

## Elderly Living in MUEN-SHAKAI: The Social Isolation Problem under Japanese Society

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### Abstract

**This article studies the causes and influencing factors of the social isolation of the elderly in Japan under the background of an aging society. The general causes of the social isolation of the elderly in Japan are mainly reflected in the weakening of kinship, the weakening of geographical relationship, and the disengagement of the industrial relationship. At the same time, it is also affected by factors such as the health, psychological and economic conditions of the elderly. According to the analysis of Japanese social structure and national psychology based on the related social anthropology theory, it can be seen that the loss of the "place" in social interaction reduces the objective ability and subjective motivation of the elderly in social interaction, and the psychological damage and imbalance of "AMAE (dependence)" will force elderly to reduce their help and dependence on the outside world, which will increase the risk of social isolation of the elderly in Japan. The research shows that simulating the structure of real social organizations to try to build a suitable "place" for the social interaction of the elderly could increase their social value and social contribution, strengthen their psychological capital, and enhance the initiative and self-confidence of social participation. That would be helpful to prevent or reduce the social isolation of the elderly.**

### Keywords

**Japan; aging society; social isolation.**

### 1. Introduction

Since the second half of the 20th century, with the declining fertility rate and the longer life expectancy, the phenomenon of global population aging has gradually emerged and has become a general trend of population development in the world. Japan is the country with the most serious population aging at present and in the future. Japan's population of 65 years and over has reached 28% in 2019, ranking first in the world. It is expected that this proportion will continue to rise to 31% by 2030. In 2019, Japan's potential support ratio (the ratio of the number of laborers aged 25 to 64 to the number of people aged 65 and over) is 1.8, which is the lowest among all countries or regions with more than 90,000 residents. This means that currently in Japan, an average of 1.8 working population has to support one elderly person aged 65 or older [1, 2]. How to provide adequate social protection and support for the elderly, increase the social participation of the elderly effectively, and prevent or reduce the social isolation of the elderly have become an important topic of concern to the Japan community in responding to the aging process.

This article examines the social isolation of the elderly in Japan's aging society, attempts to analyze related issues from the perspective of social anthropology, and combines the summary of the government's public policy response, and puts forward some supplementary suggestions.

## 2. The Concept of Social Isolation

Social isolation refers to the insufficient quantity and quality of social relations with others. It is reflected in the different levels of interpersonal communication, including individuals, groups, communities, and the larger social environment [3]. In short, social isolation is the lack of social connections, reflecting the low degree of integration into social life. Another related concept is loneliness. Different from the social isolation that describes the objective state, loneliness describes a subjective state of the individual, which mainly refers to the negative psychological feelings experienced by the individual when an important defect occurs in the quantity or quality of his social network. These defects include not only the number of existing social relationships are lower than expected, but also the expected quality of social relationships or the degree of intimacy cannot be met [4]. Loneliness is also considered to be the subjective state of negative emotions associated with perceived social isolation, such as social connections below the desired level, and lack of specific ideal partners [5]. A large number of studies in the fields of psychology and mental health have confirmed that the persistence of loneliness can have an adverse effect on people's mental health and even physical health.

Social isolation and loneliness are both different and connected. On the one hand, social isolation reflects an objective state, while loneliness reflects subjective feelings and emotions. Both have different conceptual foundations, formation mechanisms, and influencing factors; moreover, there is no direct causal relationship between the two. For example, some people in a socially isolated state may not necessarily feel lonely (in fact, some people who like to enjoy being alone tend to participate in social activities selectively and take the initiative to reduce the size of their social network), and a certain people still feel lonely when surrounded by family and friends [3]. On the other hand, many studies have shown that social isolation and loneliness have some common important predisposing factors, such as retirement, immigration, moving houses, death of relatives or other intimate social network members, and reduction of social activities due to their own health [5]. More importantly, there is often an interaction between the two. Specifically, people who fall into social isolation are more likely to become lonely, so being surrounded by a social network of meaningful interpersonal relationships is essential for strengthening social inclusion and reducing loneliness [4].

