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Japanese General Social Surveys (2) Methodological Experiments in Administering the Questionnaire, Incentives, Scales and Wording

by Noriko Iwai¹

Zusammenfassung

Der Japanese General Social Survey ging im Jahr 2000 erstmals ins Feld und wird seitdem regelmäßig durchgeführt. Die methodischen Experimente zur Vorbereitung der Befragungsserie werden beschrieben.

Abstract

The Japanese General Social Survey started in 2000 and has been conducted every other year since then. Methodological experiments conducted are described.

The Japanese General Social Surveys (JGSS) Project is the first attempt in Japan to conduct a nationwide general social survey on a regular basis and to provide its data for secondary analyses without delay for use by social scientists in Japan and overseas. The project has been undertaken by the Institute of Regional Studies, Osaka University of Commerce in collaboration with the Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo. In a previous paper², I described the development of the project, sampling design, and contents of questionnaires. In this paper, I will discuss methodological experiments we had conducted prior to the first full-scale national survey, JGSS-2000. Particularly, this paper deals with the following four issues: 1) combination of interview and placement methods; 2) length of time for interview and self-administered questionnaire; 3) response rates and incentives;

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2 "Japanese General Social Survey: Beginning and Development" in ZA-Information 55 (2004), S. 99-113.

and 4) wording and scales. Some of these issues are shared with other countries and some are peculiar to Japanese survey situations.

1 Combination of Interview and Placement

It is unusual to combine oral interview and placement of paper and pencil questionnaire for a survey in Japan. The nationwide and repeated surveys mostly adopt only one method, either interview or placement. Taking a hint from the American General Social Survey and the (American) National Survey of Families and Households (*Sweet*, 1990), both of which incorporate the self-administered questionnaire in the interview session, we planned to combine both methods for the JGSS. But in our case, the self-administered questionnaire is regarded not as a part but as the equivalent to the interview session. Considering the survey conditions in Japan, which I will discuss in the next section, we planned to set the average time for the interview session and for the self-administered questionnaire as 20 minutes respectively, so that the total time would be around 40 minutes. We allocated questions which are complicated or have many branch questions such as a respondent's work situations, household composition, or marital history, to be asked in the interview. On the other hand, questions on opinions and attitudes to which respondents tend to make socially desirable responses if they are asked in a face-to-face situation were included in the self-administered questionnaire.

In the 1st pilot survey³, we examined whether a subject would agree both to be interviewed and to do a self-administered questionnaire. We also examined the order of administration of these two methods by split-balloting. In half of the sample, a subject was asked to have an interview session first and to complete a self-administered questionnaire later. The interviewer would visit the subject again on a promised date to pick it up. In the other half of the sample, a subject was asked to answer the self-administered questionnaire first and the interviewer would visit the subject on a promised date to pick it up and conduct the interview session then. We gave instructions to interviewers that they could change the order, if the subject showed a preference. We found that people seldom stopped their cooperation in the middle of the survey, so that it is possible to combine two methods. In addition, it was found that respondents tended to prefer to be interviewed first; in 58.7% of the completed cases, respondents had the interview first.

3 It was conducted in March 1999 with a random sample from Osaka Prefecture and Tokyo Metropolitan area. Refer to <http://jgss.daishodai.ac.jp/english/eframe/englishtop.html>

In the 2nd pilot survey⁴, we left the order of administration to interviewers. They decided the order based upon their preferences and the subject's request. In 3 out of 4 cases, the interview was conducted first.

Based on these results, we decided to combine an interview and a self-administered questionnaire and to leave the order to interviewers.

2 Length of Time for Interview Session and Self-administered Questionnaire

Japanese people in general do not have a strong motivation to assert their opinions or attitudes in interviews, so obtaining their cooperation for a survey is relatively difficult. People are also concerned about the amount of time the survey will take. It is difficult to get cooperation from a subject if the subject is informed that the interview session would take over half an hour. In reality, some respondents, especially elderly respondents, continue to answer the interview for well over forty minutes without reluctance, once they agree to cooperate. But it is important to incline subjects to cooperate with the survey in the first place.

Considering these situations, we planned to combine a 20 minutes interview and a self-administered questionnaire which would also take around 20 minutes. We thought it likely that subjects could be persuaded with these figures if they ask about the time the survey would take. Having a pretest with people who varied in educational background, the project team completed questionnaires for interview and for placement, both of which took about 20 minutes.

Table 1 shows the average time for the interview for each survey. You may notice that the mean time of the interview increased from 23.3 minutes to 28.6 minutes in the 2nd pilot survey. Although the number of questions asked in the interview increased only slightly from the 1st pilot survey (101 questions) to the 2nd pilot survey (104 questions), the construction of some questions in the 2nd pilot survey was more complex and took more time. The number of questions in the interview session further increased to 108 in JGSS-2000 and to 111 in JGSS-2001. At the time of conducting JGSS-2002, we noticed that the project team crammed too many questions into the questionnaire and extended the interview time. It is no longer possible to announce that the interview will take around 20 minutes. In conducting JGSS-2002, we wrote in a letter of requesting cooperation to subjects stating that it would take 20 to 30 minutes for the interview and about 20 minutes for the self-administered

4 It was conducted in November 1999 with a nationwide random sample.

portion. The inclusion of this information might have a negative effect on cooperation from subjects. Considering also the fact that the response rate has decreased from 64.9% in JGSS-2000 to 63.1% in JGSS-2001, we decided not to increase the number of questions asked in the interview for JGSS-2002.

Table 1 Average Time of the Interview for JGSS (in minutes)

	1 st Pilot	2 nd Pilot	JGSS-2000	JGSS-2001	JGSS-2002	JGSS-2003
Mean	23.3	28.6	28.3	28.4	29.0	20.4 (+13.3*)

* Form B questionnaire requires additional verbal explanations by interviewer.

Although we used one form of self-administered questionnaire for JGSS-2000, 2001 and 2002, we used two forms in JGSS-2003 (Forms A and B). The structure of Form B is complex, since it focuses on the respondent's social network and political opinions. Due to this complication, its first part was administered through an interview so that the interviewer could guide the respondent which questions to answer depending on the particular social network for the respondent. Because of this completing Form B was quite time consuming. To allow this to happen, we have decided to shorten the interview part of the survey instead, substantially. We decreased the number of questions in the interview from 110 to 56. As a result, the interview session for JGSS-2003 took 20.4 minutes on the average. The time taken for explaining the introductory part of Form B turned out to be 13.3 minutes on average.

