

Echoes of the Lost Decades: Aging Society and Tangping movement in China and Korea

失われた10年の響き：
日本の事例を通して見る中国と韓国の未来

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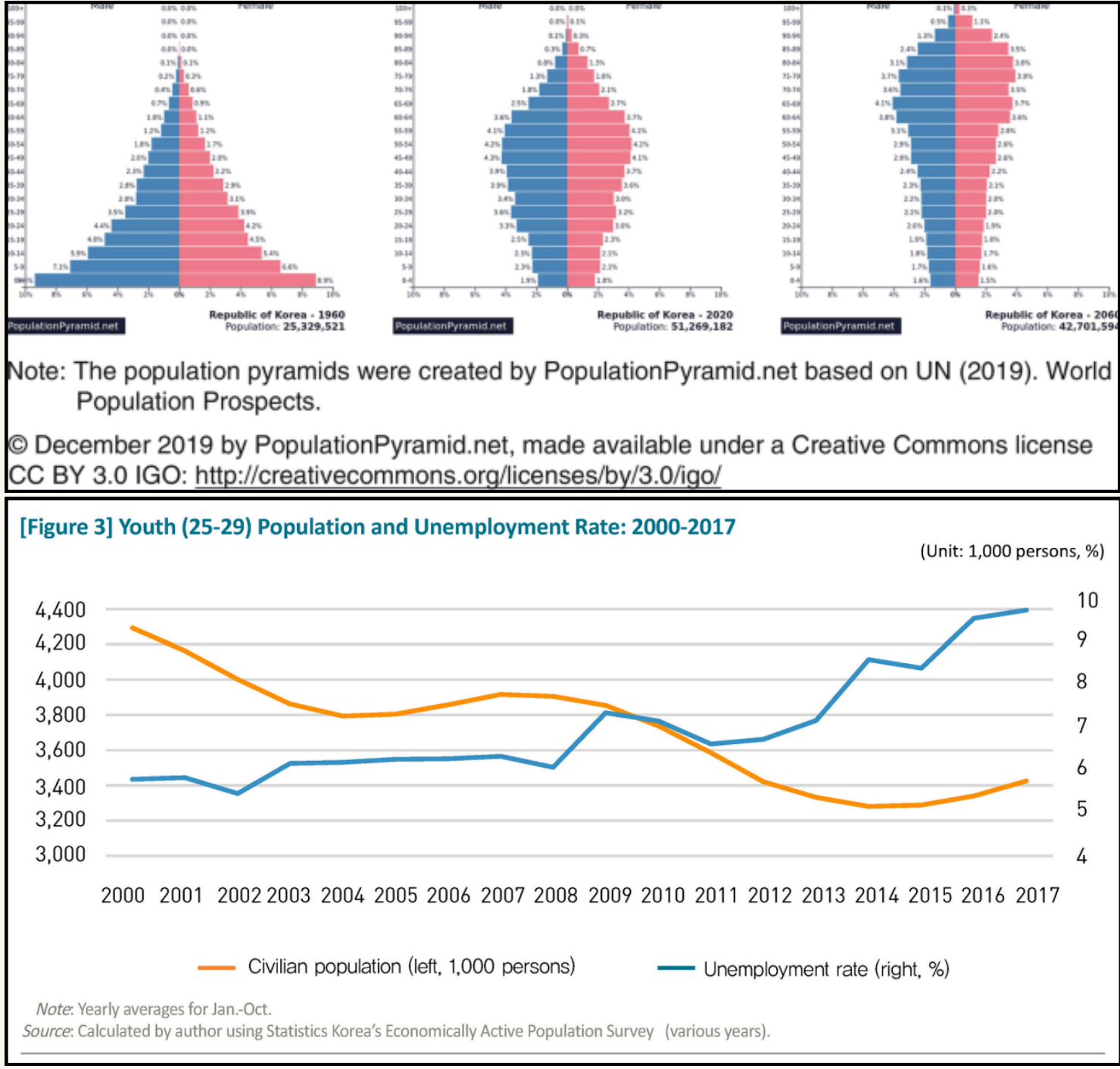
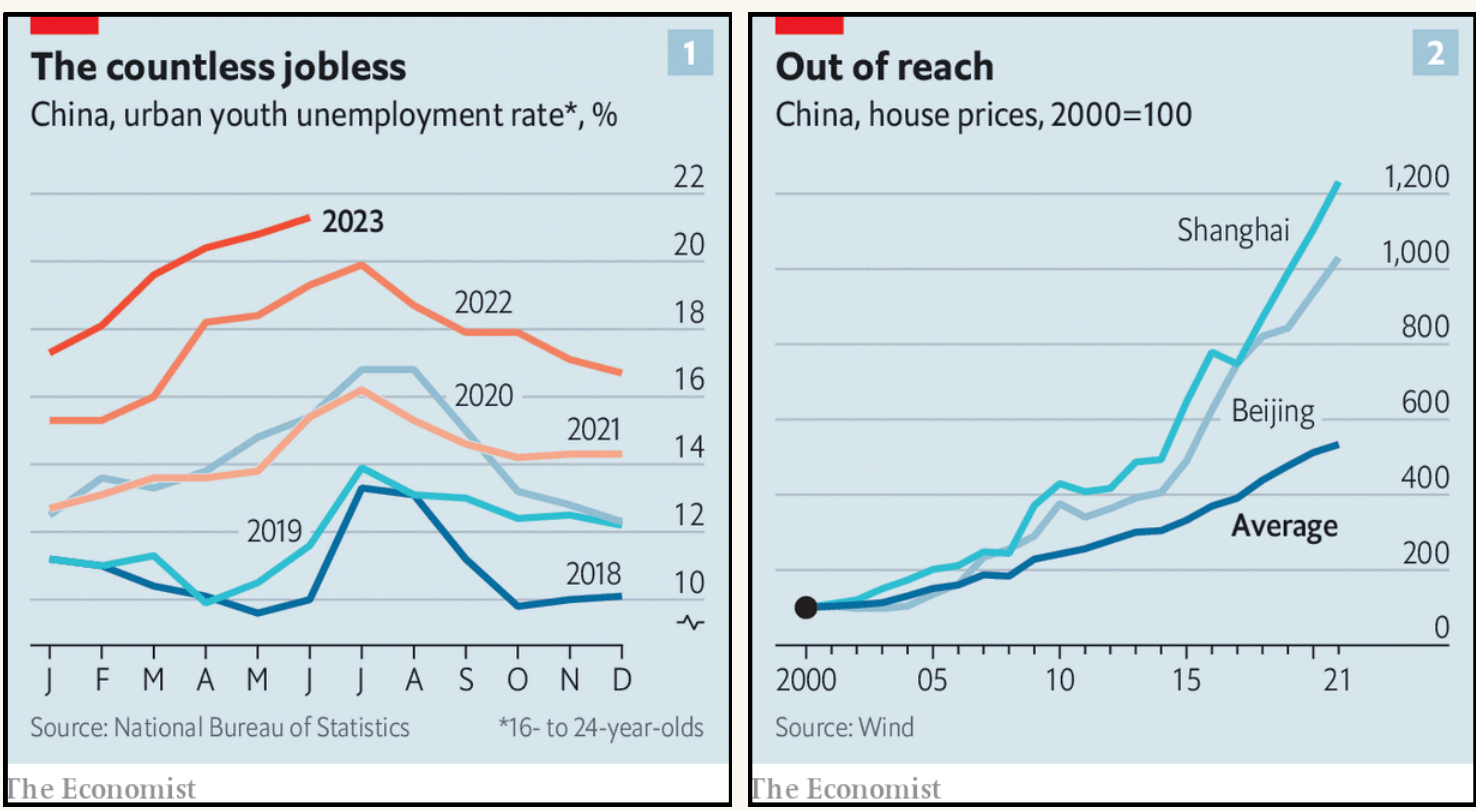
Research Question

What lessons can China and South Korea learn from Japan’s experiences with youth unemployment and aging population, and how can these countries apply those lessons to address their own future socio-economic challenges?

