for health" at age 90 or Yoshida-san's belief that senior citizens who remain in their homes without meeting people are "at risk of aging rapidly" resonate with national programs that aim to increase the healthy longevity of Japanese senior citizens.

Yet these case studies do more than show the dovetailing of government initiatives with individual action. They illuminate men's perspectives on the vital role of heterosexual socializing in sustaining their health in old age. Kubota-san, for example, created the dance circle after his wife's death to establish new relationships with women who became his dancing partners and then helped to take care of some of his domestic needs. Yoshida-san took up English language classes in a mixed-sex environment because he felt strongly that social interactions with women in the classroom helped generate productive tension that was necessary to "retain his youth." For these men and countless other Japanese senior citizens, these communal leisure environments have transcended their mission for preventive health care. Constructing masculine identity through these leisure activities is central to their perception of their own health and vitality.

## **Conclusion**

Due to persistent low fertility, low immigration and mass longevity, Japan has one of the largest silver populations in the world. Promoting health through lifestyle changes has become a major tool in the effort to mitigate the burden of aging on the nation's health and long-term care insurance systems. Through

subsidies, discounts and public promotions, the state has been a keen advocate and active promoter of communal leisure activities.

Changes in family structure and the subsequent rise in single-person households across Japan have also added to the social interest in communities of leisurely socializing as an antidote for social isolation. Undergirding the provision of these services has been a broader shift in Japanese approaches to the elderly. Under the banner of “self-sufficiency,” various reforms have been introduced that increasingly demand that older citizens monitor the incidence of debility that could place them at risk for requiring care in an institutional setting. In the same vein, the value of communal leisure activities for the elderly has been shifted from being a source of enrichment for senior citizens to being a key medium for preserving mobility and self-sufficiency in old age.

Japan is at the forefront of nations managing aging populations. Tracking the impact of current and immanent preventive health programs down to the individual cases will be valuable not only for Japan, but for other nations facing the challenges of demographic aging.