Although social isolation and loneliness may exist and affect any individual in society, for a long time, social isolation and loneliness have been considered to be issues closely related to the elderly [5]. Obviously, this is because older people have more opportunities to face some of the predisposing factors of social isolation and loneliness, and are more sensitive to these factors, so they face a higher risk of social isolation and loneliness. Also, the social network can bring information, resources, spiritual support and social protection to individuals. It can achieve an important supplement to the old-age security by improving material, safety, spirituality, and respect for needs. Therefore, its role is particularly important for the elderly. In this sense, the damage caused by social isolation to the elderly is more prominent.

## 3. Social Isolation Happened on the Elderly in Japan

After Japan entered an aging society in the 1970s, the issue of social isolation of the elderly has been raised. However, because of the incidents of "lonely deaths" among the elderly exposed by the media are relatively sporadic, they did not attract too much attention from the society at that time.

On January 17, 1995, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of magnitude 7.3 occurred in Japan. Later, according to the Asahi Shimbun report on January 14, 2000, as many as 233 "lonely deaths" occurred during the five years in which temporary houses built after the disaster were demolished. According to another report by the Asahi Shimbun on January 14, 2010, 190

solitary deaths occurred between 1995 and 2003 when they moved from temporary housing to rebuilt housing. If the previous lonely deaths of the elderly were only individual cases, then the many events that occurred in specific areas after the earthquake highlighted the importance of kinship and geographic relations to the elderly [6]. This has also aroused widespread concern about the social isolation of the elderly in Japanese society.

On January 31, 2010, Japans NHK TV station produced and aired a documentary movie titled "MUEN-SHAKAI". The film uses "the lonely death of modern people" as the interview theme, revealing more than 30,000 lonely deaths in Japan in one year. These programs reflect the problems caused by the weakening of kinship, geographic relationship, and workplace relationship, and aroused strong responses from Japanese society. "Death in isolation" and "MUEN-SHAKAI" thus became one of the keywords of the year. The serious social isolation problems expressed by MUEN-SHAKAI and other related TV programs, especially the social isolation of the elderly, became the focus of people's attention.

As the government agency that is responsible for planning, drafting, and comprehensively coordinating measures for aging society, the Cabinet Office of Japan has formulated and promulgated the "Outline of Measures for the Aged Society" in accordance with the requirements of the "Basic Law on Measures for the Aging Society" (Law No. 129, 2007), and issued it every year with "White Paper on Aging Society." The 2010 and 2011 editions of the "White Paper on the Society of Senior Citizens" used separate chapters specifically discusses the social isolation of the elderly. At that time, the need to regard social isolation as an important issue in public policy for the elderly began to be clearly realized.

At present, although there is no uniform standard for judging the social isolation of the elderly, most people basically agree that "the absence or lack of contact and contact with relatives, friends and neighbors" is an extremely important manifestation of the social isolation of the elderly [7]. In order to comprehensively promote the implementation of social countermeasures for the elderly isolation, the Cabinet Office of Japan plans to conduct research and surveys targeting ordinary elderly or specific types of elderly. The basic data obtained by surveys on the social status of the elderly can reflect the profile of the social isolation of the elderly in Japan.

According to the Results of The Eighth International Comparative Survey on the Life and Consciousness of the Elderly in 2015 [8], regarding the "frequency of meeting or telephone contact with offsprings living separately (if any)", Japan Respondents answered "almost every day" at 20.3% and "more than once a week" at 30.9%, which totaled 51.2%. The respondents in the United States, Germany and Sweden answered "almost every day" or "more than once a week" are respectively 78.6%, 62.5% and 78.1% in total (As shown in Table 1). In comparison, the frequency of contact between the elderly in Japan and their separated living offsprings is relatively low, showing a more obvious alienation of kinship.

