Never Gonna Fall for Modern Love

The Negative Population Growth of Japan Explored

Ritgerð til BA-prófs

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Abstract

The main purpose of this essay is to attempt to shed light on possible underlying causes behind the drastic negative population growth in Japan. Additionally, similar trends of negative population growth around the world will be looked at, in light of the situation in Japan.

The first chapter of this essay provides a brief outline of statistics both from Japan and other countries showing the development of the birth rate in those regions. Following the outline is a subchapter which aims to explain the statistics, and subsequently outline the consequences of negative population growth on the planet and the economy. Through this analysis of statistical data the goal is to gain insight into possible problems the governments of various countries are facing.

The second chapter explores how various social changes within the Japanese society have affected the birth rate in Japan.

The third chapter attempts to describe the sexual behavior of the younger generations in Japan today, as well as explore the various services many in Japan have begun to use as substitutes for relationships, contemplating whether these factors can be linked with the declining birth rate.

The fourth and final chapter discusses the Japanese government’s methods and attempts to increase the birthrate. These methods are then compared with measures taken by other nations with similar problems.
Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................1

Introduction .....................................................................................................................................3

1. The population decline .............................................................................................................5
   1.1 Statistics ...............................................................................................................................5
   1.2 Consequences ......................................................................................................................8

2. Probable reasons .......................................................................................................................10
   2.1 The traditional Japanese family system .............................................................................10
   2.3 The working women’s dilemma..........................................................................................14
   2.4 Drastic cultural changes in a short period of time.........................................................18

3. Japanese sexual behavior ..........................................................................................................22
   3.1 The Celibacy syndrome ......................................................................................................22
   3.3 Girlfriends of the ‘LovePlus’ .............................................................................................25
   3.4 Virtual Reality .................................................................................................................27

4 The government steps in ..........................................................................................................29
   4.1 Means to boost the Japanese economy ..............................................................................29
   4.2 Other countries ..................................................................................................................32

Conclusion.....................................................................................................................................34

Reference .......................................................................................................................................36
Introduction

When I think about the Japanese nation an exotic and even a slightly strange image comes to mind. Japan is the home of giant sumo wrestlers, samurais, geishas, robots, teahouses, Pokémon, extravagant fashion statements, and even capsule hotels. However, perhaps most shockingly, Japan is now a nation with negative population growth. According to new figures released by the Japanese Health Ministry, the birth rates have hit a new low with statistics showing that only over 1 million babies were born in 2014, in a population of 127 million. This statistic represents the lowest figure found on record (Passary, 2015).

According to predictions, the Japanese nation will have lost half of its diligent workforce by 2060 and with that, its status as an economic superpower will be in jeopardy (Carney, 2015). No other industrialized nation has experienced such a swift increase in the aging population as Japan, (Kumagai, 2014) and this is attributed to a drastic decrease in the reproduction rate in the past 40 years (Rebick & Takenaka, 2006a).

There are several possible reasons for this drastic decrease. There are those who cast blame on the women’s liberation and independence movement for this development. The argument for placing the blame on women is largely attributed to women’s choice to dedicate themselves to their professions, which in turn is said to decrease the amount of time they otherwise would have devoted to having families of their own (Sugimoto, 2010). Others blame men, some of whom are now obsessed with new virtual reality technology which offers them carefree relationships with cyber girlfriends (Rani, 2013). Yet again others seem to think that the Japanese have found a way to buy everything they could possibly need emotionally and physically through various different services (Duffy, 2013) thus decreasing the psychological need for procreation. Perhaps most shockingly, according to an article in The Guardian, more and more Japanese are losing interest in real and physical sexual relationships (Haworth, 2013).
Though Japan has one of the fastest declining population rates in the world, the “Baby Shortage” is not a phenomenon which is limited to Japan, as it is currently becoming an increasing issue in other countries (Kumagai, 2014). It is apparent that Japan has developed this syndrome of a falling birth rate at a faster pace when compared to other countries. Consequently, it can be argued that what is happening in Japan today could become the reality of other nations in the near future. This thesis will attempt to examine the problems facing Japan due to its falling birth rate as well as discuss some of the underlying societal issues causing it. Furthermore, the approach of the Japanese society in tackling this issue will be explored, as well as an assessment of whether this issue is a rising threat to other technologically advanced countries.

