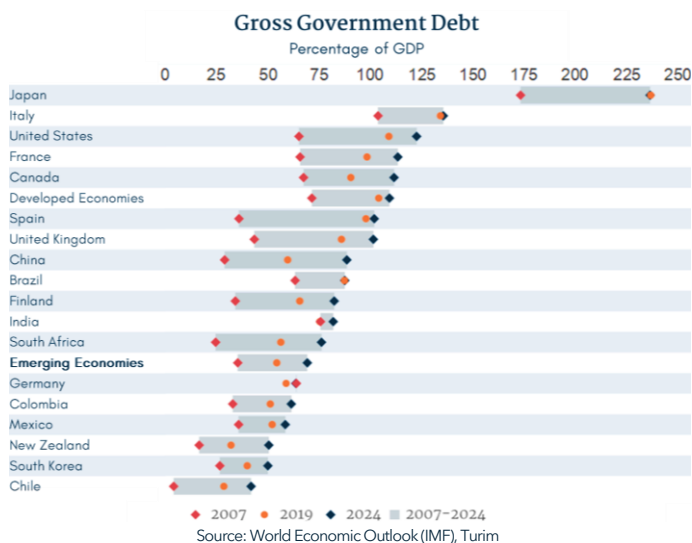


## Debt, Inflation, and Productivity: Reflections on the Future

Across most of the world, governments have been accumulating debt at an accelerated pace over the past two decades, whether to finance social policies, fund military expenditures, or stimulate the economy and protect the private sector during critical moments. In all cases, public indebtedness has become a growing challenge, and its effects, though not always visible in the short term, must be treated with seriousness.



The global stock of public debt, which had already increased substantially following the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, expanded even further after the pandemic in 2020. This occurred not only because of the unprecedented fiscal stimulus implemented by many economies, but also due to rising interest rates, which significantly increased the cost of rolling over government bonds. The most recent estimates from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) project that public debt will exceed 100% of global GDP by 2029, the highest level since the post-war period in 1948. It is worth noting that, historically, these projections have tended to underestimate the actual growth of debt.

In this letter, we discuss the roles of fiscal policy, the main challenges faced by governments today, and possible paths for course correction, considering their aggregate and distributive effects on the economy and population well-being, as well as their implications for markets and investment management. For investors and wealth managers, understanding the dynamics of public debt is essential, as it directly influences interest rates, inflation, and the pricing of global assets.

### The Benefits of Debt and the Cost of Default

**Debt is not necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, academic consensus points to an optimal level of indebtedness,** whether in public or private management, at which the benefits of leverage outweigh its costs. Even net creditors, such as countries that hold sovereign funds exceeding their financing needs, issue sovereign bonds to access credit.

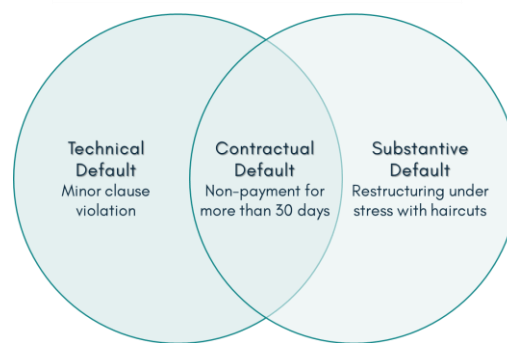
Among the legitimate reasons for public borrowing, we can highlight:

- I. Intertemporal tax smoothing, which allows governments to distribute the cost of large expenditures over time and avoid abrupt tax increases that could create economic distortions.

- II. Financing productive investments, such as infrastructure, that generate long-term social and economic returns.
- III. Creating a local benchmark for interest rates, which contributes to the development and stability of the financial system.
- IV. Using fiscal stimulus in critical periods, serving as a tool to smooth economic cycles, especially when monetary policy options are limited.

However, when debt reaches unsustainable levels, governments may feel tempted or even forced to fail to meet their fiduciary obligations, leading to a default. A default occurs when a government fails to meet its contractual debt obligations, whether through delay, suspension, or restructuring under less favorable terms for creditors. While the formal definition may vary, a default can generally be understood as any event that reduces the value received by creditors. According to IMF specialists, these events can be categorized as technical, contractual, or substantive defaults (Ams, J. et al., 2018), reflecting different degrees of noncompliance.