韓国と中国は、日本の若者失業や人口高齢化の経験から何を学ぶことができ、それをどのように活かして自国の将来の社会経済的課題に対処できるのでしょうか？

Current Situation

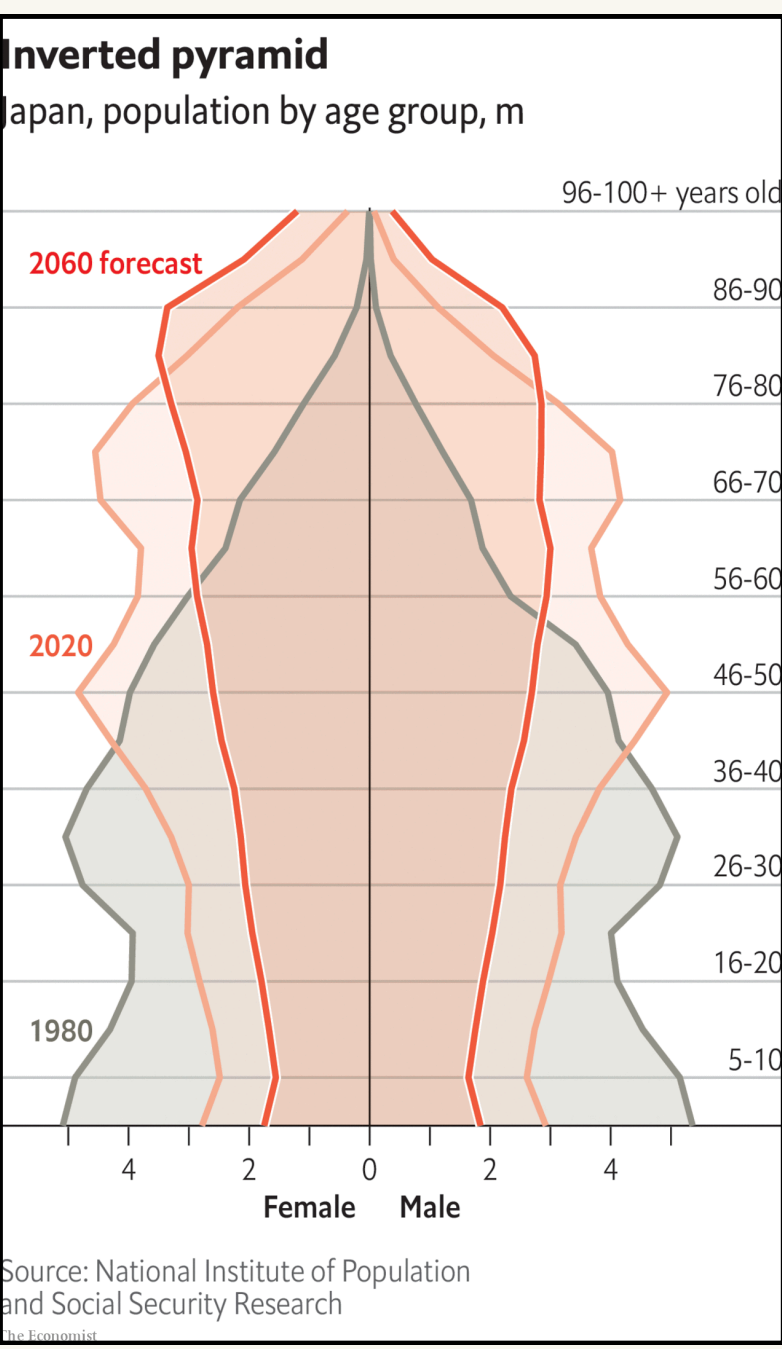
“Tang ping”(“lying flat”) in Chinese society is usually characterized by a “negative outlook on work” or “low desire for life”. Instead of pursuing a traditional lifestyle, which includes actively pursuing goals such as high-paying jobs, real estate, and even marriage and childbearing, some young people choose to pursue physical and mental balance and freedom by lowering their life goals and workloads.



