

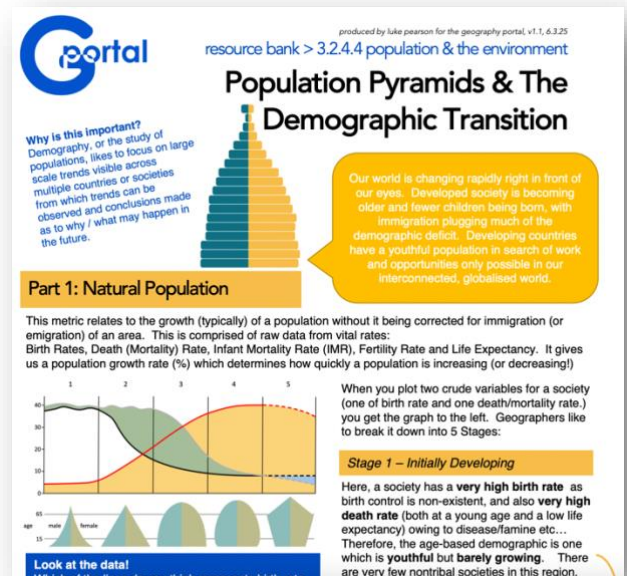
Japan is shrinking. Should we be worried?

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Topic: 3.2.4.7 Case study of a country/society in population change to illustrate causes, problems, patterns, and implications of this.



Before you get stuck into this resource, consider checking out:



Background Information:

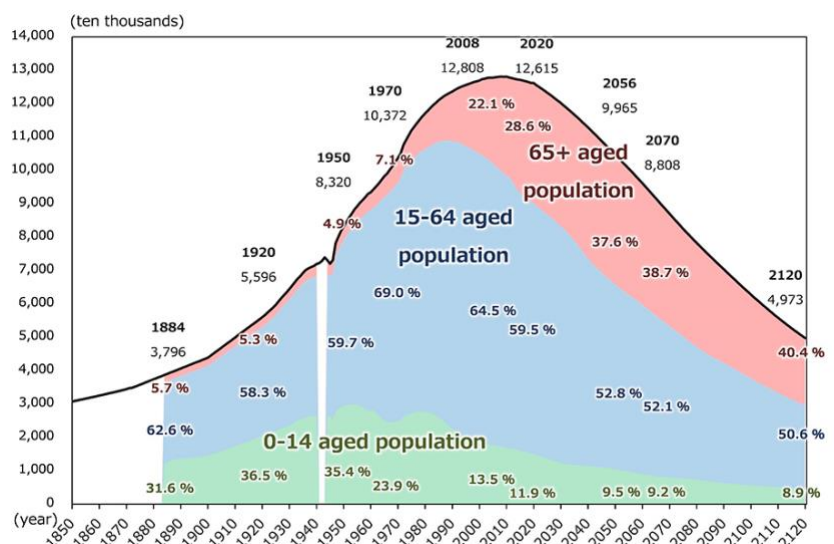
Japan's miraculous post-war recovery has been the subject of many articles, with various reasons such as allied aid, a highly motivated, educated workforce and heavy focus on export driven manufacturing industries. During this period, a rapid expansion of the Japanese middle class occurred, and household names such as Yamaha, Toyota, Sony, and Nintendo emerged.

Along with this came a post-war increase in births, with a rise in younger people, and a large growth in the working age population who were born in the interwar years.

A suffocating work-life culture and challenges of raising children in contemporary urban Japan has seen birth rates stagnate then completely slide down to a current level of **around 1.2 children per mother**. This is nearly half the natural replacement level of 2.1, last hit in 1973, and lower than most comparable nations, except China, S. Korea, and Taiwan.

The graph (right) showcases the situation Japan find itself in. Before we go further, consider the implications of that changing age-based breakdown and population collapse. What problems can you foresee?

We're going to be analysing a lot of data as part of this case study, but before we get stuck into that, make sure you are familiar with the concepts highlighted in our article on the demographic transition. Click the image above or scan this code to get access:



Part 2 – why & what are the implications?

