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TOM TOM ENGLISH



“Konkatsu” boom or bust?

VOCABULARY

Torpid =

Inactive, lethargic

Thus =

As a result or
consequence of this
heavy load

Abundance =

A very large quantity
or amount of
something

Flounder =

Struggle or stagger
clumsily (in mud or
water)

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. Did you notice the konkatsu boom? What kind of new konkatsu activities did you see in the last 8 years?
2. Do you agree that within 20 years one in three people will be single for life? Why? Why not?
3. What do you think about Mr. Shirakawa's comments? Has marriage become more like buying a fridge, with dimensions, specifications and price?
4. Do you think young people can afford to get married these days? Why? Why not?
5. What do you think about the comparison with France - would more public housing help with this problem?
6. Is there anything else the government could do to fix this problem?

VOCABULARY

Second Nature =

A tendency or habit the
has become natural or
characteristic

Indulgence =

Something that is done
or enjoyed as a special
pleasure, not a normal
thing.

Eternal =

Lasting or existing
forever

Eight years into a “marriage activity” boom, marriage is so **torpid** that in 20 years, Shukan Toyo Keizai fears, one man in three will end up single for life.

“Marriage activity” is a literal translation that fails to capture the meaning of “konkatsu.” Polls show that most young adults want to marry. Their parents want them to marry. The government wants them to marry. **Thus** “konkatsu.” This includes match-making parties, sightseeing trips, websites – an **abundance** of them. Some of these “activities” are organized by private companies, others by local governments. You’d think after eight years of the “boom” there’d be a spike in marriages, and a rise in the birth rate. It’s not happening, Toyo Keizai reports.

The magazine enlists two experts to discuss why. Sagami Women’s University professor Toko Shirakawa, who advises the government on demographic issues, says marriage **flounders** because it has failed to keep up with changing times. Getting married used to be easy, she explains. Competing lifestyles had no status, and everybody in your life – your parents, your community, your employer – helped pave the way. The word “gokon” was unknown, but the activity it describes went on beneath society’s surface. It was simply taken for granted.

Parents and relatives arranged traditional match-making parties known as “miai.” Bosses pushed and prodded – the “company marriage” became **second nature**. “There was nothing like this anywhere else in the developed world,” says Shirakawa – and well into the 1990s, “97% of Japanese got married.”

The economic collapse of that decade is one of two key changes. The other is the Internet revolution. A result of the latter, says Shirakawa, is the development of a mentality that places an order and demands satisfaction: “When your fridge breaks down, you go to an auction site and find a fridge that suits your price range and the dimensions of your kitchen.” A marriage site can be much the same. You input your specifications, “and maybe you get 1,000 hits – but you can’t check them all!” It tends to be overwhelming rather than encouraging.

Takanori Fujita, founder of the anti-poverty NPO Hot Plus, comments that, economic realities being what they are, “marriage and having children have become luxury **indulgences**.” Average young adults can’t afford them – or at least feel they can’t. “Those who do marry,” Fujita says, “are people who, in economic terms, are still living in the old Japan – public servants and full-time employees of big corporations.” But around 40% of the workforce in the “new Japan now have generally underpaid part-time status.

The key, says Fujita, is policies that raise people’s disposable income. “In France there’s an **abundance** of public housing; a young couple can rent an apartment for 10,000 yen a month. In Japan, public housing is only 5% of the housing stock. A young person earning 150,000 yen a month often pays half that on rent.” The alternative is to live with parents, as some 80 % of low-income people do, at the risk, in worst cases, of slipping into a sort of **eternal** childhood

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