

Introduction: Future Path of Extremely Low Fertility in Eastern Asia

Toru SUZUKI

It is assumed that the more distant the family pattern is from Northern-Western European pattern, the lower fertility declines. Countries in Northern-Western Europe and English speaking world are the offspring of typical feudal family with well defined obligation/right relationships, high consciousness of contract, high position of women and weak tie between parent and child. Southern European countries and Japan are also the offspring of feudal family but with patriarchic and authoritarian features. China, Korea and Taiwan are the offspring of the Confucian family and the patriarchic and authoritarian characteristics are even stronger.

Low fertility is a natural response to post-material changes such as slow economic growth, tight labor market for young workers, increasing human investment, declining conventional gender role segregation, etc. However, the conflict between the rapidly changing socioeconomic environment and the slowly changing family system is large if the traditional family pattern is apart from Northern-Western European pattern.

The paper examines fertility assumptions in various population projections. Since the current level of fertility is related with the deep cultural pattern of family behaviors, the difference between Japan and Confucian countries will last for a long time.