**Table 1.** Frequency of meetings or phone calls with offspring living separately (%)

	Japan	America	Germany	Sweden
1) Almost everyday	20.3	42.9	24.8	30.0
2) More than once in a week	30.9	35.7	37.7	48.1
3) Once or twice a month	26.8	13.7	18.4	14.5
4) Several time a year	18.8	5.6	15.8	6.6
5) Hardly ever	3.1	2.1	3.2	0.8
Unanswered	0.1	0.1	-	-

As shown in Table 2, regarding the question "when sick or alone unable to complete the tasks required for daily life, are there anyone to rely on other than the family members living

together", 16.1% of Japanese respondents answered "no", which is the highest among all countries; 18.5%, 18.3% and 3.7% of the answers were "friends", "neighbors" or "others" that can rely on, significantly lower than the United States (45%, 24.6%, 7.6%), Germany (45%, 42.2%, 5.0%) and Sweden (43.4%, 31.2%, 7.7%). It can be seen that the ties between Japanese elderly and people who are not their family members and relatives are not tight enough. They feel that they can rely mainly on their family members and relatives. Fewer people think that they can get what they need from friends, neighbors or others. This also means that elderly Japanese who live alone and have no children can easily fall into social isolation due to lack of acquaintances to rely on in life.

**Table 2.** Whether there is anyone you can rely on besides the cohabiting relatives (%)

	Japan	America	Germany	Sweden
1) Relatives living separately	66.2	60.7	69.0	59.2
2) Friends	18.5	45.0	45.0	43.4
3) Neighbors	18.3	24.6	42.2	31.2
4) Somebody else	3.7	7.6	5.0	7.7
5) Nobody	16.1	13.0	5.8	10.8
Unanswered	0.1	-	0.4	-

As shown in Table 3, in terms of "what are the specific ways to interact with neighbors", the top three most answered by Japanese respondents are mainly "Standing outside and talking for a while" (67.3%) and "Exchange gifts" (41.9%) and "Have tea and dinner together" (24.2%). The top three most frequently answered by American respondents were "Stand outside and talk for a while" (45.9%), "Discuss with each other about some problems that have encountered" (28.3%) and "Help each other when sick" (27.0%). The top three most frequently answered by respondents from Germany and Sweden included "Standing outside and talking for a while" (38.7% in Germany, 89.7% in Sweden) and "When you encounter something that needs to be discussed, you can discuss with each other" (Germany 48.3 %, Sweden 31.2%) and "Have tea and dinner together" (Germany 50.1%, Sweden 35.9%), but their ranking is different. It is not difficult to find that Japanese interviewees rarely mentioned the option of "Discuss with each other about some problems that have encountered". Only 18.6% of the respondents answered, which is obviously lower than other countries. In addition, Only 5.9% of the respondents agreed "Help each other when sick", which is significantly lower than Germany (31.9%), United States (27%) and Sweden (16.9%). This shows that the old people in Japan do not interact deeply with their neighbors, which is consistent with the aforementioned situation where there are fewer people to rely on, including neighbors.

**Table 3.** The ways elderly interact with neighbors (%)

	Japan	America	Germany	Sweden
1) Have tea and dinner together	③24.2	24.9	①50.1	②35.9
2) Sharing hobbies	15.6	13.5	16.3	9.2
3) Discuss with each other about some problems that has encountered.	18.6	②28.3	②48.3	③31.2
4) Help with chores	5.2	15.2	7.3	3.2
5) Help each other when sick	5.9	③27.0	31.9	16.9
6) Exchange gifts	②41.9	18.4	14.3	24.3
7) Stand outside and talk for a while	①67.3	①45.9	③38.7	①89.7
8) Else	9.7	6.1	1.3	8.4
Unanswered	0.6	-	1.2	-