The paper is divided into four chapters, each of which has a particular focus on this problem. The first chapter briefly outlines the statistics of the population decline in Japan and other countries. In addition, it explains what consequences negative population growth has had on Japan and other countries in Western Europe. The second chapter explores how various social changes within the Japanese society have affected the birth rate in Japan. The third chapter describes sexual behavior of the younger generations in Japan today and explores if this behavior can be linked with the declining birth rate. In the fourth chapter, the Japanese government’s methods to increase the birthrate are outlined as well as a comparison between the tactics used by Japan and other nations facing similar problems.
1. The population decline

When considering the drastic changes in Japan’s population, various statistics must perforce be examined. This chapter will discuss various different statistics and figures published by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW) in order to give a comparison of the population decline in Japan and other countries. Additionally, the meaning of these statistics and how they affect the Japanese nation and the world will be explained in this chapter.

1.1 Statistics

Like most Western European countries, Japan has become an aging society. The age profile of the Japanese population is rapidly changing due to increasing life expectancy and the concurrent declining birth rate. It has become a society with an increasingly ageing population and a decreasing number of people in the workforce to provide care and support for the elderly (Sugimoto, 2010). Furthermore, the life cycle of the Japanese nation has drastically changed during the twentieth century. In prewar Japan, the average lifespan was less than fifty years. By 2008, the average lifespan for women was the longest in the world, 86 years, while for men it was 79 years, the fourth longest by international comparison (MHLW, 2014).

In 2013, the aged population (65 years and older) of Japan totaled 31.90 million people or 25.1% of the total population, marking a heretofore never seen record high. According to a projection done in 2013 by the MHLW the aging society will reach 38.8% of the total Japanese population by 2050. The percentage of the population under 15 years of age will amount to only 9.7% of the population (see figure 1).
This change in age population has occurred much faster in Japan than any other technologically advanced country. In less than a quarter of a century the aging population doubled in Japan, as in 1970, people aged 65 or older amounted to 7.1% of the total population, but had increased to 14% by 1994. By comparison, in other countries this same development into an aged population has taken a much longer time. For instance in France this change took 115 years, in Sweden 85 years and in Italy 61 years. These comparisons clearly highlight the rapid progress of demographic aging in Japan when compared to other countries (Statistics Bureau, 2014).

Unlike the Western European countries, Japan’s post-war baby boom was extremely short. It lasted only for three years, through 1947-1949 (Rebick & Takenaka, 2006a). In comparison, the baby boom in America lasted trough 1946-1964 (Russell, 1982). Because of this short baby boom, Japan’s fertility declined markedly. The total fertility rate declined by more than half during the period of 1950-1957, it went from 4.54 to 2.04 children per woman. In the 1970s the number of births increased despite the low fertility rate as an ‘echo’ effect of the baby boom generation. However, since then the fertility rate has started to fall again and reached 1.29 children per woman in 2003. In the same year, (2003) there were 1.12 million births recorded, which is less than half of the annual total births recorded during the baby boom period (Rebick & Takenaka, 2006a).
Though the fertility rate is dropping drastically in Japan, it is also declining all over the world. Birth rates have declined in almost all countries since 1970. This trend has even affected India and various countries located in the continent of Africa. For example, during the period 1970-2014 the birth rate declined in Somalia from 7.2 to 6.08 children per woman. In Iceland it has dropped from 2.8 to 1.88 children per woman and Italy from 2.4 to 1.42 during the same period (Population Reference Bureau, 2015). Fertility rates are dropping in China as well due to the one-child policy which was adopted in 1980 in an attempt by the Chinese government to diminish the population growth. Now the Chinese nation is rapidly becoming an aging society as a result of low fertility rate (Hvistendahl, 2011). In January 2014, the Chinese government tried to boost the birth rate by allowing couples to have a second baby if the mother or father was an only child themselves. This has not increased the birth rate yet and china is quickly becoming one of the most elderly populations in the world (McKenzie, 2015).

