Japan – Debunking the Myths!

Inflation, Earnings Growth, and Supply/Demand

MUFG Asset Management March 2024

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Summary

Japanese Equities are Attractive from Structural Viewpoints

Inflation and Labor Markets

In Japan, non-regular employment has been expanding for the past two decades in labor markets, fueled mainly by women, but this is reaching its limit. The stage may be set for price increases accompanied by wage growth, leading to an economy with greater overall growth potential.

Corporate Earnings

- ✓ In Japan, corporate earnings are likely to continue improving as management focuses resources on core businesses, with managers realizing the importance of capital costs.
- ✓ Japanese companies have improved their corporate governance, as they started paying attention to shareholder interests due to the unwinding of cross-shareholding over the last two decades.

Supply/Demand Conditions

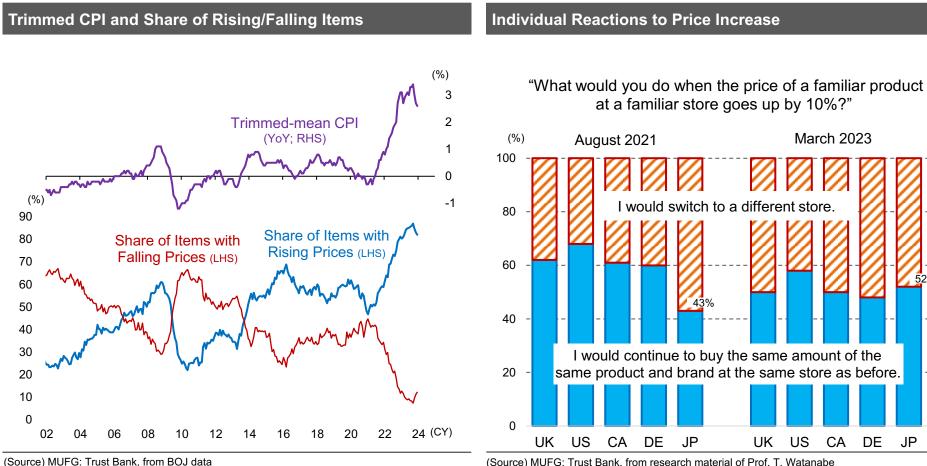
- ✓ Domestic business corporations and retail investors became net buyers of Japanese equities in 2021 and 2022, basically offsetting foreign investor's recent selling.
- Significant enhancement to NISA may accelerate the shift of household financial assets from savings to investment.

Appendix: U.S. Equities, Japanese Economy, BOJ, FOREX and Small Caps



Inflation: Japanese Companies Revise Pricing Strategies

- Among the individual components of Japan's consumer price index (CPI), items with prices rising in YoY terms comprise 82.0% of the total in December, which exceeds the share of those whose prices are falling (12.1%).
- Companies have started to revise their pricing strategies in response to rising raw material and labor costs, because individuals have recently become more tolerant of price increases.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from BOJ data

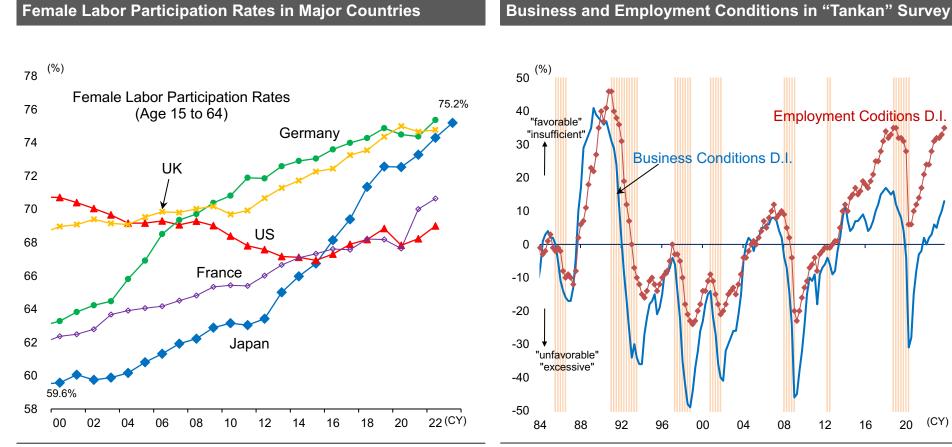
(Note) Rising/falling CPI based on % of items that are rising or falling compared to the same month of the previous year; data as of December 2023.

(Note) Question is "What would you do when the price of a familiar product at a familiar store goes up by 10%?"



Inflation: Significant Changes in the Labor Market

- In Japan, the labor participation rate for women in working-age (ages between 15 to 64) rose from 59.6% in 2000 to 75.2% in 2023, which is higher than those in the U.S. and France. Improved compensation packages appear to be a necessary precondition for a further increase in the participation.
- Japanese companies have been facing persistent labor shortages over the past several years.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from OECD data

(Note) Data as of 2023 for Japan and as of 2022 for the other countries.

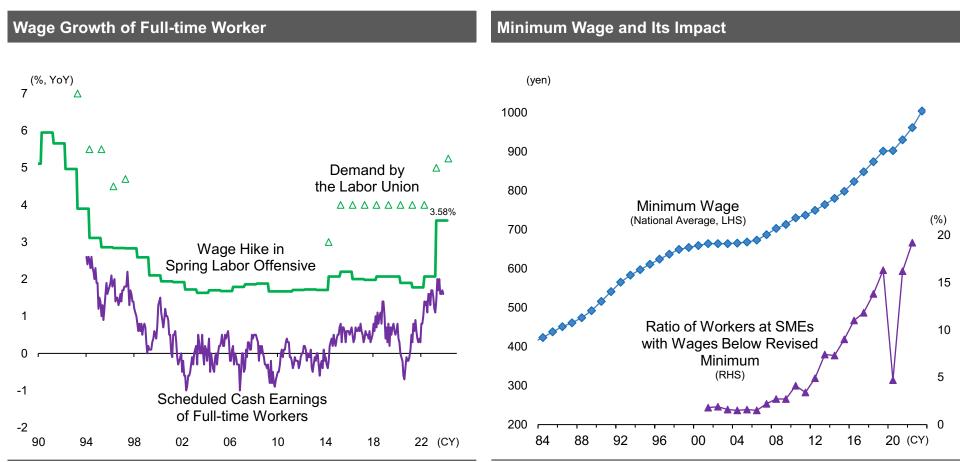
(Note) Universe is all industries, all enterprises; shaded areas indicate economic recessions; data as of December 2023.



