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Around a half of century years ago, the total fertility rate (TFR) of Asian woman was expected to have roughly six children each. However, fertility rate in Northeast Asia, mainly Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, fertility rates have been dropped significantly during the past years. Northeast Asia's significant declines in fertility rates are accompanied with economic and social developments during the past 50 years. Increase in level of educational attainment, job opportunities, living conditions, combined with improvements in technology of health care and family planning contributed to lower birth rates in the communities. Now, those countries have one of the lowest birth rates in the world as women tend to have only one child during their childbearing years which is far below than replacement level (2.1 per woman). In contrast, other developed countries such as United States and some European countries' fertility are close to replacement level. This means that Northeast Asia countries' elderly population keep expanding and working-age population, who can pay for pension and drive economic development, keep declining. This unanticipated trend has occurred concerns about implications of not only their demographic changes but also their economies. Considering the current situation in Northeast Asia, this paper argues that it is important to formulate a set of pronatalist policies as an effort to encourage childbirth, thereby establishing a foundation on which further policies and practices can be devised. This paper majorly focus on fertility trends in Japan as a representative country among Northeast Asia countries since its decline in fertility rate is more pronounced than other societies.

Today's fertility rates vary largely depends on countries, for example,

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average birth per woman in Pakistan is around three to four in their entire lifetime (Westley, Kim, and Retherford, 2010). Japanese woman's average birth rate was 4.45 children in 1947 to 2.04 children in 1957 and it continues to decrease. Now, Japan's total fertility rate (TFR) in 2005 is 1.26, which is lower than most of developed countries even though it is slightly higher than South Korea (1.08) and Taiwan (1.12) (Suzuki, 2006). Total number of population in Japan is already decreasing and this trend is first observed in so far among Asia countries. It is more problematic when we consider the fact that Japanese has the longest life expectancy in the world. It is important to make sure "replacement-level" fertility is kept, which means woman has average 2.1 children in their lifetime. That is because when it is maintained, "population growth will slow and eventually population size will stabilize" (Westley, Kim, and Retherford, 2010). In this sense, Northeast Asia's governments, including Japanese government, should take action to formulate pronatalist policies as an effort to encourage childbirth.

Japan's low fertility patterns have inescapable consequences for national population profiles over the coming generation. These extraordinarily low birth rates will force a pervasive and very rapid population aging. When birth rates fall, demographic dividend occurs as it changes the age proportion of population. Since there are not many young age population, in other words, it means there are relatively more working age adults who contribute to economic development and social welfare by providing enough labor force. Consequently, it leads a rapid economic growth and less burdens on families. However, demographic dividend turns out negative when population is

getting aged as current Japan's situation. When large number of working age population move into the old age population and birth rates keep declining, the dependency ratio rises, which means young age people will be heavily responsible for taking care of old age population. Evidently, data shows that among the Northeast Asia countries, Japan faced the fertility transition much earlier than others. In 2002, Japan had 17 per cent of the old age population (age 65 years old and over), and 15 percent of the young age population (age under 15 years old) in their total population. Furthermore, Japan is expected to have 36 per cent of old-age population of the overall population by 2050 that is around three times more than the number of youth population. Consequences of low fertility rate will also conduce to a peaking, and thereafter and more or less indefinite decline, in the size of the working age population, i. e, those between age 15 to 64 year olds (Gubhaju and Moriki-Durand 2003). As a practical matter, these trends stand to complicate the prospect of maintaining rapid economic growth. They obviously beg the question of the pension burden on economies and societies. Besides, inevitably, these demographic changes result in fatal problems such as shortage in labor force, critical burdens in public pension system, and nation's societal stability.

There are efforts made to challenge increasing birth rates through certain political approaches. Japanese governments created a series of pronatal policy interventions since beginning of 1990s, but those have not been significantly effective to raise birth rates yet. During the past years, almost all kinds of policies that the government can think of were created. " They include bonus payments for births, family allowances, paid maternity and