![Figure 2](image.png)

**Figure 2.** Proportion of elderly population by country, aged 65 years and over. (Statistics Bureau, 2014)

These figures tell us that fertility and birth rates are declining all over the world. As a result, many countries are quickly becoming an aging society (see figure 2). The statistics show that Japan’s aging population is the largest compared to other nations. However, these statistics alone fail to tell us why that is, or what the consequences will be for the Japanese nation.
1.2 Consequences

Population growth in the past century was three times the total growth from the origin of the species until 1900 (Negative Population Growth, 2014). Most experts agree that the population growth exceeds the carrying capacity of the earth, pointing out that the declining birthrate will prevent overpopulation on earth (Dalen & Henkens, 2011). Overpopulation has led to rising unemployment, increasing competition for resources, and water and food shortages in many places of the world. Furthermore, it is affecting the world’s climate, raising the sea levels, creating powerful hurricanes, heat waves, intense floods and droughts. Future generations must depend increasingly on renewable energy, which is unlikely to be recoverable in amounts sufficient to support more than a fraction of the current world population (Negative Population Growth, 2014). Therefore, the growing negative birth rate could prevent the overpopulation of the earth. On the contrary the dropping birth rate is affecting the global economy in a negative way.

According to an article in *The Wall Street Journal* this declining population growth will shrink the growth of the global economic output for the world’s 20 largest economies by 40% over the next 50 years if it continues at this rate. This 40% drop in global growth could translate to a lower standard of living for the coming generations. In other words the generations of the future would see less prosperity than their parents and grandparents if the population decline continues at this rate (Timiraos, 2015). In Japan, the changing demography of age distribution has brought on crises both in the labor market and in the social welfare sector. The young, active labor force that once underpinned the postwar expansion of Japan’s economy no longer exists (Sugimoto, 2010).

According to a worst-case scenario prediction published by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIOPASSR) in January 2012, the working population of Japan will shrink by 10% down to 73.4 million workers by 2020. By the year 2030 it will have shrunk by 18% or down to 67.4 million workers. These figures demonstrate that about 59.4% and 58.5% of the population will be supporting Japan’s nonworking population. When looking even further ahead or to the year 2060, Japan may only have 39.7 million workers, which is less than half of the current population.
These figures clearly show that the economic system in Japan will not be able to withhold the pension system as it is today.

The National Pension system of Japan is a public pension system participated in by all persons aged 20 to 59 who have an address in Japan. These pensions provide benefits due to old age, disability, or death (Japan Pension Service, 2015). Because of this “lack” of younger people there will not be enough people to pay the pension for the elderly. In effect, the government will have to spend large amounts in order to care for their enormous senior society, which they likely will not be able to do due to the dropping numbers of working citizens. As a result, Japan would lose its position as the world's third largest economy (Kodera, 2014).

Understandably the Japanese government is trying to prevent this from happening. In the next chapter various reasons for the drastic drop in birth rate in Japan will be explored in order to give some insight into the problems the Japanese government is facing.
2. Probable reasons

Although Japanese couples consistently say in surveys that they would like to have more than two children, it’s not reflected in the birth rate figures. In this chapter the traditional Japanese family system will be discussed in order to show the difference between modern and older ideas towards family life in Japan and how they cause increasing tension between the generations. The chapter will then turn to the working women and how the family system is affecting them in the Japanese labor environment. Finally, cultural changes within Japanese society will be explored in order to show how these subchapters are affecting the birth rate.

2.1 The traditional Japanese family system

Before 1947, when the population decline was not a problem, the Japanese had a family system called the *ie*. The *ie* system or traditional family household, was an extended family that could have four generations and several married couples sharing the same surname and even residence. The system required each household to nominate its head which in most cases was the eldest male. The head had great authority over other members of the house and would manage the family business (Jones, 2014). The head of the *ie* was supposed to receive many privileges from other members of the household. For example, the head was allowed to take the first bath and was served first at all meals (Hendry, 2013). According to custom, the eldest son would eventually become the head of the household and inherit both the house and its property. The eldest son would also inherit the responsibility of taking care of his parents as they aged and was expected to live with them as well. This is still the case in many rural farming communities in Japan (Hamabata, 1990).

This *ie* system was a convenient tool for the Japanese government to identify, control and govern the Japanese people with a help from the *koseki*, a national family registration system. The *koseki* contains the birth certificates, death certificates, marriage licenses and other additional information of the household rolled into one file. Therefore the basic unit of the *koseki* is not an individual ‘one’, but the whole
household. Today all Japanese households are obliged to record their marriages, adoptions and acknowledgements of paternity into the *koseki* system. These events do not become legally effective until they are recorded in the *koseki* (Child Resource Network Japan, 2009).