⁽Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from BOJ data

Inflation: Wage Growth in a Tight Labor Market

- The wage hike for 2023 in spring labor offensive was 3.58%, its highest level since 1993, and the scheduled salaries for full-time workers have been increasing, mainly because of tight labor market conditions.
- The national minimum wage was increased by 4.5% to 1,004 yen in 2023. Over the last decade, cash wage growth for full-time workers has been higher at SMEs than at large companies.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from JTUC-RENGO, MIC data

(Note) Wage growth includes regular salary increases; data as of November 2023.

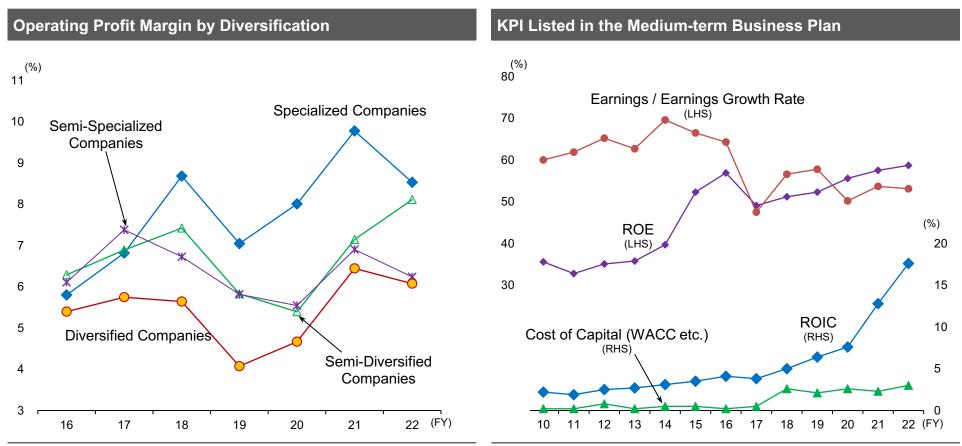
(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from MHLW data

(Note) Ratio impacted is the percentage of workers with wages below the minimum wage after its revision; SMEs are companies with 30 or fewer employees; data as of 2023.



Corporate Earnings: Diversified Companies have Lower Profit Margin, but ...

- In Japan, companies with diversified businesses have relatively low profit margins. A diversification strategy that does not involve exiting low-margin businesses should be problematic.
- However, an increasing number of companies are paying attention to capital efficiency recently, leading to earnings improvements through the restructuring of their business portfolios.



⁽Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from FactSet

(Note) Universes are MSCI Japan Index companies; companies are classified based on sales composition ratio other than the largest business by 10%, 30% and 50%.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Life Insurance Association

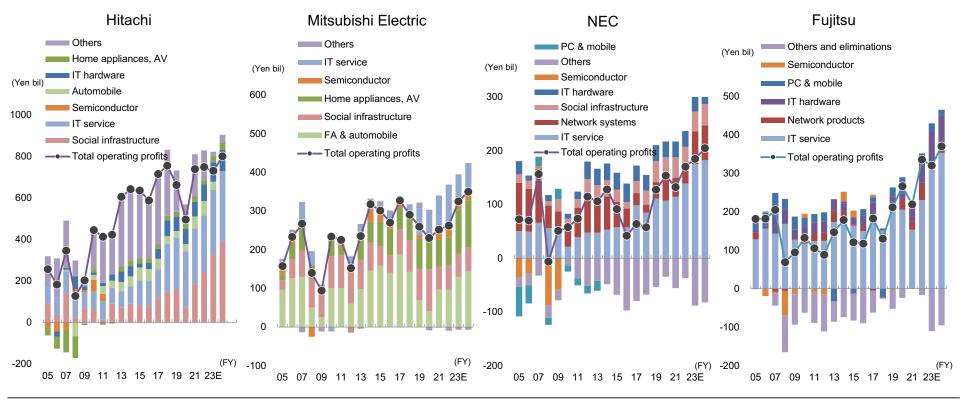
(Note) Universe is 1,200 listed companies with largest market caps; data as of FY2022.



Corporate Earnings: Focus on Core Business

- In Japan, in addition to steady efforts with rationalization and headcount reductions, business portfolio revision and industry realignments have also contributed to higher profit margins.
- In the 1990s, Hitachi and other major electronics firms had considerable overlap between businesses such as consumer electronics and semiconductors. Now, each of these firms has focused on different business areas.

Business Portfolio of Major Electronics Companies in Japan



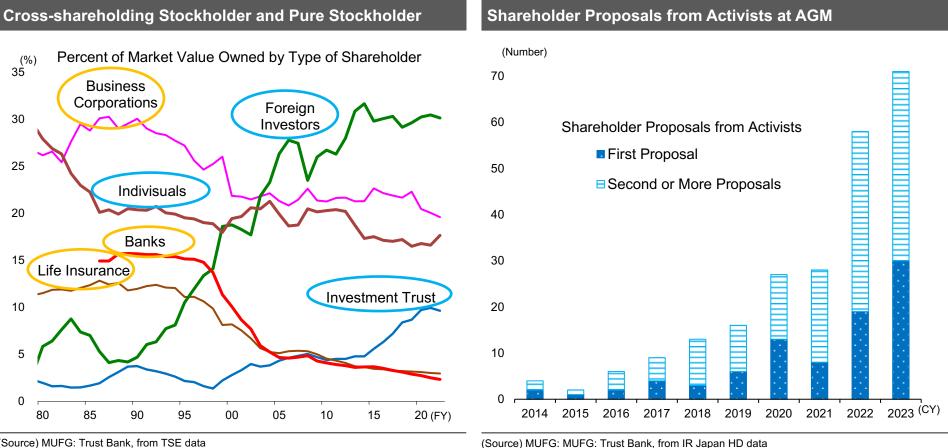
(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Nomura Securities

(Note) Figures after FY2023 are Nomura estimate.



Corporate Earnings: Sound Pressures from Pure Shareholders

- After the unwinding of cross shareholdings over the last two decades, sound pressures from pure shareholders force management at Japanese companies to pay more attention to the interests of minority shareholders.
- Activist shareholder proposals are no longer unusual occurrences for companies facing problems such as excessive levels of cash or securities.