### Types of Default and Examples



Source: AMS, J. et al. (2018)

**What may initially seem like an easy solution actually entails several costs for the country,** such as the loss of access to financial markets, both domestic and international. This loss translates into higher financing costs, exclusion from benchmark indices, and credit rating downgrades. Although some countries have regained market access years later, severe or prolonged defaults have often led to persistently higher risk premiums.

There are also economic side effects, such as sharp GDP contractions, declines in international trade, and lower inflows of foreign investment. Domestic companies may also face declines in market value and more restricted credit access. Among the most affected sectors is banking, which frequently holds large volumes of public debt securities and suffers losses that may compromise financial stability, leading to credit crises and prolonged recessions.

Finally, legal costs, resulting from litigation and contractual disputes, can also be significant. A well-known example is that of the holdouts (creditors who refused restructuring offers) in Argentina, which faced court battles for more than a decade following the 2001 default. Although international sovereign debt laws have advanced considerably since then, such cases show that default tends to be a government's last resort, used only in situations of unavoidable insolvency.

## Determinants of Sustainability and Solvency

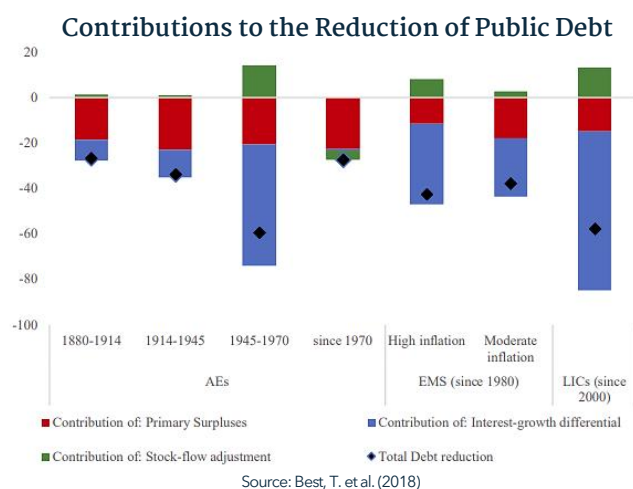
Formally, the assessment of fiscal sustainability begins with the non-Ponzi condition<sup>1</sup>, which states that a government cannot indefinitely finance itself by issuing new debt to pay off old debt. In other words, all debt incurred must eventually be repaid through the government's own revenues. This implies that the present value of all future public revenues must be equal to or greater than the sum of future expenditures and the existing stock of debt, adjusted for the cost of carry.

From this perspective, the determinants of fiscal sustainability can be summarized in three key components that govern the dynamics of public debt as a percentage of GDP:

- **Primary balance:** the difference between revenues and expenditures, excluding interest payments on the debt
- **Cost of debt:** the interest expense, which depends on the size of the debt and the effective rate applied to government securities
- **Economic growth:** the main driver of tax revenue growth and the denominator in the debt-to-GDP ratio.

It becomes clear that **countries in which the rate of economic growth exceeds the interest rate applied to public debt enjoy greater flexibility to adjust fiscal policy ( $r - g < 0$ )**. In the opposite case, maintaining a stable debt-to-GDP ratio requires a certain degree of fiscal effort, such as generating a primary surplus. This point has become particularly challenging in recent years, given the combination of higher interest rates and already elevated global indebtedness.

History, however, offers examples of successful course adjustments achieved even in high-debt environments without default. A comprehensive study by Abbas, S. M. A. et al. (2011) analyzed large reductions in debt-to-GDP ratios across various countries, breaking down the factors that contributed to these adjustments. The same methodology was later used by other authors, including Best, T. et al. (2018), from which the following chart was adapted.



In general, the authors show that there was no single "silver bullet" solution, but rather a combination of factors, each contributing to different degrees depending on each country's circumstances and the global context. In advanced economies before World War I, debt

reductions were mainly achieved through primary surpluses in an environment of modest growth and low inflation. In the interwar period, successful adjustments resulted from a combination of hyperinflation and primary surpluses, while in the post-World War II era, debt reduction was predominantly associated with negative interest-growth differentials in a context of rapid growth, financial repression, and persistent inflation.

