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World Geography

### Chapter 4 Reading Response

Population decline is a rising issue threatening the future growth and maintenance of human civilization - a constraint of wealth. As the world develops, it simply becomes both less possible (due to the economic burden of doing so) and less incentivized to have large families, and when the number of births falls below replacement levels, the average age of a population increases and the population begins to shrink. This is most evident in Asia, but is also seen in much of Western Europe and will eventually sweep the globe, save for significant measures to stop it.

In an era of subsistence farming, children were free labor. Every laborer in a family could produce only slightly more than they consumed, but if you had 12 children that made you significantly more productive than a family with 2 children. In the early days of the industrial revolution, children were still useful as laborers (despite the inhumanity of their working conditions), but even then the economic burden of having children meant that average family size declined. In our modern era - keeping in mind that the world is not EVENLY modernized or industrialized - children are a net economic burden, and the cost of raising them has rising to such a point that it is no longer economically viable for most people to have large families. Families with more than 3 children are now a great exception, and in the nations with the highest cost of living, population decline has already reached a crisis point.

The most notable case in point is Japan - where the national government is piling on so many incentives to have children that it is almost comical. Even so, the effects of these attempts have been minimal and a dramatic population decline (and a corresponding economic decline) is now visible. Now, Japan is an extremely wealthy nation and it makes sense that they would be among the first to experience it but it is not exclusive to super wealthy nations. Japan's regional enemy, China, is undergoing a demographic crisis of similar scope, and one that might end their dream of the "Chinese Century" early. As the result of the "One Child Policy", the average age of the Chinese population is rising rapidly and GDP growth is not tracking similarly. More than this, relative to the rest of the world, China's cost of living in the cities is huge compared to the average income, and the cost of raising a child is similar. The result is that the average Chinese family is having few if any children, and a mass of elderly people are having to be supported by a tiny fraction of the population. Despite the *literally* totalitarian measures taken by the Chinese government to try and stop this, a road to demographic crisis is now inevitable.

In conclusion, population decline is a rising issue threatening the future growth and stability of human civilization. This is largely due to the economic burden of having children, and the fact that in the modern world, children are no longer necessary for the survival of a family. Without significant measures to stop it, population decline will be a serious and unavoidable issue in the coming decades.