In sum, the length of time for interview and placement sets a very severe limit to the number of questions included in each questionnaire.

3 Response Rates and Incentives

One of the characteristics of the JGSS-2000, 2001 and 2002 is that the incentive for respondents was prepaid. Two book coupons worth 1,000 yen⁵ were enclosed with a letter of request for cooperation which was sent to respondents several days before an interviewer would come. By providing incentives in advance, we attempted to activate the norms of reciprocity in a respondent.

Providing a reasonable amount of monetary incentive to a respondent in advance has been reported to be effective in Europe and U.S. studies most of which examined results for postal surveys (*Hopkins* and *Gullickson*, 1992; *Church*, 1993;

5 About 7.30 Euro

Nicolaas and *Lynn*, 1998). Although the number of studies with interviews is small, the effectiveness of paying an incentive seems to be also confirmed with interviews (*Singer, Hoewyk, Gebler, Raghunathan* and *McGonagle*, 1999). In Japan few of such studies exist. *Tanioka* (1993) experimented with postal surveys in 1991. His results showed that enclosing a book coupon worth 300 yen was much more effective than providing a chance for entering a lottery. *Kojima* (2000) also showed that a response rate for a condition in which a 100 yen stamp had been enclosed was higher by 9% than the response rate for a condition with no stamp enclosed.

In order to examine whether response rates really differ according to the timing of providing incentives in Japan, we conducted an experiment in the 2nd pilot survey by using a split-ballot method (*Iwai* and *Inaba*, 2001). At half of the survey points (40 points), we enclosed book coupons worth 1,000 yen with a letter of request for cooperation (pre-paid condition). At the rest of the survey points (41 points), we only promised in a letter of request for cooperation to provide book coupons worth 1,000 yen on completion of the interview and the self-administered questionnaire (promised condition).

The response rate for the promised condition was 60.5%, while the rate for the pre-paid condition was 73.0%. The timing of providing incentives did show a substantial effect on a respondent's cooperation. The response rate of people living in 13 major cities increased from 42% in a promised condition to 61% in a pre-paid condition. Those for people living in other cities increased from 58% to 73% and from 67% to 70% for people living in towns and villages. It should be noted that the difference in response rates between the two conditions might be amplified, since the allocation of conditions was skewed unintentionally. Pre-paid conditions happened to be allocated significantly more in survey points of other cities and significantly less in those of towns and villages. After controlling effects of such unexpected factors, we found that pre-paid incentives tend to somewhat increase response rates of certain groups of people: those who were politically conservative and those who had their spouse pass away.

Table 2 Timing of Providing Incentives and Response Rates for the First Targets

	1 st Pilot		2 nd Pilot		2000	2001	2002	2003 Form A*
	<i>Tokyo</i>	<i>Osaka</i>						
Book Coupon	Promised	Promised	Promised	Pre-paid	Pre-paid	Pre-paid	Pre-paid	Promised
Pen Set	---	---	---	---	---	---	Anytime	Anytime
Response Rate	46.4%	49.5%	60.5%	73.0%	64.9%	63.1%	62.3%	55.0%

* Response rate for Form B was 48.0%. Form B differs structurally from the regular JGSS self-administered questionnaire.

In analyzing the effects of the timing of providing incentives, we also examined whether the timing had any influence on the quality of responses and their distributions. There are not many studies on these points even in Europe and the U.S (*Nicolaas and Lynn, 1998*). Although the results of those few studies are not always consistent, it is pointed out that the number of “no answer” tends to decrease and respondents tend to write more for open-ended questions when monetary incentives are provided (not necessarily in advance). In the above-mentioned study, *Kojima* pointed out that there was no tendency for respondents to make socially desirable responses by being provided with a 100 yen stamp.

Our analyses showed that pre-paid incentives tend to increase somewhat the proportion of the “don’t know answer” for several questions, but with no increase in the proportion of “no answer.”

Based on the above results, we decided to provide incentives in advance to all respondents from JGSS-2000. The response rate for JGSS-2000 was 64.9% and 63.1% for JGSS-2001. Although these figures are higher than the response rate for the promised condition in the 2nd pilot survey, the effect of providing incentives in advance was not remarkable and there seems to be a decreasing trend of response rates. In conducting JGSS-2002, we decided to give respondents an additional gift to express our gratitude for his/her cooperation. A set of three pens of different colors was provided. The timing of giving the pen set was determined by the interviewer depending on the circumstances of each case. The response rate of JGSS-2002 further decreased somewhat. This down trend of the response rates of the JGSS might be in accordance with a down trend of response rates of face-to-face interview surveys observed in the past twenty years in Japan (*Tamano 2003*). For example, the response rates of the surveys even by the government which have been

Table 3 Proportion of Refusal, Temporary Absence or Other Reasons for Non-response for the First Targets

	2 nd Pilot		2000	2001	2002	2003
	<i>Promised</i>	<i>Pre-paid</i>				
Refusal	22.6	14.8	21.1	20.9	24.4	29.6
Temporary Absence	11.0	7.1	7.1	9.4	9.2	10.0
Change/Missing of Address, Decease	5.1	4.4	5.2	7.0	6.7	5.4
Other Reasons for Non-response	3.9	3.9	5.1	4.0	4.1	6.6

conducted annually decreased from 77.4% in 1980 to 68.0% in 2002 (“Shakai Ishiki nikansuru Yoron Chosa [Opinion Survey on Social Attitudes]”).

Table 3 shows the proportion of refusal, temporary absence, change/missing of address or decease, or other reasons for non-response among the first target group in each survey. Between JGSS-2001 and 2002, the proportion of refusal increased by 3.5%. This steep climb of refusals is suspected to correspond to the construction of the nation-wide network of the register of names and addresses by the government in summer of 2002, just before the survey of JGSS-2002 started. The introduction of this system raised a number of arguments regarding the risk of leaking one’s privacy. Although we promised to safeguard the privacy of respondents in the letter of request, people might become more concerned with protecting their privacy then.