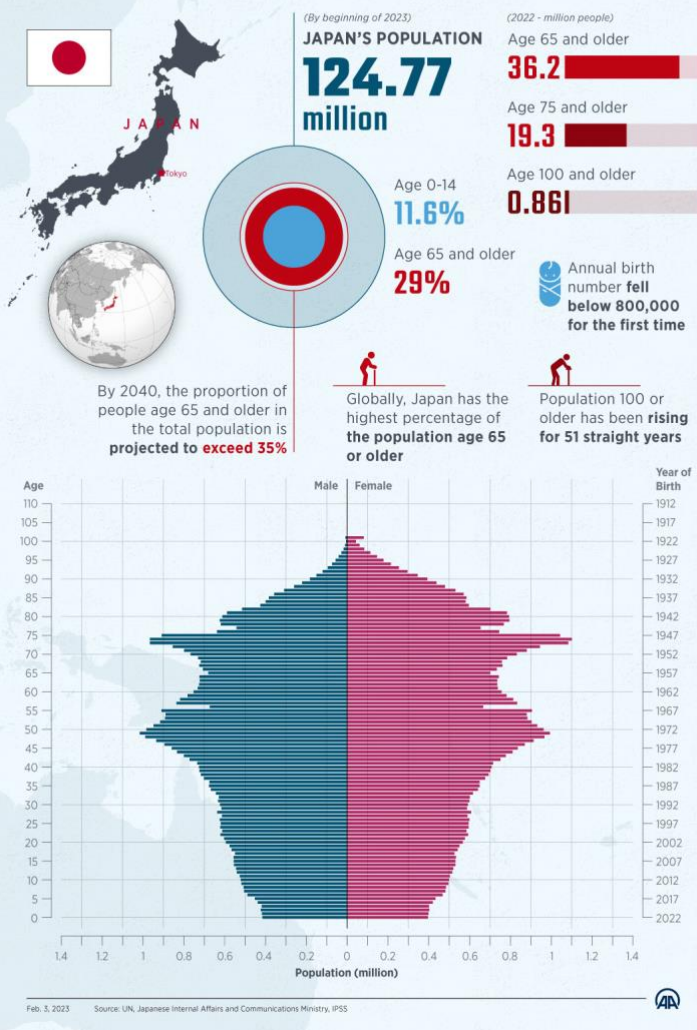
Stop Press!

Reading loads of text can get a bit boring, especially when it's on the main reasons for Japan's baby bust. We encourage you to do your own research (this topic can quickly get complicated) and wanted to only provide a few key reasons below. This really cool documentary is a great place to get started – it highlights the underappreciated loneliness epidemic in Japan which ties into this topic very effectively.



Japan faces reality of elderly caring for older parents

One-third of the population of Japan, the oldest country in the world by age, is made up of people 65 or older



Development / Birth-Rate Correlation

We know this to be the case – countries, as they get more developed, especially rapidly as is the case with Japan. An increase in women's autonomy, longer, healthier lives, lower infant mortality as well as less need for children to work and a greater childbearing cost led to the steady decline in birth rates.

What is unique is the speed and intensity with which this decline has occurred:

Cultural Expectations

Japan has an intense work culture. Many people are subservient to large corporations and frequently push 70+ hour work weeks. This, combined with stagnant career progression and wages, makes finding the time, money, or even mental strength to raise a family challenging.

Japan's Loneliness Epidemic

Another somewhat unique cultural quirk, many young Japanese people are not getting into relationships. Many people are either content with being just single, or haven't been able to maintain a healthy relationship, so just refuse to engage in one. This is obviously not good for fertility rates!

Look at the population pyramid above. What stage of the demographic transition model might this represent? Don't forget that Japan is also one of the oldest countries in the world by life expectancy. With current projections, their population may shrink to around 65 million by 2100.

What are the implications of this decline?

Well, population declines have happened before, but in contemporary advanced societies, we can't really say for *exactly* what will occur but can theorise.

Countries have something called a **demographic dividend**. This is the economic growth potential from a country's changing demographic structure, particularly when more people are working age. When people live older and retire, they:

- 1) Aren't contributing to the economy in the same way as if they were working, and...
- 2) Require greater expenditure from the government on health, pensions etc...

What this means is that:

- The declining productivity of a smaller labour force will **hamper productivity** and economic growth.
- The growth of older people puts far **more demand on health and hospital services**. This, combined with fewer people paying taxes and more pensions puts a huge pressure on government finances (where is the money coming from?)
- **Rural-urban divides are widened**. This population decline will likely not be felt very much in the likes of Tokyo, but small regional areas of the country will likely become ghost towns. There are already 4 million estimated abandoned buildings in Japan, more than almost any other country.
- The government will have to **spend far more on policies to encourage childbearing**, such as tax offsets, free childcare, and improving work-life balance.



A small ray of sunshine?

Consider how Japan is better prepared for this demographic phenomenon than many other nations. They began investing in automating and robotising jobs very early and technology has made the workforce decline more palatable to businesses.

Links & Resources:



What if I want to practice an actual exam question?

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