It is worth noting that sovereign defaults are almost always triggered by a solvency crisis, meaning a situation in which the government can no longer obtain sufficient credit to roll over its debt, rather than by a voluntary decision based solely on perceived unsustainability. Naturally, this tends to happen when markets anticipate a sustainability crisis.

It is also possible for liquidity crises to occur, caused by temporary shocks such as periods of heightened global risk aversion. These situations, however, are generally manageable through credit lines provided by multilateral institutions such as the IMF. In much rarer cases, a country may repudiate its debt, claiming not to recognize its legitimacy, as the Soviets did after the 1917 Revolution that ended the Tsarist regime. However, this mechanism is rarely used today because of the significant reputational and legal costs involved, especially in international markets, where such actions find little precedent.

Therefore, the most important objective is to ensure that the expected trajectory of public debt remains non-explosive, allowing moderate inflation and economic growth to help reduce the real burden of debt and enable refinancing at sustainable levels. With that in mind, the following sections analyze possible approaches to addressing the current global fiscal challenges.

## The Path of Austerity and the Social Challenge

Fiscal consolidation is often the first recommendation to restore confidence and stabilize public debt. This approach, aligned with the spirit of the Washington Consensus<sup>2</sup>, is based on the idea that cutting expenditures and/or increasing revenues is the safest way to balance public finances. **It is important to highlight that this path is discretionary by definition**, meaning that passive improvements in the fiscal position, resulting from favorable macroeconomic conditions such as higher-than-expected growth or lower interest rates, should not be counted. Thus, the consolidation effort is typically measured by changes in the cyclically adjusted primary balance.

However, **implementing such measures is often much more complex than theory suggests**. The first challenge concerns timing, since fiscal tightening tends to suppress economic activity in the short term. From a country risk perspective, beyond its direct contribution to the debt-to-GDP ratio, the impact on economic activity also reduces the tax base and can activate other "automatic stabilizers"<sup>3</sup>, such as higher demand for unemployment insurance and social benefits.

From a social perspective, the contraction in activity affects population well-being and inevitably carries political consequences. **Because the cost of adjustment is immediate while the benefits only materialize in the medium and long term, the electoral cycle often favors short-term or palliative solutions**. There are also relevant technical challenges, such

1 Reference to Charles Ponzi, who defrauded investors in the United States in the 1920s by paying earlier investors with funds from new ones.

2 Measures proposed in 1989 by John Williamson, adopted by the IMF and the World Bank in fiscal adjustment programs.

3 Mechanisms that smooth the economic cycle and increase the fiscal deficit without direct government action.

as budget rigidity: mandatory expenditures, including public sector wages and pension and social benefits, often follow complex legal rules that can only be changed through structural reforms that are difficult to approve. Social security is one of the most emblematic cases, as population aging has increased the number of beneficiaries and reduced the share of contributors in almost every country, putting pressure on the system's sustainability.

These challenges are aggravated by a complex global socioeconomic environment, characterized by a high cost of living (as reflected in the difficulty of entering the housing market), a decline in the marginal return of education (with increasingly educated generations earning less than previous ones), and uncertainty regarding the sustainability of social programs, such as pension systems, which cast doubt on the right to retirement for younger generations.

This deterioration in expectations undermines confidence in institutions and reduces tolerance for policies that demand immediate sacrifices in exchange for future gains, creating fertile ground for the emergence of demagogic political leadership.

### The Erosion of Currency Value and Financial Repression

When public debt is denominated in domestic currency, as is the case for most countries today, the rules of the game become more flexible. This is not only because local legislation does not require the same degree of contractual robustness – allowing alternative forms of debt repayment, such as changes in currency or indexation – but also because, ultimately, the government can issue money to meet its obligations.

A brief historical overview helps illustrate this dynamic. **The use of monetary expansion as a means of financing the State dates back to the era of metallic currencies**, which lasted until the eighteenth century in the West. Records from the Roman Empire in the third century BCE already show a reduction in coin purity through the mixing of less valuable metals, thereby increasing the money supply at the cost of greater inflationary pressure. This practice, known as currency debasement, became recurrent in the following centuries and eventually represented a significant source of state revenue.