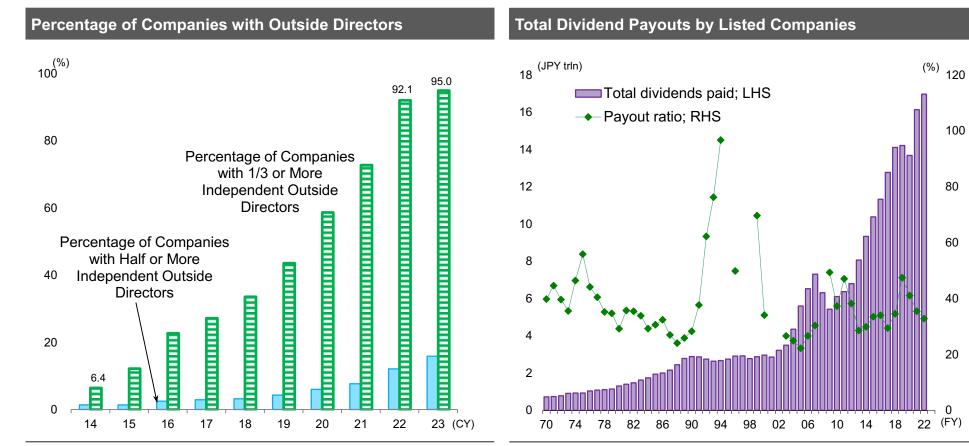
(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from TSE data (Note) Data as of FY2022.

(Source) MUFG: MUFG: Trust Bank, from IR Japan HD da (Note) Data as of 2023.



Corporate Earnings: Improving Corporate Governance

- Proportion of Japanese companies with one third or more independent outside directors have increased from 6.4% in 2014 to 95.0% in 2023.
- Japanese companies increased dividends significantly from FY2000 to FY2022, with the total amount of dividends paid rising at an annual rate of more than 8%.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from TSE data

(Note) Universe based on TSE Prime and TSE1 listed firms; data as of July 2023.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Mitsubishi UFJ MS Securities, Toyo Keizai data (Note) Universe based on TSE1 and Prime Market stocks; FY2020 figures based on DPS forecasts and the number of common shares o/s (excluding treasury stock); data as of FY2022.



100

80

60

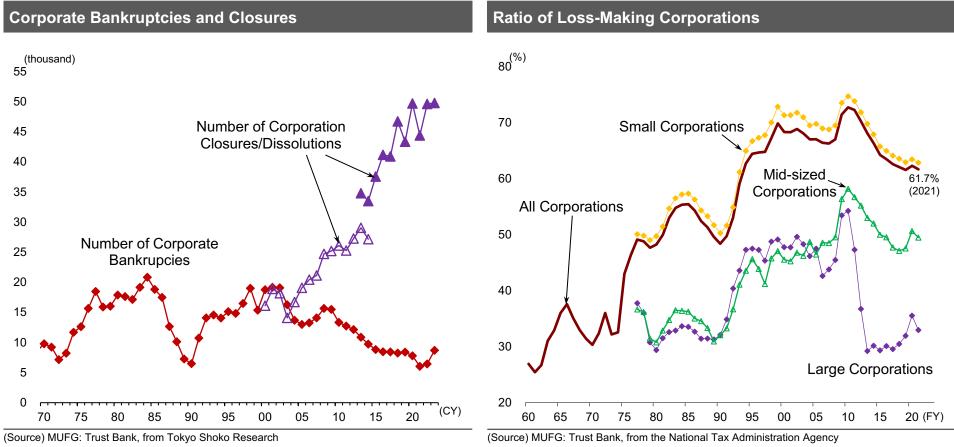
40

20

0

Corporate Earnings: Business Closures and Industrial Consolidation

- Looking at unlisted SMEs, while the number of corporate bankruptcies has remained at a low level, the number of business closures and dissolutions has significantly increased over the last decade.
- The ratio of loss-making corporation hit its peak in 2012 and has gradually decreased. There is a possibility that excessive competition in domestic industries will be corrected.



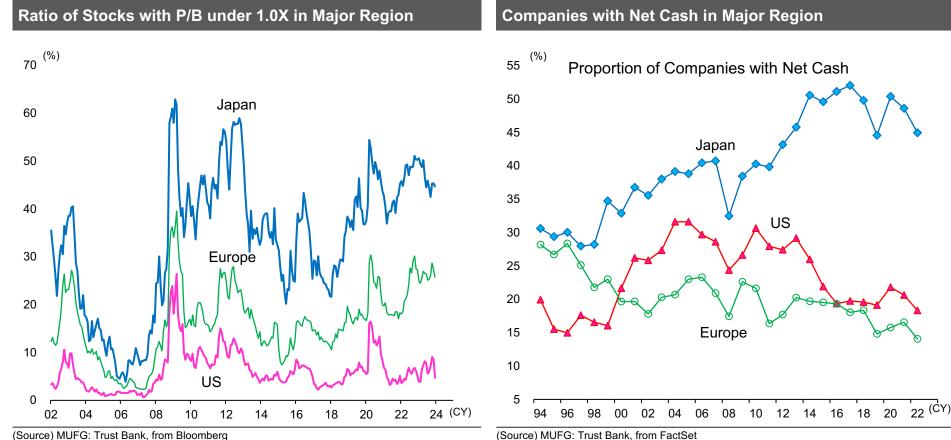
(Note) Number of corporate suspension/dissolution is counted differently up to 2012; data as of 2023.

(Note) Total number of corporations is 2.85 million in FY2021.



Requests by TSE for Cost of Capital-Conscious Management

- The TSE requested companies with price-to-book ratio below one to improve capital efficiency in March 2023, after restructured market segments to Prime, Standard, and Growth markets in April 2022.
- Japanese companies have been criticized for their conservative capital policies over the years, but the ratio of net cash companies has recently reached its peak.



⁽Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Bloomberg

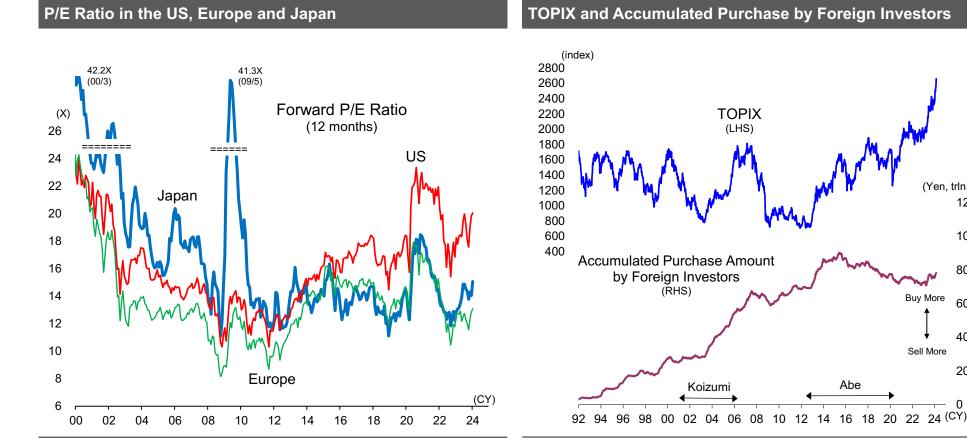
(Note) Universe is companies included in S&P500 for the U.S., STOXX600 for Europe and TOPIX500 for Japan; data as of December 2023.