S.Korea is witnessing the lowest birth rate and youth unemployment, having the highest suicide rates in OECD.

韓国は、出生率が最低であり、若者の失業率も高い一方で、OECD加盟国の中で最も高い自殺率を記録しています。

Case Study: Why Japan?



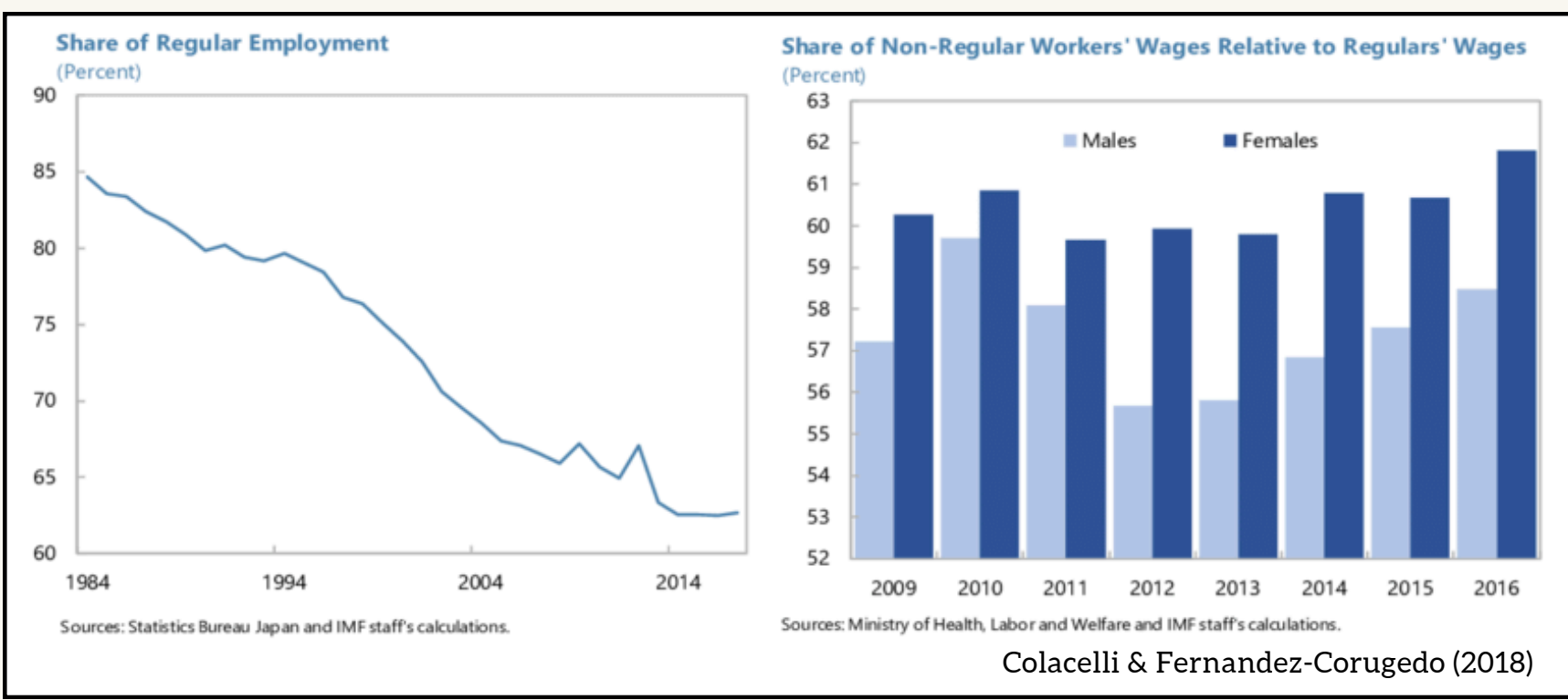
Japan has already experienced key modern societal challenges such as low birth rates, population aging, and youth unemployment. Japan's bubble economy collapse, long-term economic stagnation, and rapid aging since the 1990s closely mirror the issues now facing South Korea and China.