In more recent history, after a period of broad monetary expansion during the so-called Age of Catastrophes (1914–1945), the Bretton Woods Agreement served as a temporary brake on currency debasement by pegging the value of the US dollar to gold and that of other currencies to the dollar. Following the collapse of that system in 1971, a new era of purely fiat currencies began, granting governments wide flexibility to issue money at a time when both the cost and time required to do so had fallen dramatically.

It is important to note that monetary expansion and seigniorage—the revenue a government earns from issuing money – are not, by themselves, problematic, as long as they occur at moderate levels and in alignment with monetary policy. When managed appropriately, they can meet liquidity needs and help smooth cyclical fluctuations in the economy. The problem arises when money creation is used to finance fiscal deficits, a practice that has historically led to hyperinflationary crises, such as those observed in Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Moreover,

unexpected inflation has a redistributive effect between creditors and debtors (including the government itself) by eroding the real value of debt.

**The growing demand for inflation-linked bonds has reduced the potential gains from such inflationary strategies, but it has not eliminated the risk of financial repression**, used to artificially depress interest rates. Recent examples include Argentina (from 2010 onward) and Turkey (since 2018), where real interest rates remained negative for extended periods. In Argentina's case, even the official inflation statistics were manipulated, underestimating the true pace of price increases.

While this approach may appear effective in the short term, the inflationary option (regardless of form) creates distributional distortions in wealth and can erode credibility if sustained over time. In addition to redistributing income between creditors and debtors, inflation has a regressive social impact, disproportionately affecting those without access to indexation mechanisms, typically the poorest segments of the population. In contrast, individuals and institutions with more resources tend to seek stores of value, including financial assets denominated in hard currencies (when the risk is country-specific) or real assets such as real estate, equities of companies with strong cash flow and pricing power, and commodities – particularly precious metals.

It is therefore unsurprising that the performance of gold has stood out in recent years, although other factors have also contributed to this phenomenon. Among them are the increased demand for physical gold by central banks, particularly after the United States decided to freeze Russia's international reserves following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the subsequent trend toward deglobalization observed since early that year<sup>4</sup>.

### Gold Price on the New York Exchange



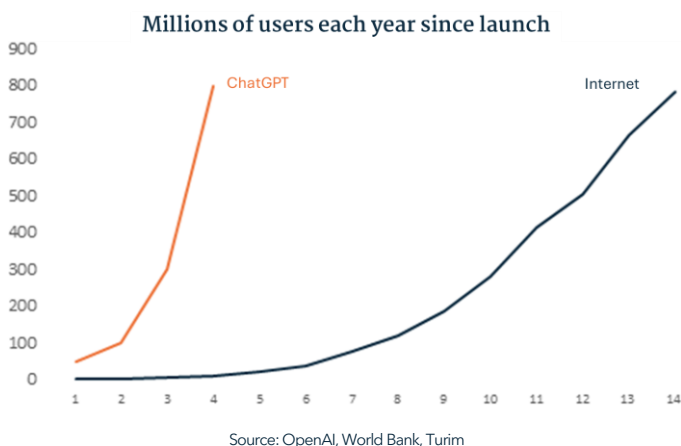
### The Hope of Productivity

As discussed earlier, economic growth is also a mechanism for containing the debt burden. However, the policies typically recommended in this area aim to increase potential output through investment in infrastructure, human capital development, and reforms that improve the business environment. These initiatives naturally produce results only in the long term, thus playing a complementary role in the fiscal debate.

<sup>4</sup> The growing demand for alternative reserves reflects the cross-border distrust thesis by Adam Posen, president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

In some developing countries, the relatively low level of basic infrastructure – such as public sanitation and urbanization – still provides significant opportunities for growth, large enough to justify recurring fiscal deficits over extended periods without undermining sustainability metrics. India is a prominent example, having made substantial progress in this regard in recent years. However, this strategy is not viable for most countries, especially advanced economies, where structural growth potential is more limited.