(Note) Universe is companies included in MSCI USA, MSCI Europe and MSCI Japan Index (excluding financials); data as of 2022.



Supply/Demand: Japanese Equities are Attractively Valued

- Japanese equities had higher P/E than U.S. and European peers by the beginning of last decade, but have lower P/E than U.S. peers recently.
- Foreign investors had been net sellers of Japanese equities from 2015 to the beginning of the last year, and domestic investors had absorbed their net selling.



⁽Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from FactSets

(Note) Universe is companies included in MSCI USA, MSCI Europe and MSCI Japan Index; data as of January 2024.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from TSE data

(Note) Purchase amount is accumulated value since the beginning of 1990; data as of February 16, 2024.



(Yen, trln)

120

100

80

60

40

20

0

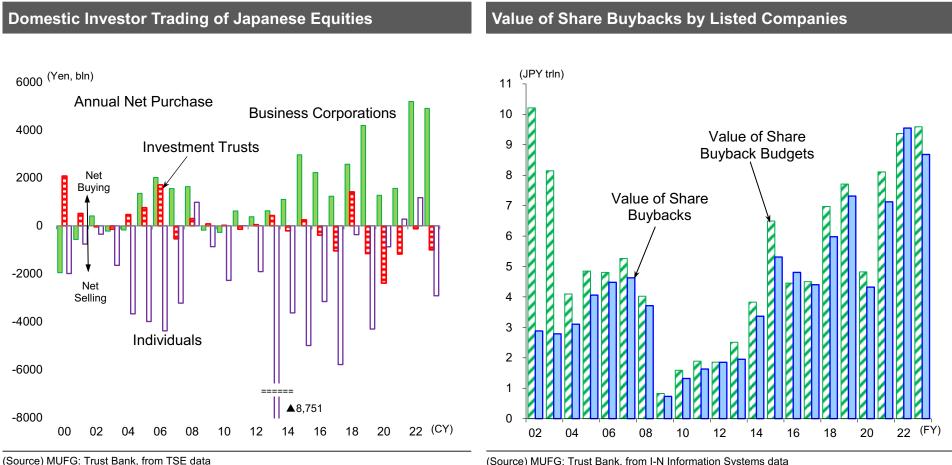
Buy More

Sell More

Supply/Demand: Domestic Buyers Absorb Foreign Selling

Net buying by business corporations, conducting share buybacks, amounted to ¥5.19 trillion and ¥4.90 trillion in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

■ The value of share buyback implementation reached above 8 trillion yen in FY2022 and FY2023.



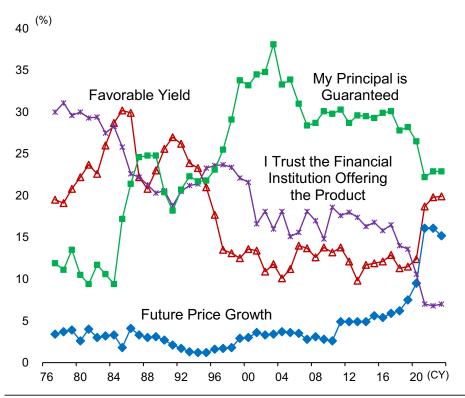
(Note) Data as of 2023.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from I-N Information Systems data (Note) Figures for 2023 are based on calendar year.



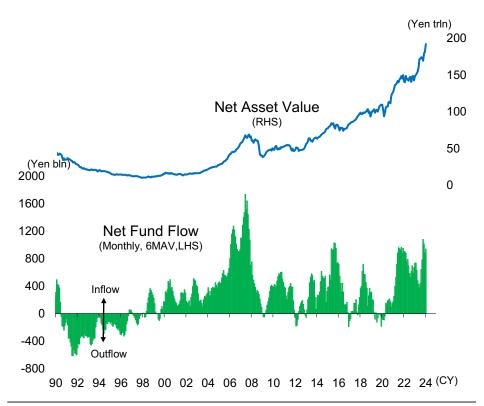
Supply/Demand: Greater Interest in Risk Asset Investment among Individuals

- Since 2019, there has been a clear increase in the number of respondents who would say their priority is on capital gains ("future price growth") when selecting a financial product.
- Annual inflows into equity investment trusts have totaled more than JPY8trn since 2021. Individuals, becoming aware of inflation, have shown greater interest in securities investments for the purpose of asset formation.



Financial Product Selection Criteria of Households

Fund Inflows into Publicly Offered Equity Investment Trusts



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Investment Trusts Association data

(Note) Net flows are inflow less cancellation and redemption amounts (excluding BOJ ETF purchase); 6 month moving average; data as of January 2024.



⁽Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Central Council for Financial Services Information data (Nots) In the survey, there are other choice such as "easy to cash in" and "I can deposit and withdraw small amounts if needed"; data as of 2023.

Supply/Demand: Significant Enhancement to NISA

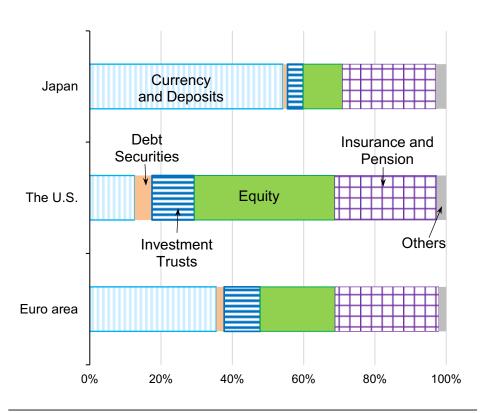
- The Kishida Cabinet decided on a major expansion of NISA to shift household financial assets from savings to investment, including an indefinite tax-exempt holding period and an increase in investment limits.
- In Japan, individuals hold more than half of their financial assets in cash and deposits, and there is a high possibility that they will shift their assets to stocks and other securities in the future.

New Schemes after January 2024 Growth Quata **Tsumitate Quaua** Type of NISA Annual limits JPY 2,400,000 JPY 1,200,000 Combination allowed? Yes. You can use both simultaneously Period of tax benefits No limits No limits Lifetime limits JPY 18.000.000 (Growth Quata limit: 12,000,000) Recycle of limits Allowed (If you sell, that amounts free up limits) Listed stocks, ETFs, Reits, FSA selected investment Investment options and investment trusts; trusts and ETFs Ristrictions will apply

NISA (Nippon Individual Savings Account) Schemes

	Current Schemes						
Type of NISA	General NISA	Tsumitate NISA					
Annual limits	JPY 1,200,000	JPY 400,000					
Combination allowed?	No. You need to choose either of them						
Period of tax benefits	5 years	20 years					
Lifetime limits	JPY 6,000,000	JPY 8,000,000					
Recycle of limits	Not allowed						
Investment options	Listed stocks, ETFs, Reits, and investment trusts	FSA selected investment trusts and ETFs					





(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from BOJ

(Note) Figures show the percentage of total financial assets; data as of March 2023.