Regarding "Are there any close friends who consult or take care of each other except family members", the proportion response of "yes" is the highest in Sweden (90.5%), followed by the United States (84.7%), Germany (82.2%), and Japan (73.1%). Correspondingly, Japan (25.9%) is higher than the other three countries (11.9% in the United States, 17.1% in Germany, and 8.9% in Sweden) in terms of answering "no". From the perspective of "Are you currently participating in volunteer activities or other social activities for the purpose of improving welfare or the environment", Japan (47.6%) has the highest response rate of "Never participated", followed by Germany (44.2%), The United States (23.5%) and Sweden (22.4%). Based on the above overall analysis and comparison of the relevant survey data, it can be seen that compared with other interviewees from different countries, the elderly in Japan have lower social frequency, weaker social connections, narrower social networks, and less social support. Japanese Elderly's participation in social activities is also lower, thus showing a deeper degree of social isolation. In the context of the continuous development of aging society in Japan, the problem of social isolation of the elderly is very worthy of attention. To prevent or reduce the social isolation of the elderly requires long-term unremitting efforts by the Japanese society.

#### 4. General Analysis of the Causes of Social Isolation on Elderly

In Japan, the view that the estrangement or loss of kinship and geographic ties has caused the elderly to fall into social isolation has always been the mainstream [9]. White Paper on the Society of the Elderly (2020) pointed out that the elderly in Japan fell into social isolation due to lack of social contact with their families and the region. The background mainly includes the following aspects. First is the change in family structure. The increasing number of elderly single families and single elderly couples living alone raises the risk of social isolation. In addition, falling marriage rates and rising divorce rates have also contributed to the formation of more single families. Second, the industrial structure drives changes in the employment structure. The proportion of the employed working-class population continues to rise. Compared with self-employed and agricultural workers, their place of work and residence are completely separated. Therefore, the relationship with the residential community is relatively weak, resulting in a weaker regional interpersonal relationship. Third, the rapid development of urbanization has brought convenience in life, so that even in the absence of interpersonal communication, ordinary people who are physically and mentally healthy will not be troubled in obtaining material needs such as clothing, food, housing and transportation. This has also led to the weakening of family and regional relationships. Last, poor economic conditions will reduce social participation [10].

This article specifically sorts out and analyzes the general causes of the social isolation of the elderly in Japan from the following levels.

##### 4.1. Weakening of Kinship

Kinship is a social relationship tied by blood or formed in-laws. Traditional Japanese society is based on the family inherited by the "eldest son." The husband takes over the family business left by his father as the head of the family, manages the relationship between the families, and passes this important task to his eldest son. Family members obey the arrangements of the patriarch. Such cross-generational families are generally large in size, and family members are closely connected and support, rely on and trust each other.

Since modern times, especially after World War II, Japan has been affected by many factors such as economic, political and foreign cultural shocks. Along with the large-scale migration of the labor force from rural to urban areas caused by the adjustment of industrial structure, the traditional large family structure was split, the family size is gradually reduced, and the nuclear family has become the mainstream of modern social family forms. At the same time, the

traditional family consciousness has gradually faded. People's lifestyles are more personal, intergenerational relationships are weakened, and the rate of cohabitation between parents and offspring has declined. In the process of aging society, The number of elderly couples or elderly single families living alone has increased dramatically. In addition, the divorce rate and non-marriage rate in Japanese society continue to rise, and the phenomenon of "fewer births" is also prominent. This not only intensified the trend of being single and transformed the smallest unit of social life from the family into the individual, but also further weakened the foundation of kinship and affected the family's elderly care and social functions.

In August 2015, the National Youth Education Promotion Agency of Japan released the Investigation Report on the Life and Consciousness of Students. The survey is designed for high school students from Japan, the United States, China, and South Korea. The results show that the percentage of Japanese high school students who answered "respect their parents", "feel pressure on their parents' expectations," and "will want to take care of their parents no matter what they do in the future" is the lowest in any country. Regarding the question "Do you respect your parents", 37.1% answered "strongly agree", but this is quite low compared to the United States (70.9%) or China (59.7%). The proportion of "feeling pressure on parents' expectations" is only 29.5%, which is 22~34% lower than other countries. When asked "how to take care of elderly parents", only 37.9% answered "By themselves", which is less than half of China (87.7%) and significantly lower than South Korea (57.2%) and the United States (51.9%) . In contrast, the proportions of "give parental alimony and entrust the care of parents to others" and "not clear" were the highest among the four countries. The analysis believes that due to changes in social consciousness such as family nuclearize and respect for independence, the parent-child relationship has weakened. Perhaps the parent-child relationship in Japan has gradually changed from the vertical relationship of "respecting and caring for the elderly" to "horizontal and mediocre friendship" [11].