In conducting JGSS-2003, we made a decision not to provide incentives in advance. This change was caused mainly by strong requests from interviewers of the survey company. Although interviewers were informed of the results of the 2nd pilot survey which indicated a clear effect of the pre-paid incentives on a respondent’s cooperation, they have felt that some respondents are offended by the pre-paid incentives and little room has been left for interviewers to persuade respondents to cooperate with the survey. Interviewers want to make an effort to persuade respondents in a promised condition of incentives.

In the JGSS project, interviewers are asked to record the circumstances of each of the non-response cases in detail by filling out a questionnaire themselves. By analyzing these data of JGSS-2002, 6 people got angry with the pre-paid incentive and 14 people complained about it. Although the proportion of these people among the non-respondents is less than 1%, we made a decision not to provide book coupons in advance for JGSS-2003 so as to maintain interviewers’ motivation to persuade interviewees for their cooperation.

The response rate for JGSS-2003 dropped substantially to 55.0%; the proportion of refusal increased by 5.2%. The refusal rate had increased because 1) incentives were no longer provided in advance, and 2) the Act on the Protection of Personal Information was proclaimed in May 2003. The proclamation of the Act seemed to have made people more reluctant to participate in the survey. The Act was enforced in April 2005.

4 Wording and Scales

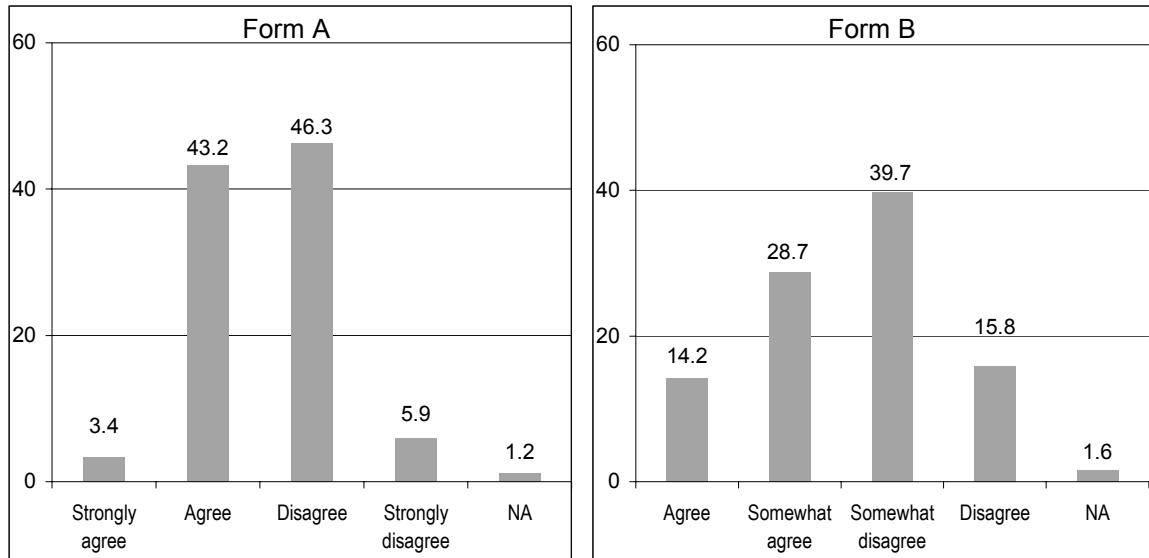
In the first and second pilot surveys, the project team examined the effects of wording, the forms of scales, and the number of choices to be presented on responses (*Iwai*, 2000; *Sugita* and *Iwai*, 2001). Even if the JGSS questionnaires model those of the GSS, we should have considered possible differences in response patterns between the U.S. and Japan. Therefore, we prepared two different forms of questionnaires to be used in the placement method. The questionnaire for the interview method is only one form. Form A contained questions whose wording or scales are observed frequently in the GSS questionnaires. On the other hand, Form B contained questions whose wording or scales are used frequently in surveys conducted in Japan. By using a split-ballot method, Form A was distributed to a half of the sample, and Form B was distributed to the rest of the sample. The survey questions for JGSS-2000, the first full-scale survey, were constructed taking into consideration the following findings.

4.1 Wording of Categories

In the GSS questionnaires, the following scale has been often used for asking respondent's opinions; a scale whose categories are "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." However, in questionnaires used in Japanese surveys, this scale seldom appears; instead, a scale whose categories are "agree," "somewhat agree," "somewhat disagree," and "disagree" is used.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses for Form A and Form B. While responses for Form A concentrate on the central two categories, the distribution of Form B spreads normally. The scale used in Form B seems proper for the JGSS self-administered questionnaire.

Figure 1 Q: “When a marriage is troubled and unhappy, it is generally better for the children if the couple gets divorced.” (All figures in %)



4.2 Inclusion/Exclusion of a Choice of “Depends”

In making a questionnaire, Japanese researchers tend not to include a choice of “depends” in a list of choices, since this choice attracts a large proportion of responses. GSS avoids this problem by not showing this choice to a respondent at the interview; but if respondents say “depends” or “don’t know,” these answers are given codes afterward respectively in a coding process.

In the JGSS, most questions on opinions and attitudes are planned to be included in a self-administered questionnaire not in an interview questionnaire. In order to examine the effects of the inclusion of the choice “depends,” we included “depends” in Form A and excluded it from Form B. The question itself is “Do you think it is desirable for three generations (older people, their married children, and grandchildren) to share a home?”

