

China is to Pay the Price for its Long-Overdue One-child Policy

By KODAMA Katsuya

It was in 1979 when China started its one-child policy. Only recently, China has finally abandoned its policy and now all married couples are allowed to have a second child. However, 36-year-old implementation of the policy yielded some adverse effects. The fundamental problem is that China will face hyper aging and low birth rate. If the one-child policy should be strictly implemented, the birth rate would go below one. While the declining birth rate and the aging population are a compelling social issue in Japan, China would hereafter face graver situation in this issue. It is mainly due to China's demographic dividend that allowed its tremendous economic growth for the past twenty years.

However, China already emptied its coffers. In Japan, generation of the postwar baby boom, so called 'baby boomers', boosted the economy rapidly in 1960's. Economy started to stagnate in 1990's when they became a well-paid workers or in 2000's when they started to retire. Japan has eaten up its demographic dividend at that time. China will be forced to manage society under inverse pyramidal population structure from now on. Besides, there is a problem of unregistered children referred to as 'black children' or 'Heihaizi'. It is said that there are whopping 13 million such children. Although this accounts for only 1% of the entire population, but it is still a huge number as such.

The population of Sweden, for comparison, is 9.4 million. It means that there are unregistered population in China that exceeds the total population of Sweden. This issue arose from the social condition where baby boys are preferred to baby girls, married couples are not able to afford the abortion and could not help but give birth to a second or a third child. When they registered a second and a third child, they are fined severely. This situation left them without any citizenship. Such unregistered population barely receive education. Neither could they go to hospital. Now they are entering into their 20's and 30's of age. This issue has not been addressed yet. First of all, their human rights are at stake. There are no other countries which are burdened with so many unregistered population. State guaranteed rights are not bestowed to them. Also they will become an uncontrollable presence for the state. This also leads to social anxiety.

Population imbalance among young people is also an issue. When they gave birth to baby girls instead of baby boys, baby girls were killed by intentional infanticide or through neglect of proper care when they became sick. This situation is quite severe especially in rural areas and the percentage of men are extremely large in young generation. It is said that there are some villages where 70 or 80 percent of population are male. In this regard, it is predicted that China would have vast population of unmarried men. This situation leads to produce massive unmarried men. Also, it throws population off balance and reams of massive single men will deteriorate the social order. China has achieved rapid economic progress under the centralized government. However, high-handed political tactics such as one-child policy has created social strains as well. Many Chinese will be affected by this in terms of human rights. Also, sharp decline in the number of births and rise in the number of elder generation, vast numbers of unregistered population and unbalanced gender ratio among younger generation would bring about social uncertainties. I assume that China's execution one-child policy was too long. It seems that China will have to pay the price in the future.

(This is an English translation of the article written by Dr. KODAMA Katsuya, President of Socially Responsible Investment, which originally appeared on the e-forum "Hyakka-Somei" of CEAC on April 6, 2016.)