Even though the *ie* was legally demolished in 1947 during the post-war Civil Code, some key ingredients of the *ie* linger on because of the maintenance of the *koseki* system (Sugimoto, 2010). According to Takami Kuwayama, an anthropologist, the ideas and attitudes derived from the system are far from extinct because it embodies deeply held social values (Kuwayama, 2001). For example, the *koseki* makes a status distinction between children born in or out of wedlock. It also requires births to be recorded on the mother’s family documents even if the child is given up for adoption. Because of this system Japanese women today often choose abortion as a solution for unwanted pregnancy to avoid the social stigma of having an illegitimate child recorded on their official papers (Sugimoto, 2010).

This is one of the reasons why people are not having children, an illegitimate child still carries a social stigma in Japanese society because of the maintenance of the *koseki*. Therefore, many people decide not to have children before getting married. As a result, fertility remains low.

Hendry has argued that the older generations of Japan would like the ideology of the *ie* to continue. Perhaps for the sake of the household occupation or in order that all of their practical needs in their old age would be met. Back when they were young, members of the household gave their service to the *ie* by taking care of the seniors of their household. The older generation would take care of the upbringing of the young and when time passed the young would take care of the old in return (Hendry, 2013). Today, the senior citizens might feel betrayed as they could be sent to a nursery home instead of being surrounded by their family as they are accustomed to. Being sent to a nursery home used to be thought of as a poor way to end one’s life as they would be rejected from the family unit. Still they know that there has been a change of emphasis in their society and that they should allow their children to choose how to live their own lives. Yet the task still falls mostly on daughters and daughters-in-law to take care of the senior generation (Hendry, 2013). Although it has been on the decline, more than 40% of the elderly aged 65 years or older live with their adult children in Japan today. The
numbers were much higher back in 1980 when 69% of seniors lived with their children (Kumagai, 2014).

Although the society and the family image of Japan are quickly changing, many old ideologies from the past linger on. This creates a tension between the younger and the older generations of Japan because of a different emphasis and ideas concerning marriage and family life.

2.2 Arranged marriages vs. Love marriages

The ie was not quite the same as “family” in the sense we understand today. It is not a group of people directly related by blood, rather it contains all those who share the same roof. The household could include two or three generations of lineal kin as well as servants, indentured laborers and others who contributed to the household economy. The most important responsibility of the members of the ie was to preserve the household (Duus, 1998). If an individual within the ie was likely to bring shame to the household he would probably be cut out from its membership. The house and its continuing entity was considered to be more important than the individuals living in it. Relations within the house were characterized less by love and affection than by duty and filial piety (Hendry, 2013). Arranged marriages were therefore very common in the traditional Japanese family system.

Marriages were arranged by relatives who looked into the background and social status of the potential bride or groom. Love between a husband and wife was not common and even frowned upon as attention was supposed to be paid to the needs of elders and children before the needs of the spouse:

Proper men did not admit to romantic love for their wives; instead they spoke of them and to them as lowly creatures. Many other customs insured that women did not endanger the operations of the social machine (Norbeck, 1965, p. 13).

In short, romantic love was not approved neither as a way to find a suitable mate nor as a desirable relationship between man and wife. It was only among people who belonged to the lowest social classes, people who lacked properties, which married for love (Norbeck, 1965). Instead men were free to have affairs outside of their marriage but women on the other hand could be killed with impunity by their husbands if found in adulterous acts, a reality which was not altered until 1908 (Hendry, 2013). Furthermore,
a relationship between a husband and a wife that was too passionate could be seen as detrimental to the *ie*. An unsuitable wife could even be sent back to her house of origin for lack of general fitness or possible infertility (Hendry, 2013).

