

HumanProgress



In the decades following the Meiji Restoration, Japan underwent one of history's most rapid periods of progress.

Within a single generation, the insular, feudal society transformed into a modern, industrial state. For the typical Japanese person, life changed beyond recognition.

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Securing basic sustenance took up vast amounts of our ancestors' time.

In England in the 1200s, for example, earning the money to buy a bushel of wheat required over 35 hours of unskilled labor.

In 2022, it took just 50 minutes.

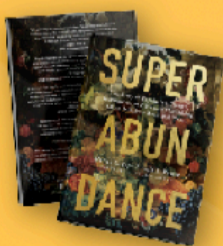
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Back in the 1800s, millions of people starved to death every decade.

Famines peaked in the 1870s with more than 20 million deaths. In the 1880s, the least hungry decade in the 19th century, close to 3 million people starved to death worldwide.

A smaller number of people died in the troubled 2000s, the hungriest decade in recent memory. The difference is even more stark after accounting for population growth in the past two centuries.

The average annual rate of famine deaths per 100,000 people dropped from 19.5 in the 1880s to 4.3 in the 2000s. Between 2010 and 2016, it was only 0.5, which amounts to a 40-fold decline from the 1880s.



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