

A Message Regarding the Special Issue

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Low birthrates and ageing populations have been regarded as the two most serious social issues faced by Asian societies such as Korea and Japan. According to the World Bank and United Nations, total fertility rates in the two states have been below replacement level since 1975 in Japan, and since 1984 in Korea. The proportion of people aged 65 and over will increase to some 40 % by 2050 in both states if the birthrates do not rise. Along with population decline and ageing, concomitant economic recession, polarization of wealth, aggravation of social distrust and hatred have had a disastrous impact on social integration and solidarity. Facing these challenges, there have been many attempts to adapt states and societies to the harsh realities, such as countermeasures to low birthrates, rebuilding civic ties and social support in local communities, and recreating welfare states which support all people in need.

In these social contexts, this special issue focuses on four topics: contradictions of developmentalism and the modern family in Korea, implementation of “housing support” in Japan, a causal relation between social capital and self-rated health in Kawasaki, and a new Asian Active Ageing Index among ASEAN+3 and EU member states.

First, Professor Park Keong-suk of Seoul National University emphasizes a reflexive understanding of population change and its relationship with modernity in Korean society. She argues that in the process of modernization, which was justified by the ideologies of development and the modern family, and its worsening contradictions, demographic transition occurred in a compressed manner. She points out that the internal contradictions of development and the modern family system meant that life became overly selected and increasingly unequal on the bases of development, power, production, and success. As the races towards the desire for a standard modern life as well as break away from it proceed in parallel to

one another, the political conflicts reflecting the gap between realistic conditions and desires, values, and institutional regulations, are growing worse.

Secondly, Professor Sukenari Yasushi of the University of Tokyo discusses the implementation of “housing support” in Japan. The concept was first introduced in Japan in the mid-2000s, and the non-conventional combination of “housing” and “support” implies the perceived growing necessity of personal social services as basic resources for securing residence. Based on a mixed methods study, he delineates how the discrepancy between formal institutions and multidisciplinary co-operation have been brought up in public housing stakeholders’ consciousness. He argues that the development process of housing support at a neighborhood level can be an appropriate basis for a comparative sociology of residential relations, in part because housing management has been neglected in the process of establishing a welfare state in Japan. He concludes that this challenge is faced by many Asian societies today.

Thirdly, Professor Akagawa Manabu of the University of Tokyo investigates components of social capital, and examines which components improve community-based integrated care systems by increasing individuals’ self-rated health and subjective well-being, based on a random-sampled questionnaire survey of Kawasaki, Japan. His multiple regression analysis shows that regional trust and horizontal networks, two of the components of social capital, affect self-rated health and subjective well-being even when controlling for socioeconomic status. Second, his propensity score analysis clarifies that social capital promote self-rated health and subjective well-being, but not vice versa. He concludes that in a bid to improve self-rated health and sense of happiness, a population approach is the most effective and enhancing social capital will improve community-based integrated care systems which aim to help all people in need.

Fourthly, Professor Asghar Zaidi and Dr. Um Jinpil of Seoul National University quantify the extent to which older people contribute to their societies by creating a new Asian Active Ageing Index, and compares them among ASEAN+3 and 28 EU member states. The new Asian AAI is calibrated to Asian norms, such as the role of older persons in the society and changes in filial piety. Amongst the 33 states, Japan leads in 2nd position and Thailand is places 10th. Korea ranks 12th and Indonesia is places 19th. Although they do better than many European states, the authors find that among the ASEAN states, a low level of pension incomes explains why older people continue to work to maintain their living. They conclude that policy

efforts should be directed towards an improved enabling environment for active ageing.

Through these four articles, we can more deeply understand the underlying social problems shared by Korean and Japanese societies: developmentalism and a lack of social policy and horizontal participation. Developmentalism had disastrous effects in both societies, exacerbating social inequality and impeding social integration and care. A new approach toward social capital and social integration in daily life would be one main condition for active ageing in these super-aged societies.

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