Nevertheless, not all is lost. The Nobel Prize in Economics this year was awarded to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt for their contributions to understanding innovation as a driver of economic growth. The central idea is that incorporating new technologies into the production sector creates space for more efficient forms of production. This school of thought, pioneered by Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter, who popularized the concept of creative destruction, attributes the rapid growth of the past two centuries to this process, which has drastically reduced poverty and raised global living standards.



The topic is especially relevant today, not only because of its immediate connection to the exponential growth of artificial intelligence (AI) over the past three years, but also because it may represent a light at the end of the tunnel for public finances.

Estimates of AI's potential impact on productivity vary widely. The most optimistic projections suggest a boost of up to 7% over the next decade, while more cautious perspectives, such as that of Daron Acemoglu – author of *Why Nations Fail* and recipient of the 2024 Nobel Prize in Economics – acknowledge a “nontrivial but modest” impact, limited to 0.71% in total factor productivity over ten years, while noting that even this estimate may be overstated.

## Society and Markets

Although there is no single solution applicable to all cases, the most advisable path seems to be a balance between responsible fiscal governance and policies that foster a favorable environment for economic growth. With some degree of luck, productivity gains may help ease the burden of debt, creating room for a healthier cycle of expansion.

At the opposite end of possible scenarios lies an increasingly unsustainable trajectory, culminating in a process of restructuring or the adoption of “creative solutions.” These could include inflationary

surprises and instruments of financial repression, potentially even yield curve control policies such as those implemented in Japan since 2016.

In the most optimistic scenario, we can envision a period of robust growth combined with moderate inflationary pressures. This type of growth, driven by capital and innovation, could reinforce the trend toward wealth concentration, but would still be net positive for society, as it would raise productivity and overall living standards, even if some sectors were “destroyed by innovation” and certain workers required reallocation. Under these conditions, risk assets, particularly equities, tend to perform better.

In a less favorable scenario, confidence in fiat currencies and traditional institutions would be shaken, resulting in more persistent inflation and the risk of a new “lost decade,” similar to what several Latin American countries experienced after the crises of the 1980s. Even before an eventual collapse, investors would likely demand higher risk premiums on traditional assets such as bonds and equities, while alternative stores of value (such as precious metals and crypto assets) could gain a larger share in global portfolios and even in financial transactions.

Whatever the outcome, it will not become evident in the short term, nor will it follow a linear path. The most likely scenario is that the world will remain, for some time, in a state of uncomfortably high global indebtedness, with partially anchored expectations and opportunistic fiscal adjustments, alternating with periods of heightened risk aversion.

These shifts in narrative will likely continue to generate volatility in asset prices, reinforcing the importance of diversification and long-term discipline.

## Referências

- ABBAS, S. M. A. et al. Historical Patterns and Dynamics of Public Debt – Evidence from a New Database. International Monetary Fund, May 2011.
- ACEMOGLU, D. The Simple Macroeconomics of AI. MIT, Massachusetts, Apr 2024.
- AMS, J. et al. Sovereign Default. Washington, DC: IMF, Sep 2018.
- BEST, T. et al. Reducing Debt, Short of Default. Washington, DC: IMF, Sep 2018.
- EICHENGREEN, B. et al. Public Debt Through the Ages. Washington, DC: IMF, Sep 2018.
- POSEN, A. Geopolitics Is Corroding Globalization. Washington, DC: IMF, Jun 2024.
- GOLDMAN SACHS. Generative AI Could Raise Global GDP by 7%. Apr 2023.



**Valores no Tempo** is a production by TORI, a Turim company, and is available on all major audio platforms.

It offers thoughtful reflections on wealth, longevity, investments, legacy, and other topics that shape the Family Office universe.

[Listen here!](#)

## What Japan teaches us about longevity?

Japan today stands at the intersection of science, culture, and philosophy. In 2025, the country reached a new longevity record: [nearly one hundred thousand people aged one hundred or more](#). It is the 55th consecutive year in which this number has grown. More than a statistic, it reflects something deeper – a society that has learned to care for time, not merely resist it.

Japan's aging population is often described as an economic challenge, but behind the numbers lies a particular way of living. Longevity in Japan is not simply the result of genetics or modern medicine, but of a culture that values harmony, consistency, and presence. For centuries, the country has cultivated an almost reverential relationship with time. There, aging is not viewed as loss, but as continuity.

