

【Directions】 Read the text below to prepare for the interview and the writing test.

- 1) You will be asked to answer questions and to write an essay based on this text.
- 2) You can take notes in this booklet and bring them with you so that you can refer to your notes during the interview and while you are writing your essay.

According to many recent articles, Japan is in decline. The articles paint a disheartening picture of Japan. Most of the articles focus on Japan's stalled economy, the stagnant political system and the weight of providing for a graying population. The picture in those articles is grim indeed, but is Japan really in decline? The question is a tough one.

Most of the recent articles come from economic analysts. They look for business growth, usually in the short term. When looked at from that point of view, Japan's economy inspires little optimism. However, those reports tend to examine profit-oriented criteria. They are not wrong, but they do not take a broader view.

Most of those economics-based articles compare Japan to its "bubble era," when the economy was booming. The current picture looks worse than then, of course. But it looks even worse now because Japan was overpraised at that time. Books and articles then were amazed at the successes of Japan. They took many of Japan's business practices as perfect models for the West to copy. Japan was seen as an Asian miracle.

The Japan-loving books also generated a reaction from other writers called "Japan-bashers." These Japan-bashers criticized Japan for being too socialistic, or too controlling, and noted the suffering of workers forced to do overtime and bosses given too much power, as well as the enduringly low position of women in Japanese society and a troubled educational system. Which view was correct?

Surely, both lovers and bashers were right to some degree, but not entirely. Both sides — Japan-lovers and Japan-bashers — took too extreme a view, as do the negative articles now. Japan's economy is still the third largest economy in the world, or fourth largest if the European Union is considered a single economy. That is not bad for a shrinking, graying

population living on an island in the Pacific Ocean.

What is needed is a more realistic view, both abroad and inside Japan, about the strengths and weaknesses of the country overall. Japan will not overtake China again, but that does not mean it is in decline. The European Union and the United States both have big problems in their economies, but few articles declare them in decline.

Without a doubt, the problems facing Japan are tough ones. The problems of joblessness, suicide, nuclear power and the position of women in society deserve greater attention and action. Japan has few inspiring political leaders.

But for every problem, you can point to a positive. Japan has a strong sense of social cohesion compared to other countries and an ongoing respect for skilled work and quality products. Japan's cultural life is energetic and the ease and safety of everyday life is an enduring part of society.

With a more realistic view of itself, one that takes the negative and positive sides in equal measures, Japan can begin the hard work of moving forward again.

【出典】

“Is Japan in decline?”, Michael Pronko, NOVEMBER 16, 2012, The Japan Times ST,
http://st.japantimes.co.jp/english_news/essay/2012/ey20121116/ey20121116main.htm?print=noframe