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# “The Land of Disappearing Children” — Japan’s Population Crisis

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The nation of Japan faces a devastating population crisis. The crisis, however, is not a problem of too many people living in Japan, but too few. Japan, with several other nations close behind, faces what we might call a population *implosion*.

Indeed, Japan has experienced 27 consecutive years of declining birth rates. Within just a few short years the nation will experience massive social problems and a complete breakdown of economic activity.

In previous eras, this kind of population loss would be explained by war or some natural catastrophe such as famine or the plague. None of these explanations is relevant to Japan’s experience, however. As a matter of fact, the population of Japan actually grew during World War II, only to start falling in the early 1980s.

As *The Washington Post* reports:

*The number of children has declined for 27 consecutive years, a government report said over the weekend. Japan now has fewer children who are 14 or younger than at any time since 1908.*

*The proportion of children in the population fell to an all-time low of 13.5 percent. That number has been falling for 34 straight years and is the lowest among 31 major countries, according to the report. In the United States, children account for about 20 percent of the population.*

*Japan also has a surfeit of the elderly. About 22 percent of the population is 65 or older; the highest proportion in the world. And that number is on the rise. By 2020, the elderly will outnumber children by nearly 3 to 1, the government report predicted. By 2040, they will outnumber them by nearly 4 to 1.*

The numbers tell the story. Almost a quarter of Japan’s population is 65 and older; only 13.5 percent are children. The inescapable conclusion is that there will soon not be enough Japanese to keep Japan functioning as a nation, society, and culture.

The paper calls the reality “a slow-motion demographic catastrophe that is without precedent in the developed world.” Looking ahead, the paper assured its readers that it was not overstating the case. Indeed, “The economic and social consequences of these trends are difficult to overstate.”

The Japan Center for Economic Research predicts that Japan will lose 70 percent of its workers by mid-century. Japan may now be the world’s second-largest economy, but it cannot retain that status with a population in severe decline.

A society that stops having children is like a healthy person who simply decides to starve himself. This is an act of the human will, not a natural calamity.

The population explosion prophets are still warning of a population crisis to come, but they got the story almost

perfectly backward when it comes to nations like Japan. Russia and several other European nations face similar crises.

Babies are a clear sign of cultural confidence and cultural health. *The Washington Post* describes this crisis as “Japan’s disappearing children.” Those words do describe Japan’s predicament — and this crisis will *not* disappear.

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