Figure 2 Q: “Do you think it is desirable for three generations (older people, their married children, and grandchildren) to share a home?”⁶
(All figures in %)

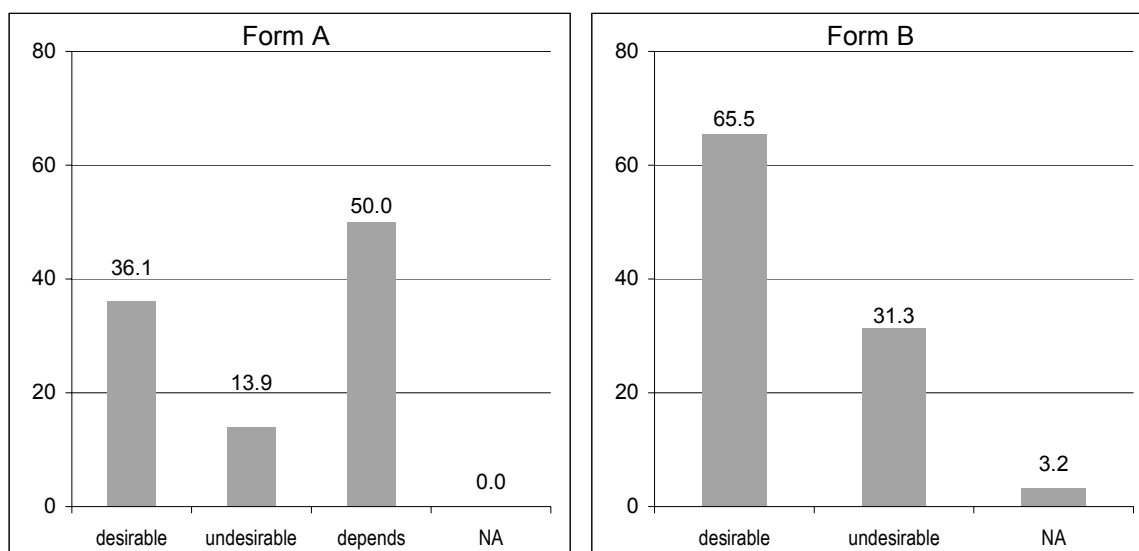


Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses for Form A and for Form B. While a ratio of “desirable” responses to “undesirable” ones does not significantly differ between Form A and B, half of the responses concentrate on a category of “depends” in Form A. The scale used in Form B seems proper for the JGSS self-administered questionnaire.

4.3 Inclusion/Exclusion of a Choice of “Don’t Know”

A choice of “don’t know” also attracts a large proportion of responses. For examining this point, we included “don’t know” in Form A and excluded it from Form B. The effect of this inclusion differs depending on the topic of questions.

6 In Japanese questionnaires a category of “depends” is put after “yes” (=desirable) and “no” (=undesirable). If we use 5-point scale (although we seldom use it), we put a category of “neither...nor...” in a middle, that is, agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, disagree. We feel the nuance of “depends” is somewhat different from that of “neither...nor...”

Figure 3 Q: “When a person has a fatal disease (that cannot be cured), do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient’s life by some painless means if the patient and his/her family request it?” (All figures in %)

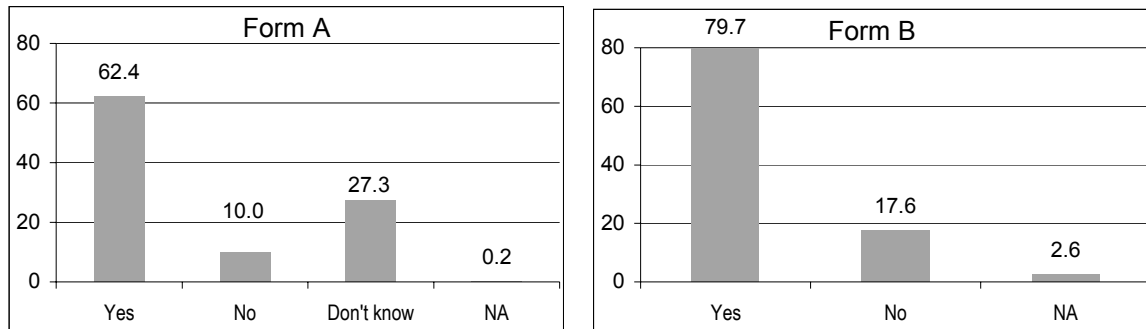
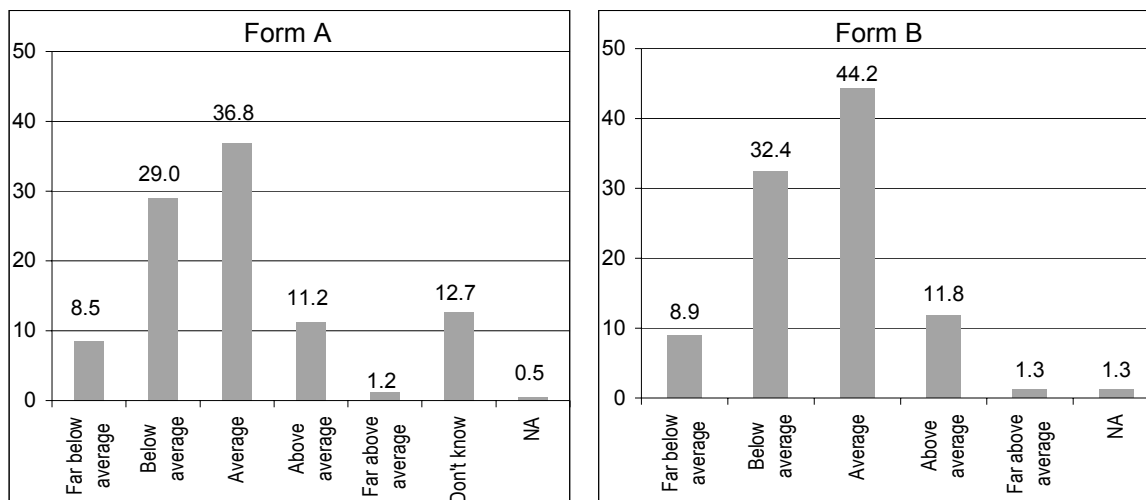


Figure 4 Q: “Compared with Japanese families in general, what would you say about your family income?” (All figures in %)