Much of this outcome stems from choices made more than half a century ago. After World War II, Japan rebuilt not only its economy, but also its habits. The government invested in sanitation, nutritional education, and preventive health policies – especially in rural areas and among the elderly. The period known as the Japanese economic miracle (1955–1973) was marked by major investments in education, public health, and school nutrition programs. Policies such as the National Health Insurance Act (1961) ensured universal access to healthcare and helped strengthen a generation with rising life expectancy. From the 1960s onward, school nutrition programs and physical activity campaigns became part of daily life, shaping a population that aged with discipline and awareness of the body.

### Purpose as the Axis of Life

This vision is reflected in the concept of *ikigai*, which can be translated as “reason for being.” *Iki* means “life,” and *gai* refers to “value” or “purpose.” The term expresses what motivates a person to get up every mornin: a purpose that connects the individual to the collective.

In *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*, authors Héctor García and Francesc Miralles describe *ikigai* as the meeting point between what we love, what we do well, what the world needs, and what can sustain us. *Ikigai* is not discovered in grand moments but cultivated in the small repetitions of a well-lived life.

In Okinawa, one of the world's [Blue Zones](#) (regions where people live longer and with better quality of life), this lifestyle is particularly evident. The number of centenarians per capita is the highest on the planet, and researchers point to four pillars that help explain this phenomenon: **balanced diet, constant movement, strong social ties, and a sense of purpose.**

In Japan, these practices have names and histories: *hara hachi bu* (eating with moderation), *ikigai* (purpose), *moai* (mutual-support groups), and *nuchi gusui*, an Okinawan expression meaning “food as medicine.” Together, they represent a philosophy of long and healthy living.

The traditional Okinawan diet is rich in vegetables, tofu, and fish, with moderate rice consumption and very few processed foods. Residents

eat slowly and stop before feeling completely full, following the practice of *hara hachi bu*, the habit of eating until 80% satiated. This moderation reduces metabolic stress and cellular oxidation, promoting longevity.

This philosophy is also reflected in *washoku*, the traditional Japanese culinary culture recognized by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage for expressing balance between flavor, aesthetics, and nutrition.

Physical activity is also a part of life, but in a natural way. Walking, tending gardens, and taking care of the home keep both body and mind in motion, without excess. In Okinawa, almost no one “exercises” in the Western sense, but everyone is moving all the time. Climbing stairs, gardening, kneeling on tatami mats, and walking to the market are everyday gestures that keep joints and muscles active for decades. This light and constant movement improves cardiovascular function, reduces inflammation, and preserves telomeres—structures that protect DNA and are directly linked to cellular aging. As Haruki Murakami wrote in *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, the quiet consistency of a routine—whether running, walking, or simply repeating gestures with attention—is what allows time to work in favor of the body, not against it.

Another essential element is *moai*, lifelong groups of friendship and mutual support that span generations. These circles of companionship function as a form of emotional and financial safety net. Studies show that strong social bonds reduce the risk of heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline. These social ties have been documented for decades by the [Okinawa Centenarian Study](#), launched in 1975, which identified *moai* as one of the key factors in social and emotional longevity. In Japan, social and intergenerational cohesion is an invisible pillar of health.

Finally, purpose is the thread that connects all these elements. Having an *ikigai* not only brings meaning to life but also eases stress and regulates biological systems associated with longevity. Science already knows that lower cortisol levels and better hormonal regulation are directly linked to a sense of purpose and belonging.

This collective sense of meaning also reflects values inherited from Confucianism and reinforced in the postwar period, when the country needed to rebuild its identity. Disciplined work, care for others, and respect for time became pillars of a culture that views longevity not as chance, but as the consequence of coherence between individual and community.

### The Body, the Brain, and Time

Blue Zones show us that these habits not only extend life but also preserve mental health. Healthy aging is associated with a state of low stress and high intellectual curiosity: people who continue learning, creating, and challenging themselves mentally show a lower risk of cognitive decline and greater maintenance of neural plasticity throughout life.