parental leave, leave to care for sick children, tax relief for parents, care facilities for young children or tax relief for childcare, flexible working arrangements for mothers and guarantees of retained promotion rights, labour force re-entry training programs, housing benefits for families with children, and educational supplements for children" (Retherford and Ogawa, 2005). To be specific, In 1991, the government created a policy, so called "1991 Childcare Leave Act" to create a decent environment for working women to bear and rear children. The law allowed woman who gave a birth or her husband to have unpaid leave up to one year to take care of a baby. However, the policy has a limitation as it only covered full-time workers. Employees who are temporarily working in companies or part-time workers could not fall under the benefit. In addition, once this law was established, more than 30 firms were asked to apply the childcare leave for their employees. However, the law did not state about penalties for noncompliance. Therefore, some organizations did not follow the request (Retherford and Ogawa, 2005). Furthermore, Japanese government entailed the enactment and implementation of the "Angel Plan" in 1994, which provided a public day-care center for the children while their mothers work between 1995 and 1999 in order to encourage working mothers to give a birth. The law of establishing children day-care centers was planned with the national government's subsidies which was funded from the Ministry of Health and Welfare's annual budget. As a consequence of the Angel Plan, the number of babies, age between 0 and 2, who were able to use the day-care center increased from 451, 00 in 1994 to 564, 000 in 1999. Also, this plan was included taking care of children until the end of school hours so that

mothers can continue to work even though their children left school (Retherford and Ogawa, 2005). The original version of the "Angel Plan" further expanded to the "New Angel Plan" for 2000-2004. This time, the government focus on compatibility, with title "Zero Waiting List for Daycare Program" as a its political goal. Contrary, the Children and Families Bureau reported there still not many early childhood babies under 2 years old could benefit from the day-care service even though the number of centers increased in the country. Only 18.6 per cent of children who are under age two were in the day-care center with the fact that 67.8% of children who are on the waiting list were under age two. Therefore, childcare service program could not significantly impact on raising fertility rates in Japan (Suzuki, 2006). The other problem was that the day-care services under the "Angel Plan" was means-tested, that meant that parents who earn high-income had to pay more for the service. Also, the day-care centers were established where demand for using the services were not high, usually in rural areas. On the other hand, some urban areas with high demand and long waiting lists for the day-care service did not have enough centers to meet the demand. Also, it increased the costs of using the service for parents with high level of income, which resulted in not making it attractive to them.

Before establishing implanting policies that increase the fertility rate, it is very important to perceive the main determinants of why birth rates in Japan continue to decline. Japanese government put lots of effort to hike it.

Nowadays, Japanese couples tend to get married late. One of the main reason for the trend - is married women's tendency. This tendency is based

on growing up in prosperity and have a full-time work, which escalates economic power of women. Increasing rate of women have a high level of educational attainment thus women have more job opportunities. However, enormous empirical studies proved that “ many Japanese women have the ability and opportunity to work but they have to give up their career on childbearing” due to remaining of socially constructed gender role, husband’s low participation in housework, and also preferences of labor market (Suzuki, 2006).

There is another important reason why women in Japan cannot quit their job when they have a child. As the world is getting more globalized and competitive in these days, demands and preferences for highly educated individuals increases. Therefore, costs for kids’ education has been remarkably increased. Particularly in Asian countries, parents are willing to send their children to universities and further after graduation bear with a responsibility for paying the tuition fee. In this sense, Japanese women prefer not to give a birth to a child unless they have full-part timing job. Even though Japanese government's “ Angel Plan” and “ New Angel Plan” were not very successful to raise fertility rates, I still believe there is another effective way to encourage women to have a child. By making plans more effective, government should establish more public day-care centers to meet the high demand in urban cities, rather than providing equal number of centers in rural area where there is less demand for using the service. Since the government budget is limited, urban cities with large number of population should benefit to have more of day-care centers where mothers can send their children. Government can reduce the number of day-care

centers in rural cities where less demand is spotted. Saved maintenance fees can be alternatively used to create more centers in urban areas.

Both of the proposed policies can be controversial with regard to high budgets that are required from Japanese firms and the government.

Companies would take responsibility for some costs of letting employees to have a childcare. Government's budgets are collected by taxpayers and those citizens who do not get any benefits from the day-care services, may disagree to share the money on the law.

Fertility plays a critical role in country development and stability. Northeast Asia countries such as Japan, Republic of Korea, and Taiwan have encountered a severe fertility trend over the past years as the population has dropped in the world. Those extremely low fertility rates threaten the nations' social and economic status. By considering Japan's situation, the total population began to decline. Government put lots of efforts to increase fertility rate. Significant changes in these trends are still not made. An increase in childbirth manipulates development in the community since it provides adequate human capital investment in economic entities.

Consequently, an aspect where the population decreases, provides a loophole to the failure of the active organizations where unemployment, dependency, and poverty grow roots in the community. Therefore, it is important to establish ideas, which will encourage childbirth in Northeast Asia. Further, this paper will propose possible policies that can be employed to promote the fertility trend.