#### 4.2. Indifferent Geographical Relations

Geographical relationship is a social relationship based on people's coexistence in the same area. With the in-depth development of the economic and social division of labor, self-employed businesses are on a decreasing trend, while the working class keeps increasing. Long working hours, separation of work place and residence will reduce people's interpersonal communication in their own regions. Especially under the common living condition of renting apartments in big cities, the residents has strong mobility and lacks a long-term sense of belonging to their regions, which will also affect the willingness to communicate with each other.

**Table 4.** The degree of regional geographical communications (%)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Being in contact	67.80	67.00	67.70	66.90	65.40
deep in contact	16.90	17.50	18.30	17.00	16.40
average contact	50.90	49.50	49.40	49.90	49.00
Basically no contact	32.10	32.80	32.10	33.00	34.20
Barely contact	25.60	26.10	25.30	25.70	27.40
Never contact	6.50	6.70	6.80	7.30	6.80

According to The Public Opinion Survey Report on Social Consciousness [12], the respondents (Japanese citizens over 18 years old) answered the question "The degree of regional geographical communications", the proportion of being in contact was 65.4%, of which 16.4% were "deep in contact" and 49% were in "average contact"; 34.3% of those who answered

"basically no contact" (As shown in Table 4). It can be seen that in the past five years, the proportion of people who choose "being in contact" has shown an overall downward trend, while the proportion of people who choose "basically not in contact" has shown an upward trend.

The above survey also shows that the proportion of respondents who answered "being in contact" is lower in larger cities, and the proportion of respondents who answered "basically not in contact" in large cities is increasing year by year. Another study has shown that Japanese elderly living alone in cities are more likely to feel the lonely-death than those living in towns and villages. Among them, the perception of residents in large cities is twice that of residents in towns and village [13].

In Japanese society, people's neglect of geographic relations can be seen from this, especially in large cities, where geographic relations are even weaker.

### **4.3. Disengagement from Working Relationship**

The working relationship is a more complex social relationship based on the professional relationship established by the division of labor. Japanese companies have generally implemented life-long employment in the past, and provided employees with a very comprehensive welfare guarantee including company residences, single dormitories, housing subsidies, disease treatment, health prevention, pensions, etc., and individuals have a strong sense of belonging and high loyalty to the company they belong to, thus establishing a very close industry relationship. However, after the 1990s, with the long-term downturn of the Japanese economy, many companies fell into a state of recession, and it was difficult to continue the policy of lifetime employment and high welfare. There were more and more phenomena such as wage cuts, layoffs, and increased non-long-term employment. Personal work instability has greatly increased, and the sense of belonging and loyalty has decreased. Compared with the past, the relationship between individuals and industry is gradually diluted.

On the other hand, since work ability and contribution will inevitably decline with age, it is a natural development process for the elderly to be replaced by young people. With the passage of time, the elderly will gradually and eventually completely leave the workplace. The lack of working relationships among the elderly is inevitable.

For the elderly whose work relationship occupies an important position in their interpersonal relationship, once they lose this relationship, if they also lack other social interaction opportunities such as kinships and geographical relations, they will easily fall into social isolation. Compared with people engaged in self-employment, agriculture, forestry and fishery, and household sideline businesses, people employed by companies or institutions are more difficult to maintain social network connections after they reach old age. Elderly people living alone in the latter will have a stronger sense of loneliness and death [13].

