Chapter 18

The Japanese experience

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This chapter discusses how the concept of universal design gained popularity in Japan, with some references to research. It was not because the civil rights of people with disabilities were acknowledged, but because everyone had to accept the fact that ageing is one’s almost unavoidable future. Preparing for one’s own ageing through universal design seemed the most feasible way. Japan’s rapid ageing has overridden almost all countries by now. The proportion aged 65 and over has reached more than 18% and still growing. During the past fifteen years, as population ageing progressed, design concepts have gradually shifted from special solutions for special people to universal solutions, with housing design taking the lead. Examples are given, from home modification, to ball point pens, to accessible transportation. Most of such implementation is driven by economic incentives.

**Background**

It was fairly recently that population ageing emerged as one of the biggest problems in some countries. Figure 18.1 shows 65 plus

![Graph showing 65+ population trends in various countries from 1950 to 2050.](image)

18.1 Asia and Europe
65+ population trends.