

予習課題 次の英文を読み、内容を理解しなさい。

Few people in the modern world are not affected in some way by the ideas, culture and economy of Japan, yet this country remains for many an enigma, an unsolved riddle, Westernized but different from any Western country, part of Asia but clearly unlike any other Asian society, Japan is a uniquely adaptable place where tradition and modernity are part of one continuum.

With over 3,000 islands lying along the Pacific Ring of Fire, the Japanese archipelago is prone to frequent earthquakes and has over 100 active volcanoes. Much of the country is mountainous, while cities consume flat lands and coastal plains. The Tokyo-Yokohama area is the largest urban concentration in the world, and 70 percent of Japan's 127 million people live along the Pacific coast stretch between Tokyo and Kyushu.

The remaining slivers of cultivable land are farmed to yield maximum crops. Generous amounts of rainfall, melting snowcaps and deep lakes enables rice to be cultivated in near-perfect conditions.

Each spring, the Japanese are reminded of their country's geographical diversity as the media enthusiastically tracks the progress of *sakura zensen*, the "cherry-blossom front," as it advances from the subtropical islands of Okinawa to the northernmost island of Hokkaido.

The Japanese regard themselves as racially integrated tribe, though different dialects and physical features distinguish the people of one region from another. Moreover, there are many minorities in Japan, from the indigenous Ainu to Okinawans, and an admixture of Koreans, Chinese, Southeast Asians and Westerners who have made Japan their home.

Although modern Japanese society developed from a feudal system, Japan today is astonishingly egalitarian. Hereditary titles were abolished along with the aristocracy after World War II, and members of the imperial family, the world's longest unbroken line of monarchs, now marry commoners. Class is defined by education and job status. The people employed by the top government ministries, large corporations and other prestigious companies are Japan's true elite today.

The Japanese take their sports and leisure activities almost as seriously as their work. Traditional sports, in particular, often embody some underlying cultural, spiritual or aesthetic principle, so that there is not only the method but "the way." This applies especially to ancient disciplines like kyudo (archery), kendo, karate and aikido. Sumo, the national sport of Japan, originated as an oracular ritual linked to prayers for a bountiful harvest. Having a similar appeal to sports audiences as Kabuki dramas do to theater-goers, sumo ranks many non-Japanese among its fans. Japan gained many soccer fans after the creation of J-League in 1993 and its selection, along with Korea, as co-host for the 2002 World Cup. Professional baseball attracts an even larger and more devoted following.

(注) enigma : なぞ、continuum : 連続体、the Pacific Ring of Fire : 環太平洋火山帯、Japanese archipelago : 日本列島、sliver : 細長い区域、egalitarian : 平等主義、oracular ritual : 神託儀礼