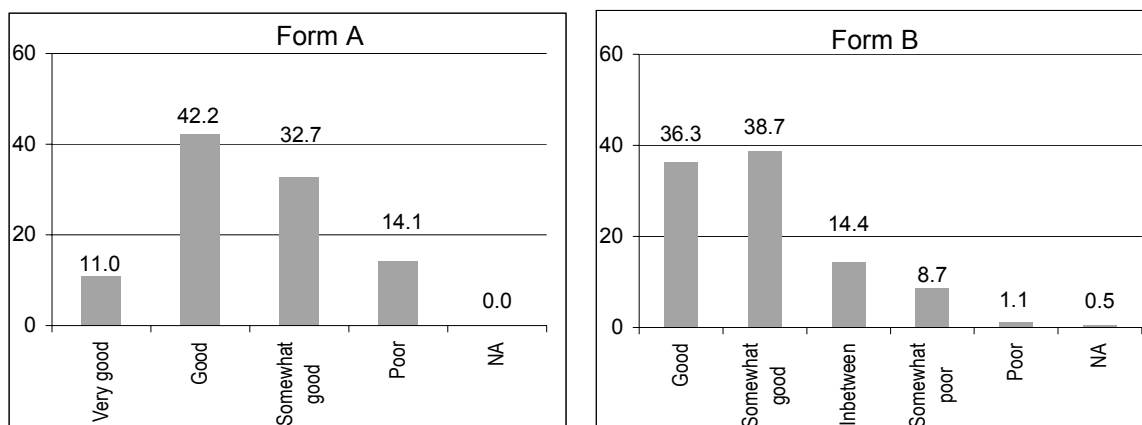
The proportion of “don’t know” accounts for about 30% for questions which calls for some knowledge on the law: euthanasia (Form A of Figure 3), the revision of Juveniles Act, the death penalty, and pornography. On the other hand, the proportion of “don’t know” decreases for questions on respondent’s subjective evaluations of the household’s income and household’s income when the respondent was 15 years old (12.7%; Form A of Figure 4). However, in both cases, the shape of the distribution of responses for other categories does not differ regardless of inclusion/exclusion of “don’t know.” As a result, we decided to include a choice of “don’t know” for questions relating to the law and exclude it for other questions in the questionnaire of JGSS-2000.

4.4 Use of Symmetrical or Unsymmetrical scales

In the GSS questionnaires, unsymmetrical scales have been used for questions on the respondent's health condition or degree of happiness or satisfaction. Those scales are contrived to have more categories on the positive side. On the other hand, most Japanese studies use symmetrical scales for these questions with equal number of categories on the positive and on the negative sides.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of responses for Form A (unsymmetrical) and for Form B (symmetrical). The distribution for an unsymmetrical scale tends to be better balanced than the distribution for a symmetrical scale. The conclusion to use this scale will be discussed in the following section.

Figure 5 Q: "How would you rate your health condition?" (All figures in %)



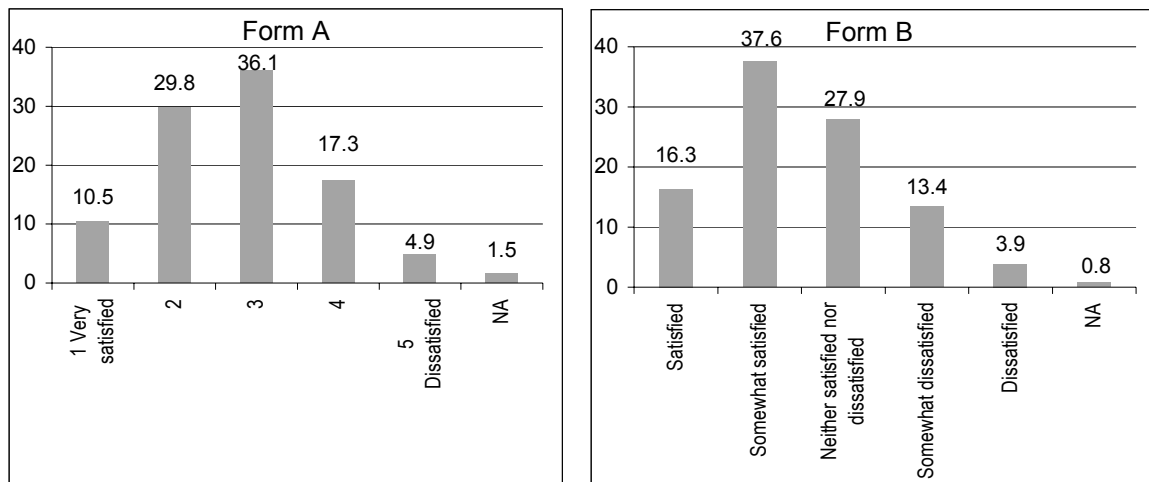
4.5 Spelling out Categories: every category or only both ends

In the GSS questionnaires, choices for questions are not always spelled out. There are some questions for which respondents are asked to choose one point from a scale whose categories are spelled-out only on both ends.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of responses for Form A (scale) and for Form B (spelled-out). The distribution for a question with a scale tends to be better balanced than the distribution for a question with spelled-out choices.

Considering the results of comparisons between symmetrical and unsymmetrical scales and between a scale and spelled-out choices, the JGSS project team decided to use a symmetrical scale whose categories are spelled-out only on both ends for JGSS-2000.

Figure 6 Q: “How much satisfaction do you get from the following areas of life? Your non-work activities.” (All figures in %)

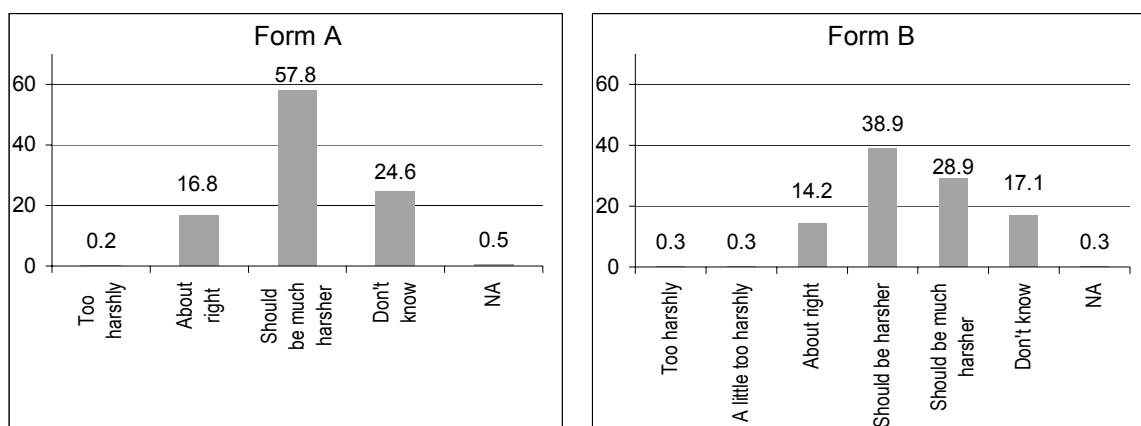


Although unsymmetrical scales tended to show a better-balanced distribution, the distribution for symmetrical scales was not especially skewed. In addition, symmetrical scales are easier to handle for statistical analyses than unsymmetrical scales.