During the times of the *ie*, before 1947, some women took their role as wives so seriously that they were called ‘professional housewives’. They were responsible for running the household, managing the family budget, raising the children and ensuring their careers and marriages (Hendry, 2013). A good husband was said to be “one who was ‘healthy and absent’; healthy to maintain the flow of income and absent to confirm his commitment to his company while not interfering too much at home” (Eccleston, 1989, p. 187). Even today, many Japanese men never say that they love their wives to them or about them (Barth, 2007, March 26) and being a ‘professional housewife’ is still the ideal for many married women today (Hendry, 2013). Perhaps these ideals are one of the main reasons why marriage is not appealing to young people in Japan today. As a result, fertility remains low because marriage is the only socially acceptable way to have children (Domínguez, 2015). Back when the *ie* system was legal, arranged marriages were common and people were automatically put in an environment where family life was important and expected. Therefore fertility and birth rates remained high because of the high number of arranged marriages.

Even though ‘love marriages’ started to appeal to young people during the Western influence after the Second World War (Hendry, 2013), it is not always easy to classify a particular marriage as ‘love’ or ‘arranged’ even though statistics are collected as if it were. Some people meet and decide to marry, though they might not call their relationship one of love. Other couples claim to have fallen in love after a marriage arranged by their parents or other guarantor (Tokuhiro, 2010). Although arranged marriages are not as common in Japan today as they were a hundred years ago they still persist. It is not uncommon for sons and daughters of wealthy corporate owners to be joined together through marriage arranged by their parents (Hendry, 2013).

Women married at a much younger age in the 1950s than they do today. Back then, the average age was 23 years when marrying for the first time. In 2013, the average age of women who married went up to 29 years (MHLW, 2014). It is possible to explain the increased age of first time marriages between the 1950s and present time by noting that in the 1950s arranged marriages were more common. It was generally not the women’s decision when they got married, if at all. Till this day, there is still considerable social
pressure on Japanese women to marry, however many have chosen to delay marriage and as a result, their time to bear children is shortened which possibly exacerbates the low fertility rate.

There are many reasons for why women are delaying marriage or choosing not to marry. Firstly, there are increasing numbers of women who prefer to marry later or not at all as more job opportunities are now available to them now than there were in the fifties or sixties. Secondly, an increasing number of women feel that they cannot afford to raise many children when education costs are so expensive and therefore do not want to get married (Sugimoto, 2010). Thirdly, more and more women are postponing marriage and becoming what the sociologist Masahiro Yamada called ‘parasite singles’. The ‘parasite singles’ stay at home, find short-term positions and spend most of their income on consumption goods rather than on raising a family (Yamada, 1999). However, there are many women who want to pursue a serious career and some of them may decide not to have children at all, as it increases their chance to become promoted to a more serious and powerful position (Hendry, 2013). In addition, according to some researchers, years of stagnant incomes have made the Japanese men less attractive as potential partners (Harney, 2012).

Even though there has been a great change in Japanese society in the last decade, perhaps especially for women, they still lack equality in the workplace and other sectors of life. These factors affect their decisions about whether to marry and have children.

2.3 The working women’s dilemma

After the Second World War, Japanese women breached the gap in social standing between themselves and male members of the society when they started to enter the labor market (Norbeck, 1965). The Japanese economy grew as a result of the added female work force and consequently many employment opportunities both for single and married women became available. Japanese industries suffered a constant shortage of labor and in order to draw married women into the labor market they invented the part-time job (Ueno, 1987). Women moved into the workplace, earned diplomas and began to demand more cooperation, compensation, protection as well as respect from
men and society. There was a common postwar saying: “After the war, men weakened while women and stockings became stronger”\(^1\) (Kaori, 2014).

In spite of this change, women were still made to feel inferior, and they lacked legal equality during that time (Norbeck, 1965). The participation rate of women in the labor force peaked at about 55% in 1960 but declined through the 1960s and the 1970s. Then it began to rise again in the 1980s. This can be attributed to a drastic change in the nature of work done by women over the years. In the 1960s, women mainly worked within family businesses (Ito, 1992). By the 1980s part-time work for companies outside of agriculture and family businesses had become the most popular choice of Japanese women (Ueno, 1987).

Unlike most men, the majority of Japanese women who explore the possibility of entering the job market are still faced with many complex issues which they feel they need to consider. This is partly because of the lingering ideology of women from times of the *ie* system. The traditional view of a typical Japanese woman is that she should retire when she marries in order to take care of her home for the rest of her life (Ito, 1992). Because of this view, modern Japanese women must generally make life-changing-decision at three different stages of their lives: at marriage, following child birth, and finally when their parents or parents-in-law require day-care (Sugimoto, 2010). Only about one-quarter of women remain in the workforce throughout their married life. Around 25% of Japanese women never return to work from their maternity leave and many women stop working to take care of their parents and parents-in-law according to tradition (Sugimoto, 2010).

