

Exploring for the Best Models of an Aging Society – Lessons from Japanese Experience

By Naoyuki Haraoka



Japan is a frontrunner in the aging of societies, a common global challenge today, with its population greying at an unprecedentedly high speed. The rapid increase of the population aged 65 and over is also largely due to a falling birthrate, and thus we see the Japanese population itself declining. The aging of society under depopulation is a source of concern about a possible significant decline in Japan's economic growth potential. The decline in economic growth over the long term would worsen the national debt, which has already reached 200% of GDP, through a decrease in tax revenue. This concern will be even more exacerbated with the arrival of a super-aging society in which there will be an increasing need to care for the elderly in their 80s and 90s, or even older, as the average life span becomes closer to 100.

Although elderly people today are able to enjoy better health, thanks to the progress of medical science, and may continue to work longer during their life without needing to be taken care of by the national government's social welfare program, when they become even older and reach late old age they will have to be cared for by a care worker. How can we meet this social need of a super-aging society under rigid budgetary constraints? How can we avoid a significant decline in economic growth potential and revitalize the economy under the progress of depopulation?

These are the basic questions which our authors and interviewees have responded to in this issue's cover stories. I believe that their experiences, ideas and proposals for the future will be of interest not only to readers in Japan but those outside Japan also, who are now facing or will face soon this inevitable challenge.

We begin with two leading articles giving an overview of the issue – one by Mamoru Maekawa, a former vice-minister for policy coordination at the Cabinet Office in charge of formulating Japan's macroeconomic policy, and the other an interview with Jitsuro Terashima, a think-tank leader who has worked on many policy recommendations. Our editorial

committee member Prof. Kazumasa Oguro, an expert on public finance, then proposes a new direction of reform of social security for the interest of poor older people suffering from “residential poverty”. This is followed by a well-considered and unique proposal on city planning for an aging society by Satoru Yamazaki, a distinguished architect and city planner.

Dr. Atsushi Seike and Dr. Takashi Oshio are both economists working on labor economics. Our interview with Dr. Seike highlights how enabling the elderly to work for longer in their life will be a key to achieving a sustainable super-aging society in Japan, while Dr. Oshio's article highlights the disincentive effects of pensions on senior employment. As the working elderly would be one of the keys to a sustainable aging society, we have an introductory article on gerontology about how to ensure welfare for elderly people by Dr. Pinchas Cohen, dean of the University of Southern California Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, a pioneering school in the field.

For the elderly who will need long-term caregiving in the later stages of life, Japan's long-term care insurance system needs to be a truly excellent one. The article by the Health and Welfare Bureau for the Elderly of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare provides a succinct and easily comprehensible introduction to the essence of the system.

We have another interview article with Yukari Amano, senior associate professor at the University of Shizuoka and an expert on caregiving in Japan. This gives us a clear idea of the reality in Japanese caregiving facilities, reminding us of the further need to provide a good working environment for caregivers in Japan in taking maximum advantage of our long-term care insurance system.

Finally, we have a non-Japanese view on the aging population in Japan by Valerie Moschetti, a French expert in business development and public affairs who has specialized in international partnerships at the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation.

(Brief Introductions)

COVER STORY 1

Towards a Long-term Vision of Japan's Social Security System

By Mamoru Maekawa

A long-term vision of Japan's social security system will need to take account of increasing consumption and revitalization of the economy through social security and the issue of maintaining regional communities, in addition to financial concerns about depopulation and the aging population.

COVER STORY 2

Interview with Jitsuro Terashima, Chairman of the Japan Research Institute

Outlook for the Aging Society in Japan

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

To revitalize the aging society in Japan, we will need building platforms for social participation and revitalizing intelligence against the differing social background of each generation.

COVER STORY 3

New Philosophy of Social Security & Direction of Reform – “Housing” as a Pillar of Social Security

By Kazumasa Oguro

Housing should be considered as a social security policy to help poor older persons get out of “residential poverty”, which could lead to mitigation of income inequality.

COVER STORY 4

The Care Compact City Concept for an Aging Society

By Satoru Yamazaki

Establishing a “Community-Based Integrated Care System” would lead to lower financial costs for social security as well as higher quality of caregiving for elderly people.

COVER STORY 5

Interview with Dr. Atsushi Seike, President of the Promotion and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private Schools of Japan (PMAC)

Elderly Workers – Key to Achieving a Sustainable Super-Aging Society in Japan

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

A sustainable super-aging society in Japan can be achieved by encouraging the elderly to continue to work

longer in their lives, and a pension system that could prevent it must be corrected.

COVER STORY 6

Japan's Social Security & Older Worker Employment – Work Styles of Older Employees from the Perspective of Health & Pension Issues

By Takashi Oshio

A quantitative analysis shows how far we can expand senior employment with reform of the pension system currently impeding it.

COVER STORY 7

The Field of Gerontology: Views from the Past, Present & Future

By Pinchas Cohen

Gerontology, a relatively new interdisciplinary study focused on the biological, sociological, psychological and policy aspects of aging, will lead to further research on longevity and healthier aging in the future.

COVER STORY 8

Japan's Long-Term Care Insurance System & Community-Based Integrated Care System

By the Health and Welfare Bureau for the Elderly, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

A brief and essential introduction to Japan's Long-Term Care Insurance System, considered to be a possible model for other countries facing rapidly aging populations.

COVER STORY 9

Interview with Yukari Amano, Senior Associate Professor, University of Shizuoka, Junior College Department of Social Welfare

Reality of Caregiving in Japan – a Japanese Expert's Story

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Caregiving in Japan faces the harsh reality of a shortage of skilled care workers and raising caregivers is not easy.

COVER STORY 10

Japan: Immigration, a Remedy for the Aging Population?

By Valerie Moschetti

In the 21st century, more foreigners settling in Japan will certainly have an impact on society. Better inclusiveness of foreigners into Japanese society will be a new challenge for the Japanese.

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