4.6 Number of Choices: 3 choices or 5 choices

Figure 7 shows the distribution of responses for a question with three choices and for a question with five choices. The shapes of these two distributions are similar to each other. However, the proportion of “don’t know” is smaller for a question with five choices than for one with three choices (17.1% < 24.6%). Questions with five choices seem proper for the JGSS self-administered questionnaire.

Figure 7 Q: “Do you think the courts have dealt too harshly or not harshly enough with criminals in the past few years?” (All figures in %)



4.7 Inclusion of a Middle choice: 4 choices or 5 choices

In the GSS questionnaire, questions on opinions or attitudes are sometimes asked with four-point scales and sometimes asked with five-point scales including a middle point (“neither...nor...”). Figure 8 shows the distribution of responses for a question with five choices and for a question with four choices.

Being presented with five choices, almost half respondents have chosen the middle choice. While the proportion of non-responses does not differ by the inclusion of the middle choice, the proportion of the pros and cons differ substantially in some questions. Examining responses to questions regarding division of gender roles, the proportion of the approval to the disapproval tends to be larger for a question with five choices than one with four choices. Being presented with five choices, the proportion of the disapproval tends to be very small. Concerning questions on opinions or attitudes, presenting four choices without a middle choice seems proper for the JGSS self-administered questionnaire.

Figure 8 Q: “Without a doubt, a woman’s happiness lies in a marriage.”
(All figures in %)

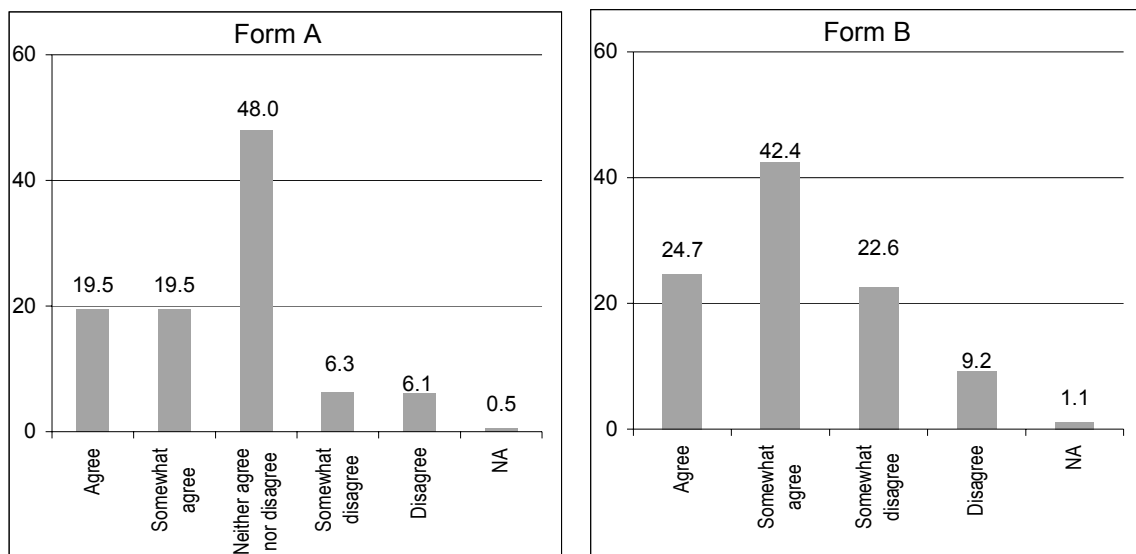
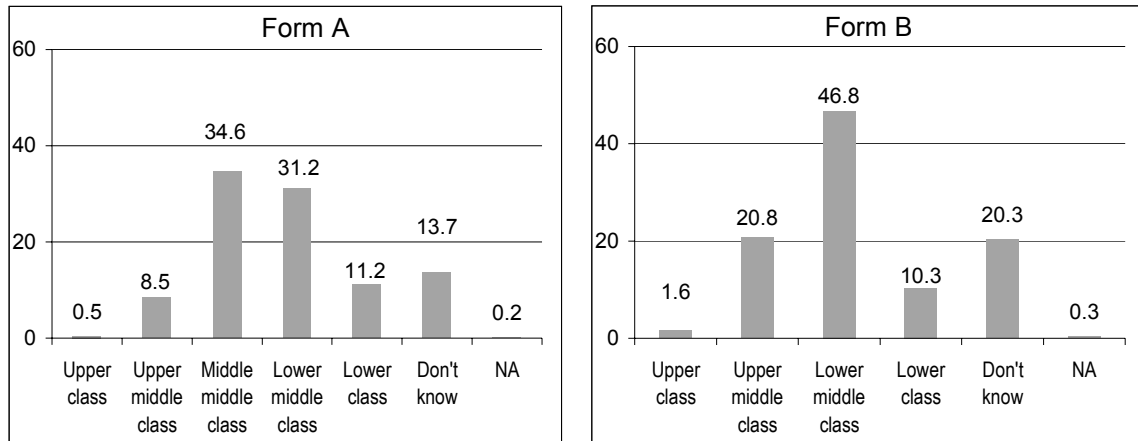


Figure 9 shows the distribution of responses for a question on a respondent’s identification with a certain social stratum. Without a middle category (“middle middle class”) the proportion of “don’t know” increases (20.3% > 13.7%). With the question of social stratum identification, presenting five choices including “middle of the middle” seems proper for the JGSS self-administered questionnaire.