Today, women who wish both to marry and embark on their preferred career, must find a husband who is willing to cooperate with their decision. This is due to the possibility that professional women might lose their chances of promotion if they take time off work to have children. Women lecturing at universities, in law, or medicine have been better able to combine a career with marriage than their counterparts who enter the big world of business (Hendry, 2013). While most modern women aspire to work, the reality is that their careers are constrained in ways which are foreign to most men. Because of these restraints, more women seek ‘free jobs’ in restaurants, services, sales,

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\(^1\) Original Japanese saying: 戦後、弱くなったのは男、強くなったのは女とストッキング (*Sengo, yowakunattanowa otoko, tsuyoku nattanowa onna-to sutokkingu*)


finances and insurance rather than in more time consuming and demanding industries. These jobs allow them to begin or end their career at any time of their choosing. Furthermore, the majority of women who have attained managerial positions are childless, which demonstrates the inherent clash between attaining a family life and a successful career for women in Japanese society (Sugimoto, 2010).

In Japan, pressure is exerted on women to terminate their employment with a company when they reach the age of 30, and these pressures are in some cases very direct. At this age women are expected to retire to get married, become pregnant and stay at home to take care of their new family. There are companies that formally insist on such resignations and offer the female workers payments for dowries, money that the bride gives the groom at marriage, as a motivation for them to resign. In such cases women can seek legal advice but the process is often so lengthy that even if judgment is in their favor they would already have lost precious time away from the company. Therefore, legal actions are not common (Eccleston, 1989).

Unmarried women over the age of 30 and still in the working force face many personal and material pressures in Japan. Traditionally, the purpose of life for women is to get married and have children. Women who don’t fulfill that ideal purpose have to cope with the pity of colleagues at work who label them as ‘old maid’ or ‘old aunt’. Their families might consider them as ‘failures’ in the bridal market who will remain a burden on her parents (Eccleston, 1989).

At the workplace both unmarried women and women who return after maternity leave are unlikely to be considered for promotions by their employers (Eccleston, 1989). McLendon wrote this about the attitude in Japan regarding women in the aforementioned position: “They are generally speaking not welcome. Most employees would prefer to see them replaced by fresh young women just graduated from Junior College” (McLendon, 1983, p. 176).

These attitudes remain because, even though maternity leave has been a guaranteed in Japan since 1972, the responsibility of financing it is not that of the state but rather is a burden to the employers. This creates extra pressure on those who choose to go on maternity leave as the employers rarely replace the absent employee. When returning back to work, these women will be faced with ill-will against them as they are now, in the eyes of their co-workers, passengers who place the company second to family life.
(Eccleston, 1989). Therefore, asking for an extended maternity leave “would be a professional suicide. Such an act is interpreted as a lack of commitment to the career and the company” (Osako, 1978, p.21). As a result more women choose to retire rather than to go on maternity leave.

Back in 1985-1989, women who continued to work without taking maternity leave were 18.3% and only 5.7% took maternity leave and returned back to work. In 2005-2009 the numbers had changed: more women took child leave (17.1%) than those who didn’t (9.7%). Even though more women are going on a maternity leave in recent years, the number of women who retire after their first born child is not getting lower, on the contrary, the percentage is increasing (see figure 3), demonstrating that the traditional ideology is still affecting the Japanese work environment.

![Figure 3](image.png)

**Figure 3.** Percentage of females who continued to work after child birth (by ages of child birth, composition of employment status before and after the first birth) (MHLW, 2011)

The Prime Minister’s Office of Japan has conducted a series of public opinion surveys regarding various gender roles since the early 1990s. All of the surveys include a question concerning the view of the public on fixed division of labor by gender. In a survey done in 1987, 43% said that “Men should be at work, women should be at
In February 2000 only 25% of the respondents still affirmed this idea (Rebick & Takenaka, 2006b). Today, more than 50% of married Japanese women go out to work. There has also been an increasing interest among Japanese fathers to help raise and take care of their children (Hendry, 2013). Still the majority of fathers do not take paternity leave (see figure 4). This is because only couple decades ago, a man who stayed home was considered an object of pity (Kaori, 2014). However, public opinion on the issue is changing and in a survey by the Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, in September 2000, the majority of both male and female respondents stated that men should commit themselves actively to care more for their children (Rebick & Takenaka, 2006b).