Neuroscientist [Andrew Huberman](#), a professor at Stanford University, describes this balance as “directed neuroplasticity” – the brain’s ability to keep learning and adapting when exposed to small doses of physical or intellectual challenge, followed by periods of recovery and rest. According to Huberman, mental longevity does not depend on eliminating stress, but on modulating it consciously: walking, sleeping well, exposure to natural light, and maintaining social connections are, in his view, neurobiological behaviors that sustain vitality and emotional balance.

Modern science is gradually confirming what Japanese culture seems to have intuited for centuries: aging is not only the passage of time but the way the body responds to it – a constant dialogue between biology and environment.

The so-called “biological clock” (or epigenetic clock) measures the pace of aging through chemical marks on DNA, especially methylation patterns that regulate which genes are activated or silenced throughout life. When these marks indicate an age younger than the chronological one, we say that a person’s epigenetic age reflects a biologically younger profile.

[Studies](#) of Japanese supercentenarians show that many have an epigenetic age up to ten years younger than their chronological age, demonstrating that factors such as balanced diet, regular sleep, social engagement, and purpose can literally modulate gene expression, slowing cellular aging and reducing the risk of age-related diseases.

These principles are visible in the daily life of Japan’s long-lived communities. Instead of seeking balance through radical pauses, the Japanese find it in the constancy of rituals, in the harmony of routines – as in tea ceremonies, which can last from 30 minutes to up to 4 hours, and whose purpose is not the beverage itself, but the gesture, attention, and stillness. An active life without haste becomes a way of training the body and mind for continuity.

## Crossing Hakone, a Personal Account

The Japanese philosophy of longevity also reveals itself in small everyday experiences. To illustrate this relationship between time, purpose, and legacy, **I share below a personal account, lived recently in Japan during a walk along a historic stretch of the ancient [Tōkaidō Road](#).**

This historic road, whose name literally means “Eastern Sea Route,” was one of the five official highways of the Edo period (1603-1868). It connected Kyoto, the imperial capital, to Edo – then the political center of the country, under the command of the *shōgun*, a hereditary military leader who held real power while the emperor occupied a primarily symbolic role – and to what is now Tokyo. With more than 500 km and 53 stations, it was traveled by samurai, monks, merchants, and artists. More than a route, it became a symbol of passage and contemplation, eternalized in the prints of [Utagawa Hiroshige](#).

Inspired by writer and photographer [Craig Mod](#), who lives in Japan and reflects on walking as a form of meditation and narrative, I decided to walk a segment of the old road in Hakone, a mountainous region

famous for its hot springs. For centuries, small teahouses offered rest to travelers along the route. Today, only one remains: Amasake Chaya.

Founded 400 years ago, the teahouse has been run by the same family for more than thirteen generations and serves *amasake*, a lightly sweet, nonalcoholic rice drink used to warm and revitalize the body. I arrived there after a long hike and was welcomed by the tea master, a serene and curious man.

He told me he had never been forced to continue the family business. His father left the choice to him, but over time, he himself wanted “to take the weight off his father’s shoulders” and carry on the legacy. When I asked whether any of his four children intended to assume the role (a question I asked with some reluctance, worried it might sound intrusive), he replied that he did not know but hoped one of them might someday feel the same calling, even though they were all studying different fields at university.

He thanked me for the question and for the concern about the continuity of the teahouse. He said his grandparents and great-grandparents would be honored to know that Brazilians from the other side of the world had come to visit. He also shared that for many years, after the construction of the railways reduced the number of travelers on foot along the old road, his family debated closing the teahouse. Yet, for a reason he described as “greater than us,” they decided to keep it open – as if preserving that place were also a way of honoring time.



*Tōkaidō Road and Amasake Chaya (personal archive - Hakone, Japan)*

The conversation, simple and delicate, offered an insight into the meaning of longevity itself. Continuity is not imposed; it is chosen. Legacy is treated as an expression of identity, not obligation.

Today, the road stands as a symbol of permanence – a reminder that in Japan, tradition and modernity coexist side by side.