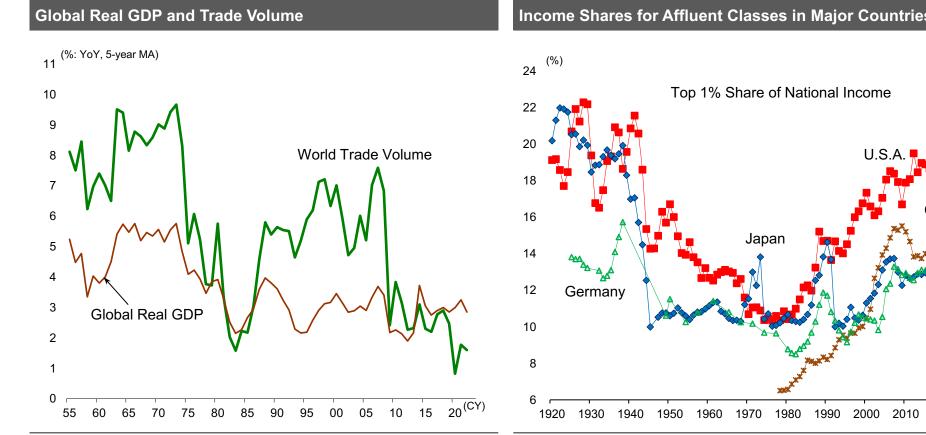
(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from FSA and Fidelity Japan

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Global Economy: Return of the Inflation Era?

- Sluggish growth in international trade since the global financial crisis (GFC) and expansionary fiscal policies among major economies may lead to gradual inflation in the long term.
- Income disparities appear to have reached socially and politically unacceptable levels in some major countries. Therefore, narrowing the income gap has become a crucial objective for economic policy.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from WTO

(Notes) Each figure is 5-year moving average; data as of 2022.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from The World Wealth and Income Database (Notes) Data as of 2022.



China

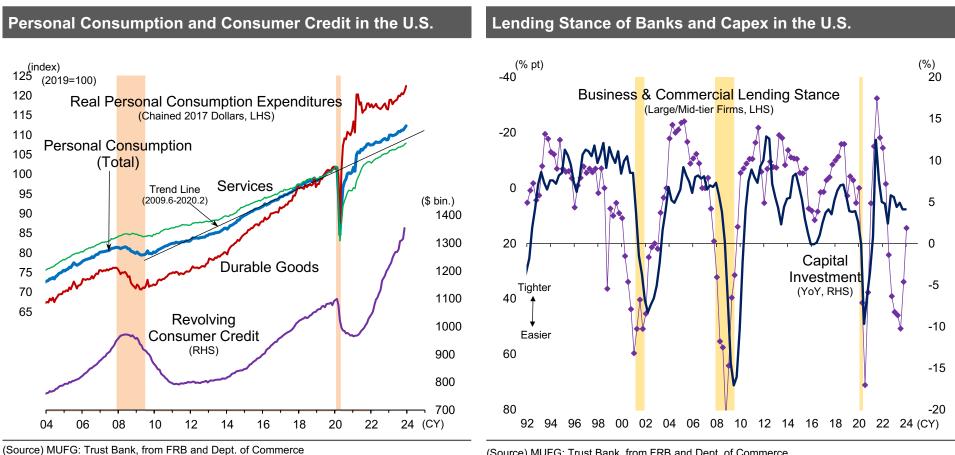
(CY)

2020

Income Shares for Affluent Classes in Major Countries

U.S. Economy: Will Economic Expansion Continue?

- In the U.S., real personal consumption expanded in 2021 to a level that exceeded the trend during the previous economic recovery, supported by huge benefits paid during COVID19 period.
- Banks' lending stance has clearly become stricter since mid 2022. In the past, after lending attitudes became stricter, capital investment tended to decline with a delay of about two quarters.



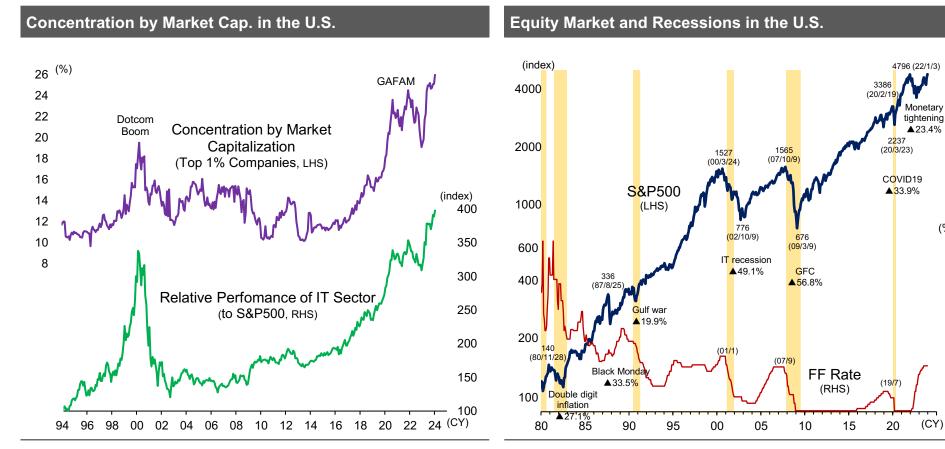
(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from FRB and Dept. of Commerce (Notes) Data as of January 2024.



U.S. Equities: Similarities to the Market during Dot.com Bubble Era

The dot-com bubble of the late 1990s saw the market bidding up IT majors' share prices as tech companies garnered a reputation for future earnings growth amid economic uncertainty, leading to an increase in market capitalization concentration..

■ US equities continued to fall during the tech wreck and GFC even after the Fed eased monetary policy.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from FactSet

(Notes) Concentration shows the proportion of top 1% companies in the term of market capitalization, based on MSCI US Index companies; Relative performance is re-indexed to 100 at the end of 1989; data as of January 2024.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Bloomberg

(Notes) Rate of decline of S&P 500 is based on the closing price; shaded areas indicate recessions; data as of January 2024.