### **4.4. The Impact of Health Status, Psychological Awareness, and Economic Status**

With the increase of age, the physical functions of the elderly gradually decline and their health conditions are getting worse and worse. Daily activities and travel will cause various inconveniences, which will adversely affect external interpersonal relationships. At the same time, physical aging, disease distress and decline in living ability will negatively affect the mentality of the elderly; and the decline in memorization, learning and cognitive abilities of the elderly will also affect their ability and willingness to accept new things and participate in new activities. The change or loss of the original social role will also increase the feeling of psychological loss of the elderly and reduce the sense of social presence. All these will cause the elderly to actively or passively reduce their contact with the society and reduce the degree of social participation.

In addition, many studies have shown that low income and poverty are one of the important factors leading to the social isolation of the elderly. For example, a survey report on the welfare of employees in Tokyo pointed out that poverty, such as low income and poor living environment, can lead to a trend of nuclear familyization and social isolation [7].

## 5. An analysis of Social Isolation of the Elderly in Japan from the Perspective of Social Anthropology

As mentioned above, the general causes of social isolation of the elderly in Japan are mainly reflected in the weakening of kinship, the weakening of geographic relationships, the separation of industrial relationships, and the influence of factors such as individual health, psychological, and economic conditions. However, the previous relevant international comparative surveys show that compared with other aging countries in Europe and America, the social isolation of the elderly in Japan seems to be more prominent. Whether this is related to the cultural and national psychological characteristics of the Japanese is worthy of further discussion.

### 5.1. The Lose of "PLACE"

Japanese scholar Nakane Chie analyzed the essential forms and characteristics of modern Japanese society from the perspective of social anthropology. She abstractly considered social groups as being constituted by two different principles: one is constituted according to the commonality of personal "qualification", and the other is constituted according to the commonality of personal "PLACE". Nakane believes that no matter in which society, individuals all belong to social groups or social strata divided by qualifications or places. Different composition principles of the society are closely related to the values of people in it [14].

Nakane pointed out that Japanese society put great emphasis on "PLACE" rather than "Qualification". Compared with "emphasis on individuals' identity", "which organization people belong to" will receive more attention. In other words, the Company Belongings is more important than Career. It can be seen that the group consciousness and sense of belonging of Japanese people generally focus on "PLACE" rather than "qualification". It is very different from European and American societies that advocate individualism and contract spirit. In Japanese society, people depend on each other and influence each other in the same "PLACE", establish a clear relationship between leaders and subordinates workers, and form a single vertical structured social group. The "EL system" in Japanese traditional feudal society also reflects this vertical social structure. The traditional concept of "EL" permeates into all corners of today's Japanese society and is firmly rooted in the consciousness of social groups. Looking beyond the general concept of family, "EL" is a certain social life community (including agricultural business entities, enterprises, etc.), and a social group composed of family members that constitute "EL".

The Japanese social group derived from the above-mentioned structural principles has unity, sense of collectivity, and exclusiveness. There is usually only one "PLACE" to which Japanese people belong. This is because Japanese social groups are divided according to different places, and individuals cannot penetrate into different places at the same time. The concept of "EL" emphasizes and forces everyone to participate in the group with all their emotions, emphasizes internal unity, and forms group cohesion and integration. The unity and sense of collectivity will inevitably lead to the closure of the group and establish a strong sense of exclusivity, which separate the inside and outside of the group. In such a social structure, it is naturally difficult for individuals to develop sufficient social experience and abilities, because the main social scope is limited to a single group. Moreover, the goals of the members inside the group are the same as a whole, so the requirements for solving problems through social efforts are not high.

For the elderly in Japan, once they leave their workplace due to retirement, it means that they have naturally separated from the social group they belonged to and lost the most important "PLACE" in their lives. According to the Results of The Eighth International Comparative Survey on the Life and Consciousness of the Elderly in 2015[8], for the question "Do you want to continue working (willing to continue) and earn income", the number of Japanese respondents who answered "want to continue" was 44.9%, which was higher than the United States (39.4%), Sweden (36.6%), and Germany (22.7%). Regarding the reasons for wanting to continue working and not retiring, 7.1% of Japanese respondents answered "get friends and colleagues through work", which is much higher than other countries (As shown in Table 5). This shows a higher percentage of Japanese elderly regard continuing to work as a very important means of maintaining their social connections.

