

《双语新闻：日本人口危机》

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Why is Japan in trouble?

The Japanese now have one of the lowest fertility rates in the world, and at the same time, one of the highest longevity rates. As a result, the population is dropping rapidly, and becoming increasingly weighted toward older people. After peaking seven years ago, at 128 million, Japan's population has been falling — and is on a path to decline by about a million people a year. By 2060, the government estimates, there will be just 87 million people in Japan; nearly half of them will be over 65. Without a dramatic change in either the birthrate or its restrictive immigration policies, Japan simply won't have enough workers to support its retirees, and will enter a demographic death spiral. Yet the babies aren't coming.

Why not?

The British newspaper The Observer recently caused an international stir by reporting that Japanese youth have lost interest in sex. The sensationalist conclusion was mostly based on a single statistic: a survey that found that 45 percent of women and 25 percent of men ages 16 to 24 said they were not looking to have sex. The article also cited the phrase *sekkusu shinai shokogun*, or "celibacy syndrome," as if it were a major trend. In reality, more Japanese singles are having sex than in past decades. In 1990, 65 percent of unmarried women and 45 percent of unmarried men had never had sex; today, the figures are 50 percent and 40 percent, respectively. "Of course Japanese have sex," Asian studies professor Jeff Kingston told Bloomberg.com. "If the number of love hotels is any barometer, it seems like many are getting plenty of it."

Is celibacy syndrome a myth?

Not entirely. There clearly is a subset of Japanese youth who have withdrawn from dating. Instead, they focus on online porn and games like Nintendo's Love Plus, in which players conduct a relationship with an anime girlfriend. Hundreds of thousands of young men are known as hikikomori, shut-ins who eschew human contact and spend their days playing video games and reading comics in their parents' homes. (See below.) But most Japanese young people do have friends and relationships — they're just not settling down. The marriage rate has plummeted, and with it the birthrate, since out-of-wedlock births are rare in Japan. In 1975, just 21 percent of women and 49 percent of men under 30 had never been married; by 2005, the figures were 60 percent of women and 72 percent of men.

Why aren't they getting married?

There are both cultural and economic barriers. In Japanese tradition, marriage was more about duty than romantic love. Arranged marriages were the norm well into the 1970s, and even into the 1990s most marriages were facilitated by "go-betweens," often the grooms' bosses. Left to their own devices, Japanese men aren't sure how to find wives — and many are shying away from the hunt, because they simply can't afford it. Wages have stagnated