![Figure 4. Percentage of workers taking child care leave by gender (MHLW, 2011)](image)

Due to the combination of factors outlined above many women who wish to pursue a serious career choose not to start a family of their own. Having a husband and a baby would decrease their chances of promotion within the company. Even though attitudes are changing and the Japanese government has increased the rights of women in the past it has failed to ensure social equality of the sexes. This could be in part attributed to the likelihood that when the Japanese government made drastic changes towards gender equality it was not because they generally wanted to but because of pressure from other countries (Sievers, 1983).

### 2.4 Drastic cultural changes in a short period of time

Few modern nations have undergone such drastic and self-sought cultural changes in such a short period of time as Japan. In 1868 Japan saw the end of over two centuries of

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2 Original Japanese saying: 男は仕事、女は家庭 (Otoko wa shigoto, onna wa katei)
self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world. Japan of that time was a nation in which peasants were under the control of a small hereditary group of leaders and rulers. When the period of isolation ended, there was a conscious effort within Japan to adapt and learn from the West. Groups were sent out to study Western culture and report back to Japan. Industrialization began in order to catch up with the culture of the Western world (Norbeck, 1965). The drastic cultural changes during that period could be one of the reason why the gap between the generations of Japan appears so wide.

19th century Japanese society adapted the mores of western society immediately after the opening, thereby adapting to Victorian mores and suppression of women. At that time, the dynamic countries of the West represented ‘civilization’, the more advanced stage of human development. According to them, China, India and pre-Restoration Japan were ‘semi-civilized’ and the rest of the world was ‘savage’ or ‘barbarian’ (Duus, 1998). The Japanese were faced with one of the favored patriarchal myths of the 19th century Western countries: that the status of women was an important measure of any society’s progress towards civilization. This claim was obviously ironic to women of the West as they were struggling to improve their status in the ‘civilized societies’. Even though men took off their hats to great them or stepped aside in a narrow street in order to let them pass, as a way to show their respect, they did not have the same rights as men. Being a mother and a wife was still one of the most significant points in a Western woman’s life (Sievers, 1983).

The Japanese were very sensitive about being called ‘semi-civilized’ by the countries of the West. The government leaders, most of whom were samurai, were very comfortable by what Takamure Itsue³ described as the “geisha society” of Japan and wanted to maintain as many aspects of it as possible (Sievers, 1983). An early 18th century document called the Onna daigaku (Greater Learning for women) reflected the Confucian⁴ attitudes towards women at that time:

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³ Takamure Itsue (1894-1964) was a Japanese feminist poet, writer, ethnologist, historian and anarchist.

⁴ Confucianism is a philosophical system, also described as a religion, developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BC). In essence, Confucianism is the practice of proper forms of conduct, especially in social and familial relationships. Confucianism also provided a hierarchical system, in which each person was to act according to his or her status to create a harmoniously functioning society and ensure loyalty to the state.
Woman has the quality of yin (passiveness). Yin is of the nature of the night and is dark. Hence, because compared to a man, she is foolish, she does not understand her obvious duties. [...] She has five blemishes in her nature. She is disobedient, inclined to anger, slanderous, envious, stupid. Of every ten women, seven or eight will have all these failings. [...] In everything she must submit to her husband. (Sievers, 1983, p.5)

To maintain these Confucian ideas and answer the Western criticism was not an easy assignment for the Japanese government. They began to centralize the political and economic power of the country during the first few years of the Meiji restoration (1868-1912). They took down the old four-class society and their fellow samurai out of the privileged status they had held for centuries to make way for a Western-style army (Sievers, 1983).