**Table 5.** Reasons to keep working but not choose to retire (%)

	Japan	America	Germany	Sweden
1) Need income	49.0	52.7	31.9	20.8
2) The work is very interesting and brings vitality	16.9	28.1	48.9	54.5
3) Get friends and colleagues through work	7.1	2.8	0.9	3.0
4) Good for the body and delay aging	24.8	14.9	14.8	16.9
5) Else	2.2	1.5	3.1	4.9
Unanswered	-	-	0.4	-

Unfortunately, it is not easy to effectively fill the social vacuum in the workplace caused by retirement with kinship and geographic relationships. This is not only due to the weakening of the aforementioned kinship and the weak geographical relationship, but also because the elderly cannot easily find new suitable "PLACE" where they can enter and establish close relationships. Leaving the shelter of the "PLACE" and finding no groups that they could fit in or establish a sense of belonging, the elderly will at least partially lose the ability and motivation to socialize, greatly increasing the risk of social isolation.

## 5.2. "DEPENDENCE (amae)" Psychology

"Dependence (amae)" is a unique word in Japanese. It generally refers to a kind of psychology similar to infants and young children's dependence on their parents, being coquettish, and hoping to be loved by their parents. The Japanese psychiatrist Takeo Doi discovered the psychological meaning of this word when he analyzed and treated mental patients, and researched and put forward a theory about the psychology of "dependence"[15]. This theory and Ruth Benedict's "shame culture" theory and Nakane Chie's "vertical" social theory are also known as several of the most famous contemporary "Japanese theories".

Toi believes that "amae" is a kind of cultural psychological state of the Japanese, and is a characteristic of the Japanese national character. Westerners' "dependence" psychology is suppressed. Their cultural psychological orientation pays more attention to themselves rather than their relationship with others, and emphasizes self-discipline individualism, that is, they often consider their group from their personal standpoint. The Japanese are completely different. They have a more important relationship with others and consider the cultural and psychological orientation of individuals from a group standpoint. This is actually the reason why Benedict proposed that Western culture is a self-disciplined "culture of sin" and Japanese culture is a heterogeneous "culture of shame". The guilt of the Westerners comes from the betrayal of the "superego" formed in the individual's heart, while the shame of the Japanese is manifested in the betrayal of the group to which they belong.

Amae is not just a one-way dependence, but is based on mutual dependence. Therefore, the basic patterns of Japanese interpersonal relationships are interdependent. Not all people can be relied upon. People distinguish between "inside" and "outside" in interpersonal relationships based on whether they can rely on each other. The Japanese network can be regarded as three concentric circles: the innermost layer is a completely dependable circle composed of parent-child relationships or simulated parent-child relationships; the middle layer is a circle composed of friends and acquaintances, dependencies can sometimes occur in this circle; the outermost circle is constituted by people who do not have dependence relationship with each other. In the innermost circle, because people can choose to depend on each other, there is no need to be so much polite. Even if people behave out of line, they will be forgiven; at the middle level, because people want to be mutually dependent, they need to be polite to each other; in the outermost circle, because people cannot be relied upon, so there is no need to be polite. The Japanese do not think that it is false to be wayward and coquettish in the inner circle and being polite in the middle circle, nor do they think that it is strange to be polite in the middle circle and unscrupulous in the outer circle. Conversely, if a person blurs the boundaries of these circles, problems will arise.

According to the mentality of "dependence", it can be explained or understood that Japanese people "do not ask for help from the outside as much as possible because they are unwilling to cause trouble to others", "when people get help from others, they should not only be thankful but also apologetic", and "strangers may be very polite on the surface but actually indifferent and ruthless at heart" and other behaviors and practices.