Figure 9 Q: “If the following five categories are used to describe the Japanese society of today, which would you say you belong to?”(All figures in %)



4.8 Order of Presenting Choices

In the GSS questionnaires, choices are presented in decreasing order, such as from “heavy” to “light” or from “good” to “evil.” In order to examine the effect of ordering choices, we presented choices in decreasing order for Form A and in increasing order for Form B.

Figure 10 shows the distribution of responses for a question on the respondent’s subjective feeling of the tax burden. The proportion of the dominant response is further expanded when the dominant category comes first.

Figure 10 Q: “Do you think the amount of income tax you have to pay is high?” (All figures in %)

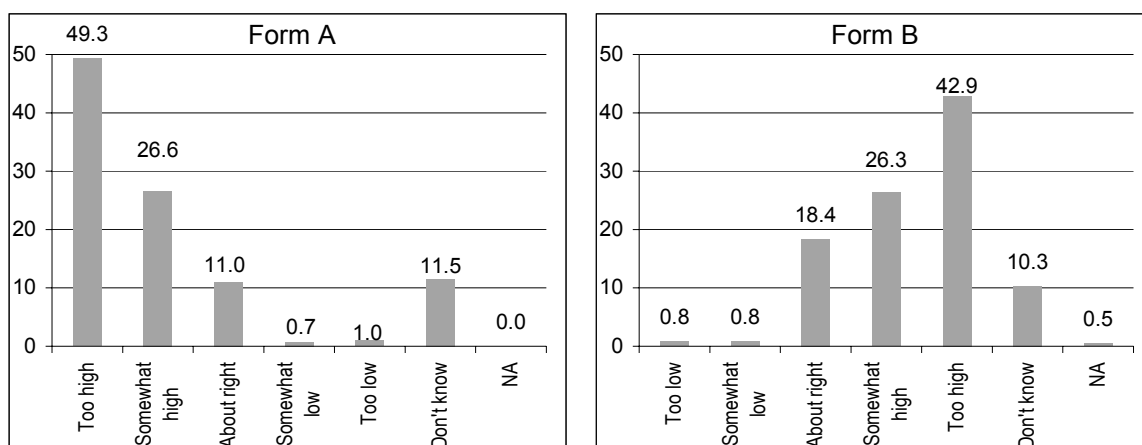


Figure 11 Q: “What do you think of human nature?” (All figures in %)

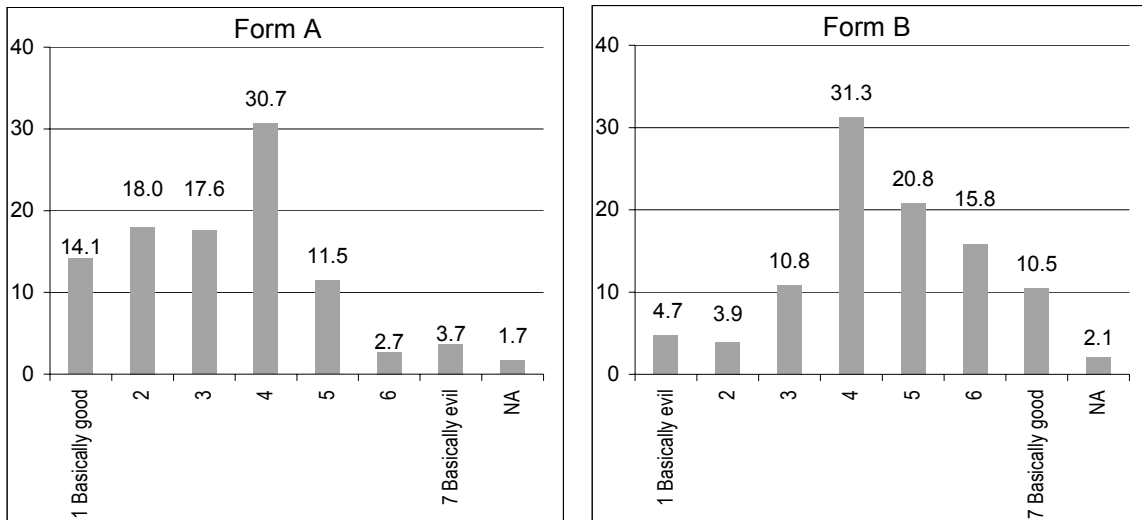
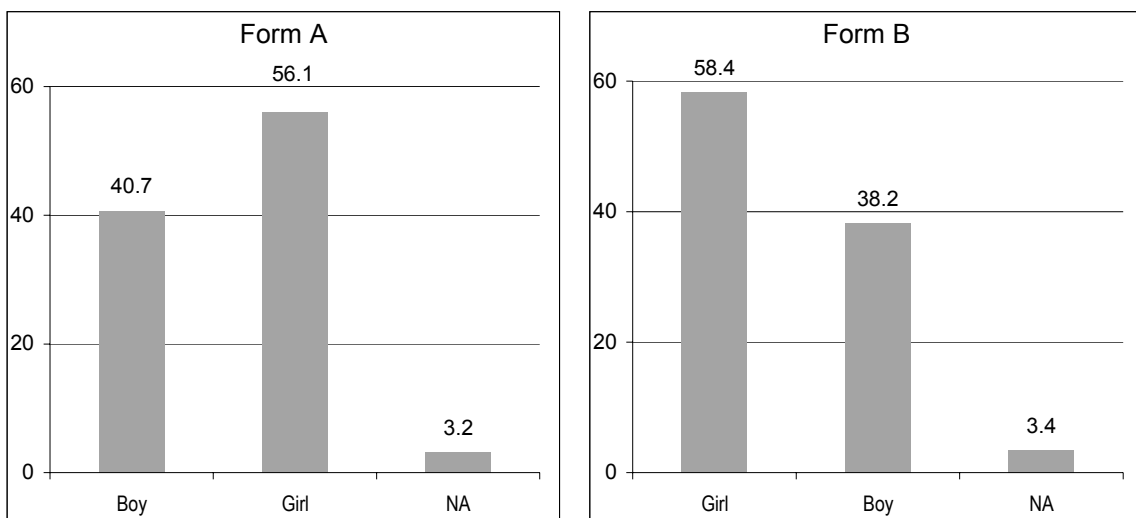


Figure 11 shows the distribution of responses for a question on the true character of the human being. The distribution of responses for a scale with decreasing order is skewed to the “good” side to a greater extent than the distribution for a scale with increasing order. It seems proper to present choices in increasing order (a dominant category comes last or in the rear) for the JGSS questionnaire.