(%)

20

15

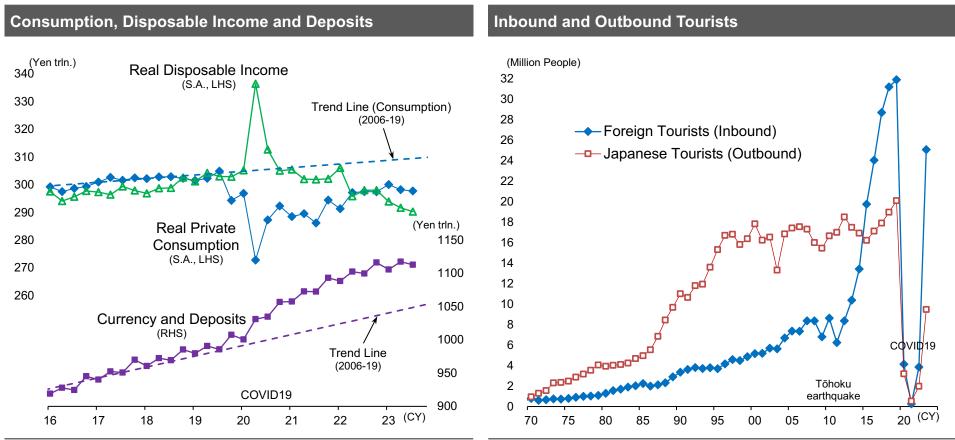
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Japanese Economy: Revenge Consumption and Foreign Travelers

- The Japanese economy is expected to remain relatively steady in 2024. The desire for "revenge consumption" looks strong supported by accumulated savings during the COVID-19 restrictions.
- The number of foreign visitors has recovered to 80% of the peak level before the spread of the coronavirus infection. The amount spent by visitors is at an all-time high due to an increase in per capita spending.



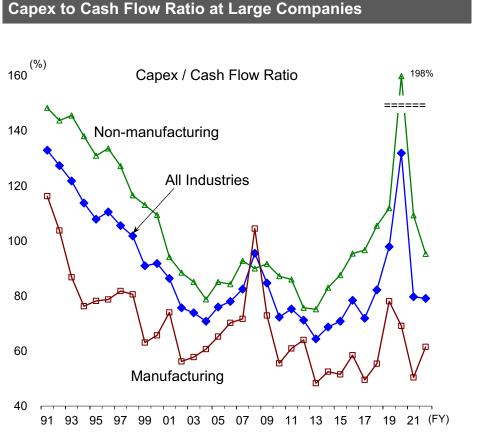
(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Cabinet Office and Bank of Japan (Notes) Trend lines are based on 2006-19 data; data as of September 2023.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from MOJ (Notes) Data as of 2023.



Japanese Economy: Room to Increase Domestic Capital Investments

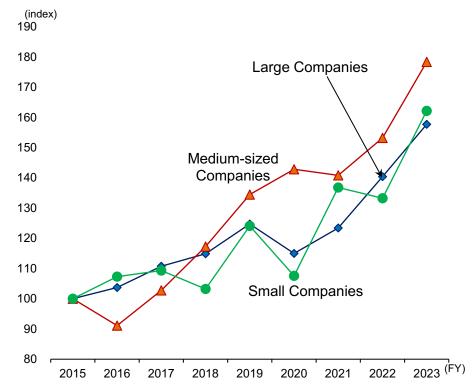
- Large companies in Japan are keeping capital spending within cash flow. They are likely to increase the spending going forward as profits improve and supply constraints ease.
- Over the past few years, software investment has grown faster at medium-sized companies than at large companies, partly because of investment aimed at rationalization and labor-saving.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Development Bank of Japan

(Notes) Universe is 5,432 private corporations with capital of 100 million yen or more (excluding financials), all industries; capex to cash flow ratio = capex /cash flow *100; data as of FY2022.

Software Investment by Size of Companies



⁽Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from BOJ

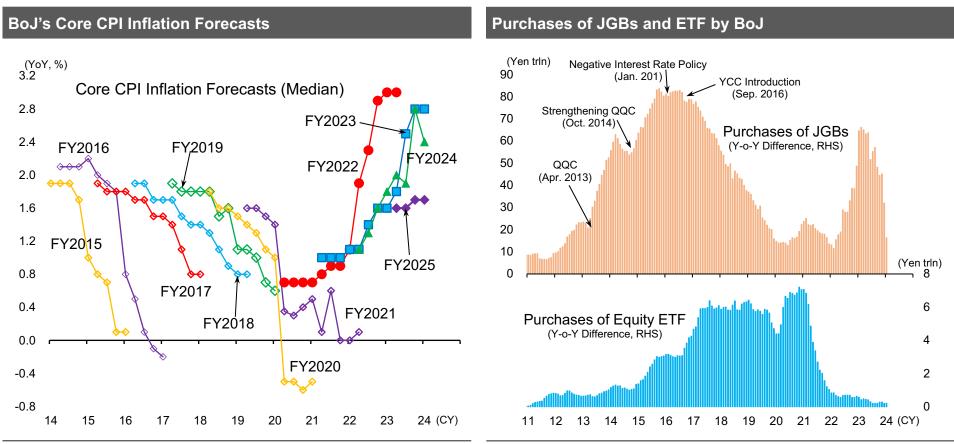
(Notes) Universe is all industries; figures are re-indexed at value of FY2015 = 100; figures for FY2023 are based on company forecast in December.

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BOJ Monetary Policy: Reality of Quantitative and Qualitative Easing

- CPI forecasts of Bank of Japan policy board members were overestimated in the 2010s, but over the last few years have been underestimated.
- Bank of Japan has continued to make various efforts to ensure the sustainability of "monetary easing of a new dimension", including YCC.



⁽Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Bank of Japan

(Note) Figures show the median core CPI forecasts of BoJ policy board members; data as of January 2024.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Bank of Japan

(Note) Figures show the year-on-year differences of JGBs and Equity ETF holding; data as of January 2024.



BOJ Monetary Policy: Tips for Additional Monetary Policy Review

The Bank of Japan raised its core CPI inflation forecasts for FY24 and FY25 to 1.9%, indicating that the underlying trend of prices is approaching the 2% target level. BOJ will end its negative interest rate policy in the near future.

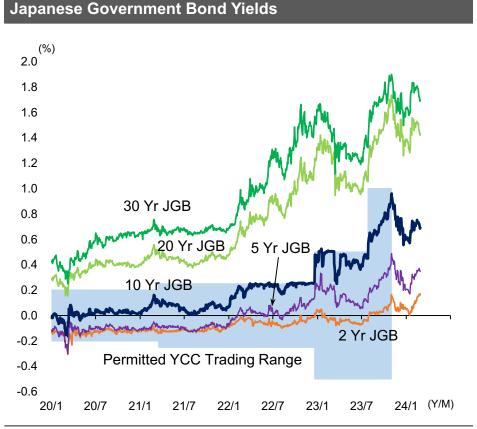
The currency and bond markets are already aware of this possibility in our view.

