

## STEP 1 級 英文読解／作文演習

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Read the following article to summarize in Japanese, then write your view on this in English, being about 200 words in length.

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### *Japan in crisis: 'A full-fledged aged society'*

As demographics point to a North American boom in the geriatric community, Japan has reached a new milestone. "We have become a full-fledged aged society," a government report has declared. "The pace of ageing ... is expected to enter a phase that no other country in the world has yet experienced." Almost 10% of its total population is now 75 or older.

This announcement comes nearly two years after Japan laid claim to the world's highest elderly ratio. How did this happen? Simply put, people are living longer than ever but having fewer children than ever. The Associated Press lays out the numbers:

One-quarter of the total population of less than 90 million will be 75 or older, and 40% will be 65 or older. That compares with 16.2% projected for the world by the United Nations for those aged 65 or older in 2050.

On the upside, lives will continue to get longer, the study said. By 2050, Japanese women will live an average of about 90 years, while men will live nearly 84 years. That would be up from the present 86 years for women and 79 years for men.

The graying of Japan has put numerous rural communities in danger of dying out altogether. From the New York Times:

Japan is dotted with so many such communities that academics have coined a term — "villages that have reached their limits" — to describe those with populations that are more than half elderly. Out of 140 villages in Monzen — the municipality that includes Ogama — 40% have fewer than 10 households, most of which are inhabited by the elderly.

Commercially, too, products and services are changing to accommodate the ageing population. In its design workshops, carmaker Nissan is using a specialized driver's suit and goggles to simulate the bad balance, stiff joints, weaker eyesight and extra five

kilograms that may accompany senior citizenry. Stores have wider aisles and lower shelves for elderly in wheelchairs and motorized carts.

Japan is also confronting a sharp increase in the number of older criminals and prisoners. Japanese 65 and over now make up the fastest-growing group of criminals, and prisons reflect this change with labour tasks that include knitting and making notepads from cardboard and paper.

The bottom line is society requires offspring to populate its schools and propel its workforce to make it functional. The demographic shift from a declining birthrate and high life expectancies is expected to strain government services and lead to labour shortages, the government report stated.

In order to ease the expanding woes, the government has stepped up programs such as those that promote elderly hiring.

The government is gradually extending the retirement age to 65 from 60, and is now urging companies a further extension to 70. Tokyo also introduced a new health insurance system in April to deal with bulging medical costs for people 75 or older.

More than 60% of Japanese senior citizens think they are healthy, but nearly the same percentage of them go to hospitals almost daily, the report said. The number of bedridden people has also surged, many of them cared for at home by elderly relatives.

We can look to Japan for a glimpse of the future of ageing North America.

(538 words)



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### *Japan in crisis: 'A full-fledged aged society'*

<解答例(意見作文)>

The population of Japan is aging quite rapidly. According to an estimate made by the government recently, people aged 65 and over accounted for more than 20% of the population, setting a new record. At the same time, birthrates in Japan have steadily declined to all-time-low levels, naturally producing a “super-aged” society, almost 10% of whose total population is now 75 or older. Simply put, people are living longer than ever but having fewer children than ever.

This unprecedented demographic change of Japan has a grave impact on social systems. Above all, at the current rate of population aging coupled with fewer children, there will surely come a time when the number of taxpayers is not sufficient to support the number of pensioners. This should be a national crisis if the necessary preventive measures are not put in place. The government has to act now to reform or revitalize the pension system in the first place.

One step is to encourage workers to invest in private pension schemes so that they can provide for themselves in their old age. Another may be to consider raising the age of compulsory retirement so that people who are still willing and able to work are not forced to retire. Lastly, there might be financial subsidies to large families, making it less expensive for them to have and educate children.

The bottom line is that the first and best to come is more offspring for society to populate its schools and propel its workforce to make it functional, combined with a view to refocusing the value(s) of happy and prosperous family life.

(268 words)