For the elderly in Japan, the weakening of kinship, the separation and rupture of working relationships will cause the inner and middle circles of their interpersonal network to collapse, and their "dependence" psychological foundation will be shaken. Further more, the reduction in family size and the increase in nuclear family have greatly reduced the frequency of direct contact between family members, and various dependent behaviors in life between family members will also decline. Although the obstacles to communication caused by spatial distance can be eliminated by means of communication technology, it is undeniable that online information connections can never substantially replace face-to-face contact. The long-term lack of dependence in family will damage the dependence psychology, and then have a weakening effect on the kinship.

On the other hand, with the aging of the body and mind, the fading of social roles and the transfer of social status, elderly's strength, psychological condition, and social capital will gradually degraded. The self-perceived social value of the elderly will continue to decline, putting the elderly in an absolutely disadvantaged position in the psychological relationship of Amae(dependence). The fact that the elderly rely on others more than they are being dependent on others, will further cause an imbalance in the psychological relationship of Amae(dependence) and increase the shame that arises from accepting the favor and help of others. In order to eliminate this anxiety and reduce the need for help and dependence on the outside world, the elderly even choose to lock themselves inside their own world. It may become the tendency of some Japanese elderly who are trapped in social isolation.

## 6. Conclusion

In Japan, where the population is aging, the social isolation of the elderly is prominent. On the surface, this can be mainly attributed to the weakening of kinship in Japanese society, the weakening geographical relationship, and the disengagement in working relations, etc. On the other hand, the analysis of Japanese social structure and national psychology according to the relevant theories shows that the loss of the "place" in social interaction and the imbalance of

"AMAE(dependence)" psychology will further contribute to the social isolation of the elderly in Japan.

In 1995, Japan formulated the "Basic Law on Countermeasures for the Elderly Society" in response to the deepening aging problem, and proposed the "Outline of Countermeasures for the Elderly Society", which covers "employment and income", "health and welfare", "learning and social participation", "living environment" and "promotion of investigation and research" five aspects. In recent years, in order to enable the elderly to give full play to their knowledge and experience and become an important pillar supporting the economy and society, the Japanese government has issued a series of policy measures to ensure and increase employment opportunities for the elderly, which play an important role in reducing the involuntary withdrawal of the elderly from social activities, maintaining the relationship between the elderly and reducing the risk of social isolation. More specifically, the Japanese government has strengthened measures to encourage the elderly to participate in learning and volunteer activities. For example, actively promote retired low-age and healthy elderly people to become the main force of volunteer activities for the elderly in the region, and help them to fill in the lack of work through volunteer activities after retirement, and achieve a sense of fulfillment through work. In addition, some community forces such as residents' groups and non-profit organizations organize meaningful social activities to actively create opportunities for the elderly to communicate with their neighbors, and strengthen the protection of the elderly through multi-party cooperation and safety confirmation measures.

Japanese society integrates the government, the market, non-profit organizations, social groups, community residents and other forces to implement diversified aging countermeasures and form a certain social support system in response to the social isolation of the elderly. Of course, there are still some shortcomings in the implementation process. For example, the elderly have a weak awareness, willingness, and degree of participation in social activities other than employment. For another example, public policy measures may have a negative impact on some conscious actions of the grassroots community. Studies have pointed out that the Japanese nursing insurance system enables the elderly to obtain institutional support for physical care, but at the same time it has the side effect of making them easy to lose their interpersonal bonds and fall into social isolation [13].

I believe that we can combine the analysis and conclusions of this paper to consider optimizing some specific strategies and methods to improve the implementation effects of relevant policies and measures. For example, when organizing learning and social participation activities for the elderly, people should pay attention to the construction of "places" and simulate the structure of real social organizations; also try to establish a relatively stable relationship and order among the elderly groups participating in the activity, form a social interaction ecological environment that the elderly are familiar with and adapt to, and enhance their sense of belonging and comfort. In addition, it is necessary to advocate a positive and comprehensive image of the elderly, establish a social awareness that recognizes and cherish the role of the elderly, and help the elderly to increase their awareness of their own social value and social contribution through social participation, so as to strengthen elderly's mental condition, and enhance the initiative and self-confidence of social participation.

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