		-														(%)
		Real GDP								(Reference)						
						CPI				CPI (all items less						
						(all items less fresh food)				fresh food and energy)						
F	Y23	1.8				2.8				3.8						
		<	1.6	~	1.9	>	<	2.8	~	2.9	>	<	3.5	~	3.9	>
	Oct.	2.0				2.8				3.8						
		<	1.8	~	2.0	>	<	2.7	~	3.0	>	<	3.5	~	3.9	>
F	FY24		1.2				2.4				1.9					
		<	1.0	~	1.2	>	<	2.2	~	2.5	>	<	1.6	~	2.1	>
	Oct.	1.0			2.8				1.9							
		<	0.9	~	1.4	>	<	2.7	~	3.1	>	<	1.6	~	2.1	>
F	FY25		1.0					1.8				1.9				
		<	1.0	~	1.2	>	<	1.6	~	1.9	>	<	1.8	~	2.0	>
	Oct.	1.0				1.7				1.9						
		<	0.8	~	1.2	>	<	1.6	~	2.0	>	<	1.8	~	2.2	>

BOJ Outlook for Economic Activity and Prices

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from BOJ

(Note) Figures indicate median of the Policy Board members' forecasts; the forecast ranges of the majority members are in parentheses; data as of January 2024.



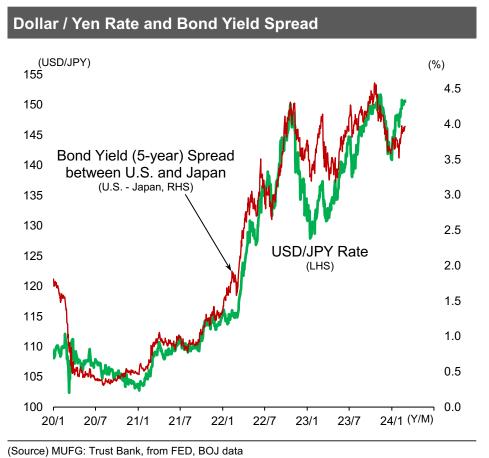
⁽Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Bloomberg

(Note) YCC represents yield curve control by BOJ; data as of February 27, 2024.

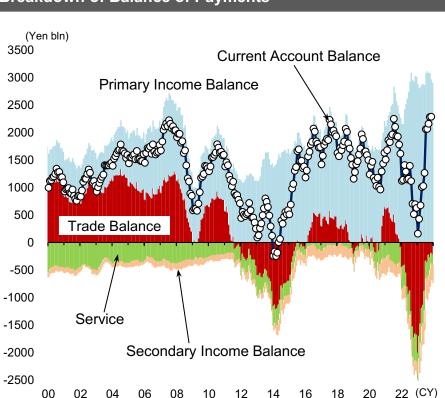


FOREX: Reason for Yen's Depreciation

- The main reason for sharp yen's depreciation has been the interest rate spread between Japan and the U.S. since 2021, reflecting the difference in monetary policy between the two countries.
- The deterioration of Japan's trade balance was another factor for weak yen.



(Note) Data as of February 27, 2024.



Breakdown of Balance of Payments

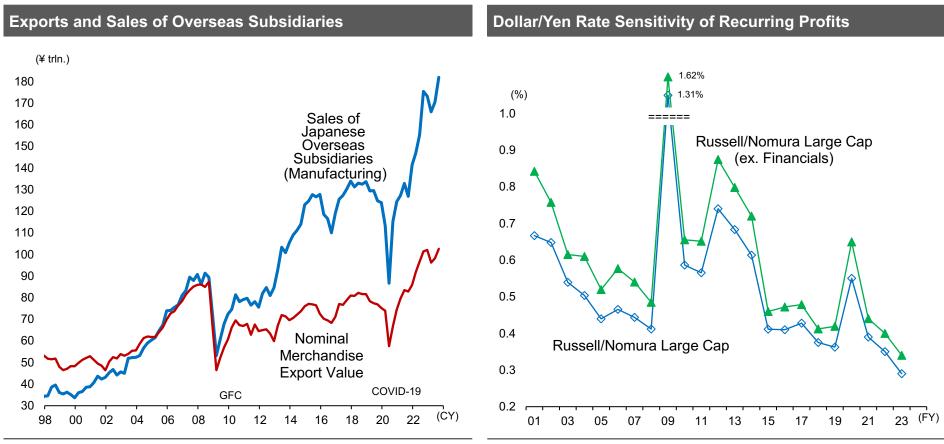
(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from FEB, BOJ data

(Note) Figures are 6-month moving average; data as of December 2023.



FOREX: Strong Yen is still a Drag on Profits, but ...

- Japanese manufactures have increased the ratio of overseas production consistently since 1990 in order to reduce the impact of exchange rate fluctuation on their earnings.
- However, as many Japanese companies have expanded their overseas operations, the strong yen continues to be a drag on their profits, although its impact is decreasing.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from METI, MOF data

(Note) Annualized quarterly data; data as of September 2023.

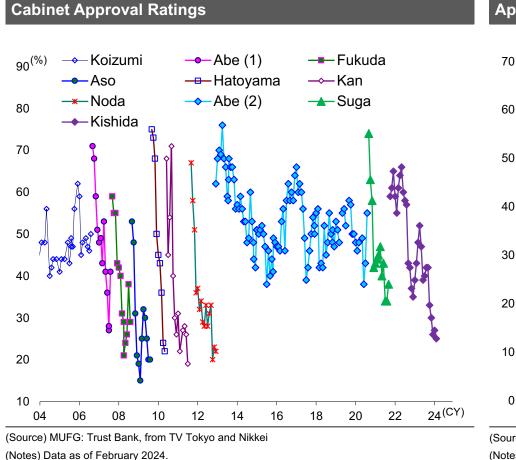
(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Nomura Securities data

(Note) Changes in recurring profits of major companies when the dollar/yen rate fluctuates by 1 yen, based on interviews with analysts; data as of FY2023.



Politics: Approval Ratings of Kishida Cabinet and LDP

- Approval rating for the Kishida cabinet has fallen to its lowest level since its inauguration.
- The Liberal Democratic Party's approval rating has been decreasing since last fall, but the opposition parties remain fractured with low support.