Figure 12 shows the distribution of responses for a question on the ideal sex of a child, provided that one has only one child. The proportion of preferring a girl does not differ significantly by the order of presenting choices. In this case, considering the naturalness of the order, we decided to present “boy” first for JGSS-2000.

Figure 12 Q: “If you were to have only one child, would you prefer a boy or a girl (a girl or a boy)?” (All figures in %)



4.9 Multiple-choice or Open-ended

Religion is one of the central topics asked in the (American) GSS questionnaires. Considering the much smaller impact of religion on society and everyday life of the Japanese, we planned to include only a few questions regarding religion in the JGSS questionnaire. Previous studies show that a considerable number of Japanese people have a religion of the family even though they do not practice it at all. Therefore, it is necessary to ask respondents not only whether they have a religion or not, but also whether they have a religion of the family or not even if they do not practice it.

In the first and second pilot surveys, we examined the effect of the form of the question on responses. Both in Form A and Form B, we first asked the following question: “Do you follow a religion?” with choices of “Yes,” “Although not practiced, I have a family religion,” or “No.”

For those people who follow a religion or have a family religion, we asked respondents to circle the religion in a list in Form A⁷. In Form B we asked respondents to name the religion in an open-ended question. Whether the second question is a multiple-choice or an open-ended question did show a significant effect on the responses for the first question. While the proportion of “having a family religion” is smaller in Form B (open-ended) than in Form A (multiple-choice), that of “no” is larger in Form B than in Form A. This kind of effect might not appear if we ask this question in interview. However, asking one’s religion is a delicate question, therefore it should be included in the self-administered questionnaire.

We decided to use an open-ended question for one’s religion. It is because the proportion of “no” in the JGSS pilot surveys was not necessarily smaller compared with results of other surveys and we can obtain more information with an open-ended question.

4.10 Use of a Frequency or a Relative Scale

The division of housework between spouses has been measured in many different ways, such as asking the amount of time spent doing housework by each spouse,

7 Which religion is it? 1=Buddhism 2=Shintoism 3=Christianity 4=Other (please give details)

asking the frequency of housework done by each spouse, or asking the proportion of sharing between spouses directly. The last scale was used in the GSS questionnaire.

In the two pilot surveys, we examined the difference in results between measuring with a frequency scale and measuring with a relative scale. In both Form A and B, we asked respondents about their frequency of doing housework (cooking evening meals, doing laundry, shopping for groceries and cleaning the house respectively). Then in Form A, we asked the respondent about the frequency of housework done by the respondent's spouse. In Form B, we asked the respondent about the proportion of sharing with six categories (exclusively by wife, mostly by wife but sometimes by husband, sharing equally, mostly by husband but sometimes by wife, exclusively by husband, or by others).

There was no difference in a respondent's frequency of doing housework between two forms. Results from frequency scales and from a relative scale are roughly equivalent to each other. For the JGSS-2000, we decided to use a frequency scale for the respondent and for the respondent's spouse, since this scale is more informative than a relative scale.

4.11 Conclusion on Wording and Scales for JGSS questionnaire

In conclusion, we made the following decisions for the JGSS-2000.

- a) Not to use the word "strongly," but use the word "somewhat" if necessary.
- b) Not to include "depends" in a list of response choices.
- c) For questions regarding the laws, the choice of "don't know" is included in a list of choices; for other questions, "don't know" is excluded.
- d) Use a symmetrical scale whose ends categories are spelled-out.
- e) Use a five-point scale rather than a three-point scale.
- f) For questions on opinions and attitudes, use a four-point scale without a middle choice; for a question on social stratum identification, include a middle choice ("middle of the middle").
- g) Present a dominant category last or in the rear.
- h) Use an open-ended question (not a multiple-choice question) for asking religion.
- i) Use a frequency scale for asking about the respondent's and spouse's performance of housework, rather than a relative scale.

Therefore, the scales we use in the JGSS are not always comparable with those used in the GSS.

5 Further Issues

Thus far, I have described methodological experiments JGSS team had conducted prior to the first full-scale national survey, JGSS-2000. Like other teams who conduct social surveys on a regular basis, JGSS team also faced new issues which are caused by changes in a society in the last few years. These developments include the introduction of digital network of Register of Names and Addresses, and the enforcement of the Protection of Personal Information. They have aroused public awareness concerning the possible risks contained in the handling of personal information. Meanwhile we hear news after news about accidental/intentional leakage of personal information and its misuse, which further stir up our anxiety.

People are becoming more cautious to provide personal information on themselves and their households, and they have become more reluctant in participating in surveys which seemed to have contributed much to the decline of survey response rates.

In order to alleviate the decline in response rates and hopefully to reverse the trend, some changes have been made to JGSS-2005 in sampling procedures and in instructions to the interviewers when and how many times to visit the respondents. We are also trying to ease the anxiety of the respondents and urging them to participate in the survey by elaborating both in our home page and a letter to each respondent the genuine purpose of the survey, and the project policies and the safeguard measures on the private information of the respondents.

Another big issue the JGSS team is facing is about the scales. As mentioned in the previous paper, JGSS will conduct East Asian Social Survey in 2006 (EASS-2006) jointly with KGSS (Korean General Social Survey) team, TSCS (Taiwan Social Change Survey) team and China GSS team. The theme of the survey was set as the "family." While there have been heated discussions on selection of questions among four teams, the most problematic issue has been the issue of scales. As described in 4.1 of this paper, Japanese respondents tend to avoid choosing a category with wordings that express extremity of sentiments, such as "strongly agree." In addition as described in 4.7 of this paper, Japanese respondents tend to choose a middle category. These phenomena do not seem to appear in Korea and Taiwan. JGSS as well as other three teams have been trying hard to contrive certain types of scales with which respondents from four countries/regions can express their attitude appropriately. In order to test scales with different number of points and different labels for each point, JGSS has conducted another methodological experiment in July 2005.

We will report methodological changes and their effects as well as results of scale experiments in the next available opportunity.

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