A few kilometers ahead, another story reinforced the same idea of quiet continuity. In a traditional marquetry workshop – the art of inlaying thin wooden sheets to form geometric patterns – I met an artisan who represents the ninth generation of his family’s craft. The technique, known as *yosegi-zaiku*, originated in Hakone during the Edo period, taking advantage of the region’s rich variety of native woods and transforming woodworking into an expression of patience and precision.



9th Generation yosegi-zaiku artisan  
(personal archive - Hakone, Japan)

He told me he learned the craft as a child, watching his father and grandfather, and that each piece carries a technique passed down almost as ritual. He said that in his family, no one is forced to continue – yet somehow everyone eventually returns to the wood. *“It’s as if the work calls you back,”* he explained. The patient act of assembling each fragment (sometimes for days) felt like a mirror of time: an art revealed in the sum of many small continuities.

## The Beauty of What Ages

After the experience in Hakone, the principle behind Japanese longevity became clearer: coherence between body, mind, and community. Nothing there feels disconnected.

During the trip, it became striking how the Japanese eat: multiple small dishes, each prepared with care. At first, the abundance of plates seemed excessive, but the logic soon became clear – smaller portions help avoid excess, and variety encourages nutritional balance. Eating in Japan is an act of awareness: stopping before surpassing one’s limit, paying attention to taste and rhythm. This quiet discipline reflects itself in other dimensions of life.

It also became evident how the sense of community crosses generations – neighbors care for one another, and the elderly remain integrated into community life. In Japan, aging is treated naturally. Older adults continue participating in daily life and are valued for their accumulated experience. This perspective connects with the concept of *wabi-sabi*, which recognizes beauty in imperfection and in the passage of time – the serenity of accepting what changes.

## The Legacy That Renews Itself

Reflecting on this philosophy, Turim sees in it a mirror of how we understand time and continuity.

Just like the tea master in Hakone, who preserves his teahouse out of meaning rather than obligation, families and institutions face the challenge of balancing tradition and reinvention, permanence and movement.

Japan has built, over centuries, a culture of continuity. Families and companies, many with centuries of history, value permanence and the transmission of knowledge. This long-term perspective, which privileges solidity over immediate gain, aligns with how Turim views patrimonial management: a process that spans generations and is anchored in values.

True inheritance is not found in structures that remain unchanged, but in the meaning that is transmitted. *Ikigai* teaches that each generation must find its own purpose without breaking the thread that links it to what came before. It is in this balance – between what we inherit and what we create – that time becomes legacy.

Japan reminds us that longevity is not merely the extension of life, but the art of living it with consistency. Living long is biological; living well is a daily decision.

Walking along the Tōkaidō Road and listening to the wind through the trees of Hakone, the feeling was unmistakable: the Japanese secret is not living more, but living with meaning.

In a world focused on optimizing routines, true innovation may lie in slowing them down. May we, like Japan, learn to cultivate purpose and honor time.

At its core, what Japan teaches about longevity is a set of principles (in addition to those cited earlier) that transcend biology and become a philosophy of life:

**Kaizen:** improve a little every day. Show up, evolve, repeat. Progress lies not in haste but in constancy.

**Shoshin:** cultivate the beginner’s mind. Staying curious, open, and humble in the face of the new is what keeps us evolving.

**Wabi-sabi:** embrace imperfection. The marks of time do not diminish value; they reveal history and authenticity.

**Gaman:** persevere with dignity. Facing adversity with patience and serenity is perhaps the quietest form of wisdom.

**Arigatai:** practice gratitude – not only for what is good, but for what is rare, fleeting, or imperfect. It forms a natural bridge between *wabi-sabi* (acceptance of imperfection) and *ikigai* (purpose), valuing the moment and recognizing time as a gift.

Together, these principles show us why longevity is not about remaining. It is about continuing – with meaning.

**With this edition, we dedicate the second theme of our Semiannual Letters to longevity, a concept intrinsically connected to our purpose of preserving family legacies.**

**More than a biological matter, longevity invites us to reflect on time, purpose, and continuity – principles that also guide how we care for families and their stories at Turim.**



For those who wish to explore this dialogue further, we invite you to listen to the podcast **Valores no Tempo**, available on major audio platforms, where we dedicate one episode of each season to longevity and its many dimensions.

[Listen here!](#)