日本はすでに低出生率、人口の高齢化、若者の失業率といった現代社会の主要な課題を経験しています。1990年代以降の日本のバブル経済の崩壊、長期的な経済停滞、急速な高齢化は、現在韓国と中国が直面している問題と密接に重なります。

As women entered the labor market, maternal absence became more common. Under Prime Minister Koizumi, economic reforms expanded non-regular employment, causing job insecurity for the youth. In 2007, as Japan became a super-aged society, the burden on the pension and welfare systems increased. A mismatch between education and labor market demands also led to highly educated youth in low-wage jobs, contributing to the rise of NEETs and freeters.

女性が労働市場に参入するにつれて、母親の不在が一般的になりました。小泉首相の下で、経済改革は非正規雇用を拡大し、若者の雇用不安を引き起こしました。

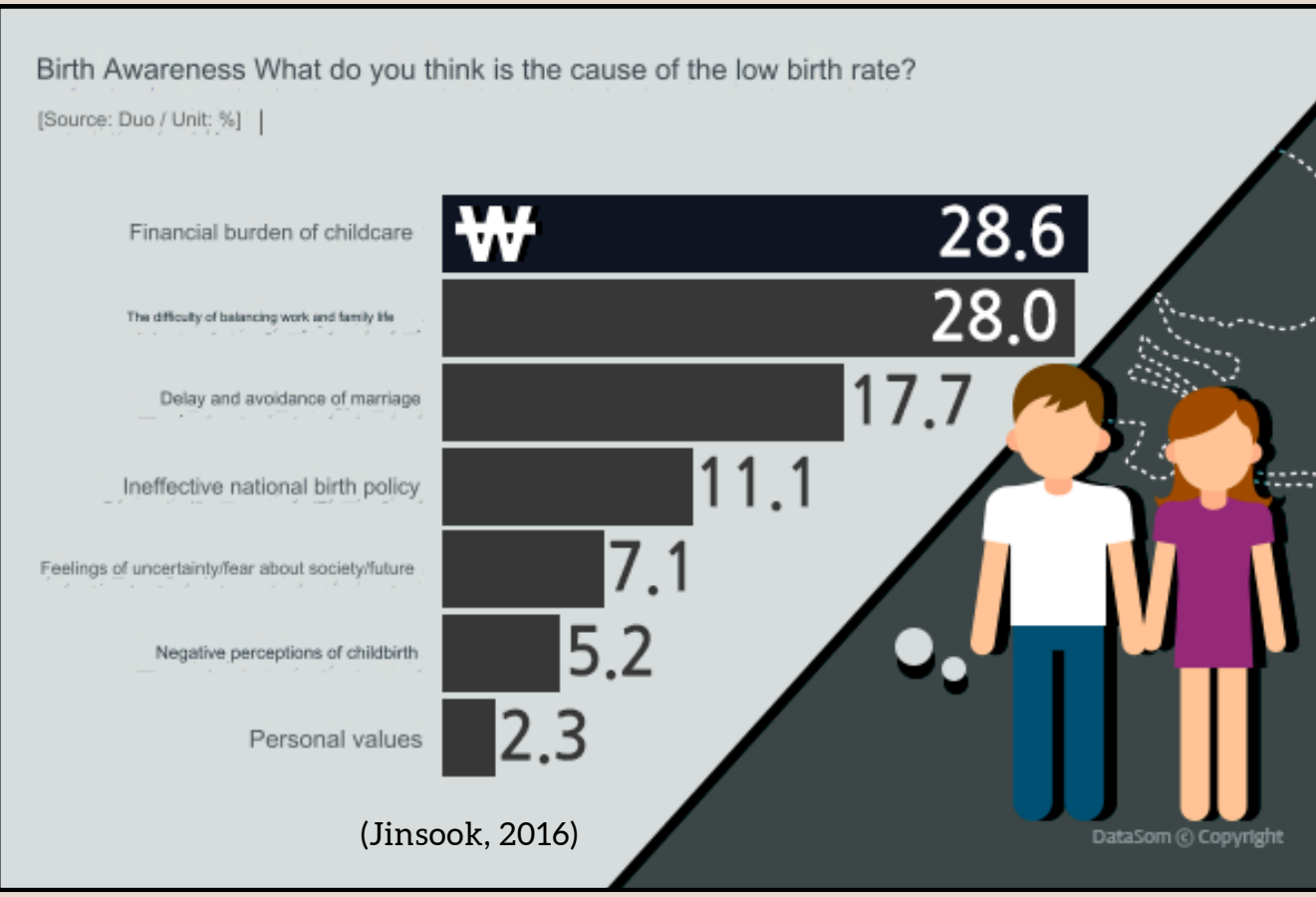
2007年には、日本が超高齢社会になると、年金と福祉制度への負担が増加しました。また、教育と労働市場の需要のミスマッチにより、高学歴の若者が低賃金の仕事に就くことが増え、NEETやフリーターの増加に寄与しました。