(%) 70 LDP Cabinet DPJ Cabinet LDP Cabinet Ruling Party Approval Rating Main Opposition Party Approval Rating

Approval Ratings of Ruling and Main Opposition Parties

02 04 06 08 10 12 16 18 20 22 14 (Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from TV Tokyo and Nikkei

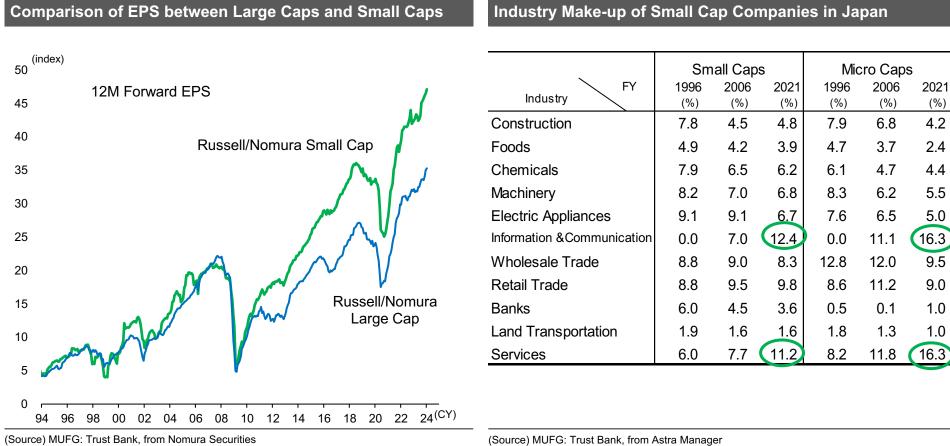
(Notes) Data as of February 2024.



24 (CY)

Small Caps: Strong Earnings Growth Potential

Small caps have provided stronger earnings growth than large caps in Japan, because of their unique business models, dominant positions in niche growing industries, and flexible decision making by visionary entrepreneur. ■ Since 2010, IPOs of tech-related and service industry companies have increased, and more small-caps belong to industries where earnings are likely to grow, such as information & communication and services.



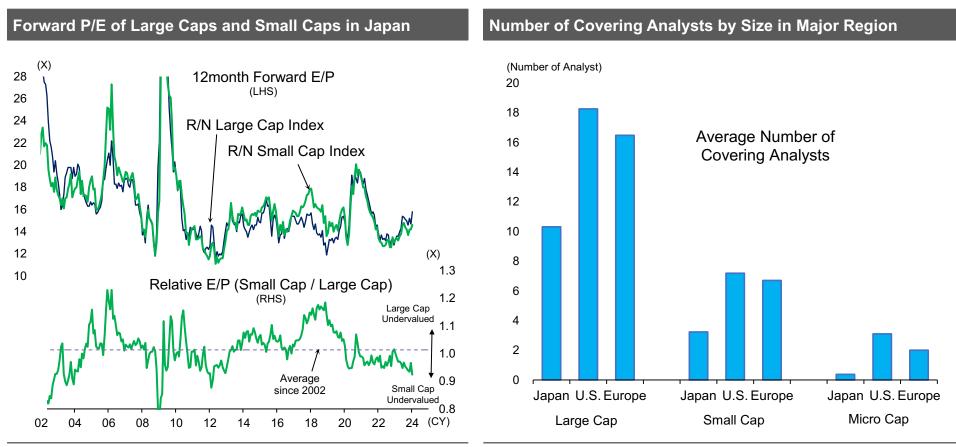
(Notes) Universe are Russell/Nomura Large-cap and Small-cap index; data as of January 2024.

(Notes) Universes are all listed companies; small caps at JPY20bn to JPY200bn, micro caps at less than JPY20bn; industry categorizations are TSE 33 sectors; figures are calculated based on the number of companies in each group.



Small Caps: Attractive Valuation from Global Viewpoints

- Japanese small caps are cheaper than Japanese large caps and European or U.S. small caps based on P/E and P/B ratios.
- High information gathering costs due to limited sell-side analyst coverage hide away lots of attractively valued Japanese small caps.



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from MSCI, Nomura Securities

(Notes) Universes are Russell/Nomura Large-cap and Small-cap index; Forward P/E is based on earnings forecast over the next 12 months; data as of January 2024.

(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from FactSet

(Notes) Universes are companies in MSCI USA Index, MSCI Europe Index and MSCI Japan Index; as of February 2023.

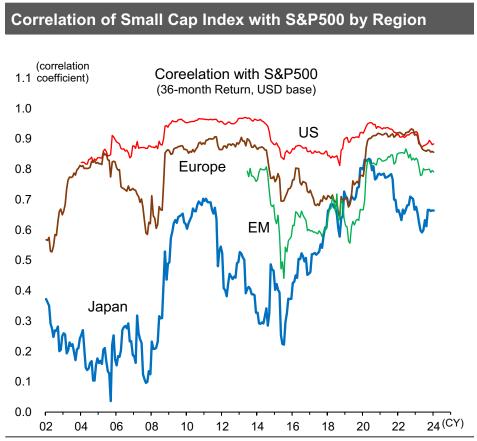


Small Caps: Benefits of Diversification

Revenue Exposure by Country/Region of Major Indexes

- Many Japanese small caps are in domestic-demand industries, whose earnings are less affected by overseas economic conditions relative to large caps in Japan.
- Japan's small caps tends to have lower correlation with US equities, partly because they are not included in major equity indices and not heavily held by foreign investors.

						(%)		
Index	S	mall Ca	р	Large Cap				
Country	Japan	U.S.	Europe	Japan	U.S.	Europe		
United States	6.4	76.6	12.8	17.2	59.2	23.7		
Japan	73.9	1.1	-	46.9	2.7	2.9		
China	5.7	3.0	3.3	9.1	7.1	6.5		
U.K.	0.6	1.7	18.8	1.4	2.3	7.8		
Germany	0.9	1.2	8.2	1.7	2.2	6.3		
France		0.8	4.4	·		5.2		
Italy			6.0			3.6		
Spain						2.9		
Sweden			4.4					
Switzerland			3.7					
Canada		2.0			1.9			
India	1.2			2.2	1.4			
South Korea	1.2			1.9				
Taiwan	1.0			1.3	1.5			



(Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from FactSet

(Notes) Universes are stocks in MSCI Large Cap Index and MSCI Mid Cap Index for Large Cap, MSCI Small Cap Index for Small Cap in Japan, the U.S. and Europe; revenue exposures are based on FactSet estimate; data as of September 2023. (Source) MUFG: Trust Bank, from Bloomberg

(Notes) Indexes are MSCI US, Europe, Japan and EM Small Cap Index; correlations are calculated based on monthly returns over 36 months; data as of January 2024.



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