

Perception and Response to the Population Dynamics – on Fertility (pre-war period)

Reiko HAYASHI

What was the reason why Japan failed to adopt appropriate measures to halt the lowering fertility at the right moment? In dividing the period from Meiji restoration to the present in 5 phases, it is argued in this article how the perception on fertility changed and the policy responded, or not responded, in the first phase (1868 to 1920) and the second phase (1920 to 1945).

In the first phase, the perception on fertility was vague, as shown by the existence of many estimations made by the researchers of the later generations. However, the crime on the abortion existed. Its possible effect on raising the fertility is difficult to prove, even more so if the contemporaries perceived it as a mean of fertility control. If there is no real fertility increase during this period, then the population increase should solely be attributed to the mortality decline.

The Meiji era statisticians were well aware of the international trend and rapid absorption of overseas literature on statistics and population analysis influenced a lot to formulate the discipline of statistics in Japan. The zeal for the participation to the international community culminated to the organization of the 19th session of the International Institute of Statistics in 1930 in Tokyo.

In the second phase, with the execution of the first population census in 1920, the total population as denominator became certain and the fertility expressed as the crude birth rate was well perceived. In earlier days, the population problem was the over-population and the first governmental body, the Commission for the Investigation of Problems of Population and Food was established in 1927. However, the abolition of the crime on abortion, contraception and the eugenic operation were not included in final report, even though it was proposed during the negotiation. As shown in the fact that Ms, Margaret Sanger was firstly denied the entry to Japan in 1922, the abortion and contraception was a taboo during this period.

Contradicting population problem of over population and lowering fertility were transformed into the Outline for the Establishment of Population Policy, decided by the Cabinet in 1941. This pro-natalistic policy was short-lived without any evident effect on the fertility increase, but certainly it remained in the people's mind as the symbol of totalistic regime of war, which became another taboo of the post-war period.