Analysis

As Japan's experience has shown, simply offering small financial incentives for childbirth is not enough to solve the low birth rate issue. A workplace culture hostile to childcare, along with incomplete parental leave and childcare systems, has led many young people to give up on starting a family (Takao, 2024).

日本の経験が示すように、出産に対する小さな金銭的インセンティブを提供するだけでは、少子化問題を解決するには不十分です。育児に対して敵対的な職場文化や不十分な育児休暇および育児制度は、多くの若者が家庭を持つことをあきらめる原因となっています（高尾, 2024）。



According to the survey on 2016 on Korea, the biggest obstacle for starting a family was 1: Financial burden and 2: The difficulty of balancing between raising a child and work. 2016年に行われた韓国に関する調査によると、家庭を持つ上で最大の障害は、1. 経済的負担、2. 子育てと仕事の両立の難しさでした。

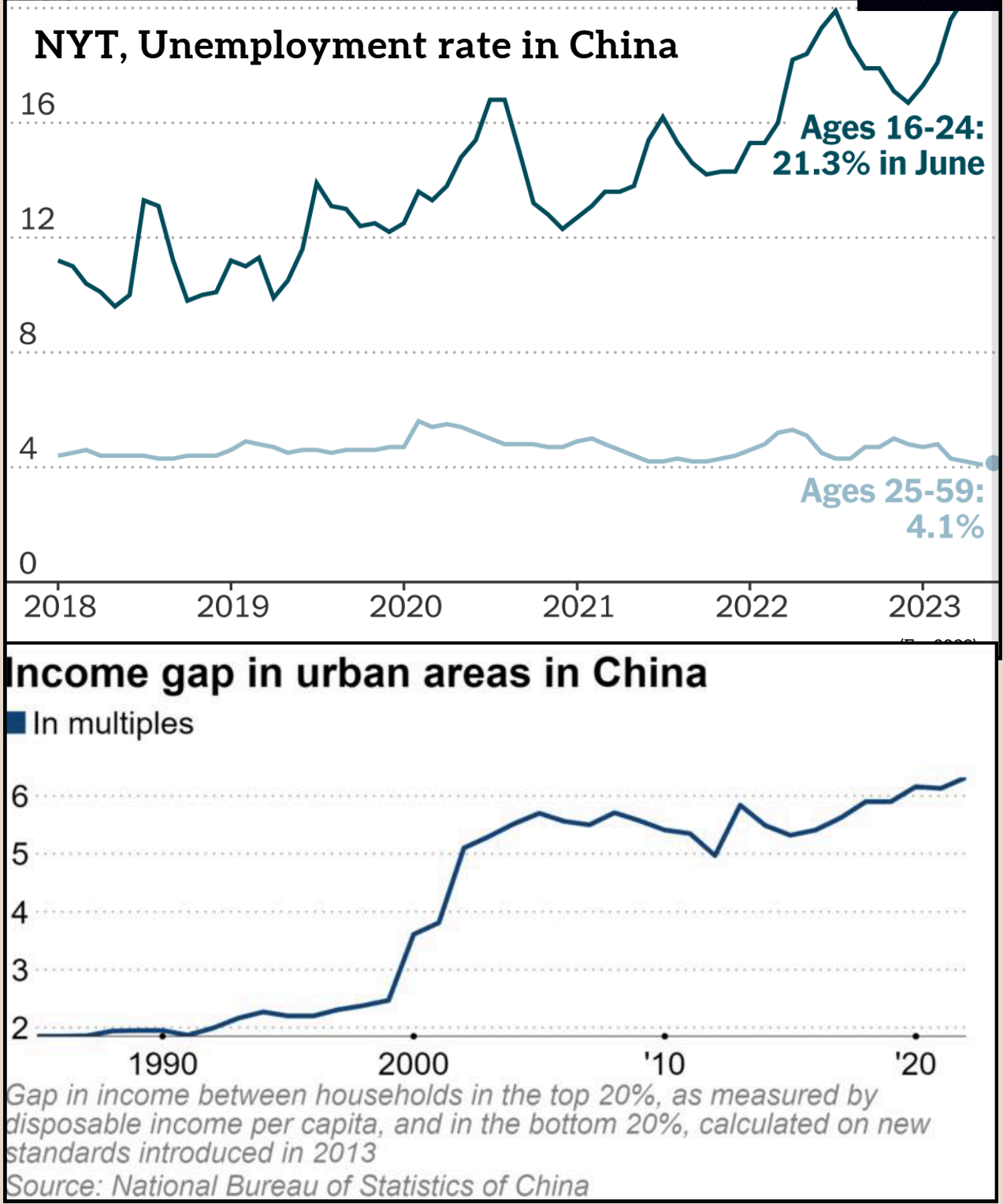
Policies that focus on increasing short-term employment and rely heavily on the use of non-regular workers have driven many young people to give up on stable jobs and having a family.

短期雇用の増加に焦点を当て、非正規労働者の利用に大きく依存する政策は、多くの若者が安定した職に就くことや家庭を持つことをあきらめる原因となっています。

Before Covid-19, the rapid development of China brought unprecedented economic opportunities to many young people, but it was accompanied by high cost of living, fierce competition for jobs, and surging life pressure.

During this, the emergence of “lying flat” and “Sang-ness culture” on the Internet was a clear sign that people were in constant anxiety and pain (Zhang & Li, 2022).

Excessive working hours and relative deprivation of the individual lead some people to rebel against excessive social demands by mildly “lying down” rather than striving to fulfill traditional social standards (Zheng et al., 2022).



Conclusion

Like Japan, China relies heavily on non-regular and low-stability jobs, which often lack benefits and career growth. The model can contribute to an **unstable labor market** and discourage long-term economic planning . Therefore, to avoid a rise in **NEET populations**, China could look to Japan’s expanded support for technological innovation. By investing startup incentives and entrepreneurship programs , young people will have alternative pathways beyond traditional employment, fostering a sense of agency and opportunity. Additionally, firms may adopt policies that **ease workplace stress**, such as flexible work hours, improved work-life balance, and comprehensive mental health support.

Before the economy enters a prolonged recession, it is vital to **reduce the overreliance on non-regular employment**, **create more pathways for transitioning to stable, regular job positions**, and **enhance support for startups leveraging new technologies**. Alongside these efforts, it is essential to expand **access to childcare**, **improve parental leave policies**, and **cultivate a more family-friendly workplace culture**.

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