During the first few years of the Meiji period (1868-1912), government initiatives relating to women were both superficial and contradictory (Sievers, 1983). Nonetheless the new policies adopted by the government during that time were revolutionary for the Japanese society. Yukichi Fukuzawa, a member of the Meirokusha, argued that women should not be treated as inferior human beings as the Onna daigaku would have them. No one had a greater impact than Fukuzawa in the transmission of Western attitudes towards the status of women in Japanese society (Lu, 1997). He argued that marriage should be a contract between equal partners and that wives should have equal rights to their husbands. Furthermore, he asserted that a monogamous marriage was the only proper kind of marriage, and men who kept several mistresses were no better than beasts. To ensure greater equality with men, women ought to be given full property rights and should also receive proper education. However, neither Fukuzawa nor other members of the Meirokusha intellectuals considered the possibility that women might become involved in politics or that they would pursue professions outside the home should they receive these rights (Duus, 1998).

In 1871, five Japanese girls were sent to America as Japanese government students. This was part of the ‘civilizing nation’ program or the Iwakura mission. The government indented to use these women in the future as teachers to teach girls in Japan through their knowledge attained in Western educational background. Nonetheless,

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5 Meirokusha was an association formed in 1874 to spread Western knowledge to the Japanese public.
when these girls returned to Japan from the United States in the 1880s their mission had become insignificant as the government no longer expected women to play active roles in society. Instead the government introduced new gender polices including an educational policy for women: the so called ‘Good wife and wise mother’. This policy emphasized women’s collective roles as wife’s and mothers in households. To underpin this ideology of womanhood, the government framed the Meiji Civil Code in 1898, where married women’s civil rights, such as property, alimony and divorce were restricted (Shibahara, 2010).

In the 1890s there was already a growing feeling within the Japanese conservatives that the Western influence was getting out of hand. At that time an imperial prescript on education issued made explicit the expected values of the *ie* system to be learned by heart and recited daily by all schoolchildren. The dissemination of these ideas was extremely efficient as educationalists of the time tended to be traditionalists and enrolment in schools was up to 98% by 1909. There were of course variation in the practice of the *ie* system, but its principles became a common cultural property (Hendry, 2013). As a result of the conservative forces in Japan the changes made during the Meiji period (1868-1912) were not as sufficient as many would believe and the rights of Japanese women remained lower than that of Japanese men. Today, Japanese women are trying to breach the gap between themselves and men in the labor market. One of the side effects of these efforts by women is visible in the dwindling birthrate as marriages and children are one of the reasons that make such a transition difficult. There is a growing number of Japanese women who say they have started to resent sexual relationships and prefer to be alone (Haworth, 2013). The men state the same, yet various sexual services are mushrooming throughout Japan (Duffy, 2013).
3. Japanese sexual behavior

Japanese sexual behavior has recently raised international interest because of articles claiming that the Japanese youth are losing interest in sex. At the same time the variety of sexual services in Japan is booming. The declining birthrate could well be linked to those factors as well as the social ones described in previous chapters.

3.1 The Celibacy syndrome

Several articles exist which put forth information stating that the Japanese youth are losing all interest in relationships and sex (Haworth, 2013). The declining birthrate seems therefore not be caused solely by the fact that people are generally choosing to marry and start a family later (like in many other countries with a declining population figure) but also because of a new development which results in a general lack of interest in all sexual relationships.

In 2010 a survey done by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIOPASSR) regarding attitudes among Japanese singles toward marriage and family found that more than half of the Japanese population said that they were single and more than a third of all childbearing-age Japanese said that they never had sex (NIOPASSR, 2011). According to the same survey 61% of unmarried men and 49% of unmarried women aged 18-34 were not in any kind of romantic relationship, which was a rise of almost 10% from five years earlier.

Another survey done early in 2013 by the Japan Family Planning Association, found that 45% of women aged 16-24 are not interested in or despised all sexual contact. More than a quarter of men the same age felt the same way. Even more they found that one third of the Japanese, under the age of 30, had never dated at all (Japan Family Planning Association, 2015). The Japanese media calls these people: セックスしない症候群, sekkasu shinai shokogun, which is directly translated as ‘not having sex syndrome’ or ‘celibacy syndrome’ (Fisher, 2013). Based on these findings it is clear that the underlying psychological issues regarding sexual contact amongst Japan’s youth today
could be affecting the fertility rate and therefore negatively impact the birth rate in the country.

Even though Japanese people appear not to be having as much interest in sex as they used to, many new sexual services have become available in Japan in recent years which enable people who use them to enjoy sex without partaking in conventional sexual relationships.

3.2 Services and Hosts

Various services with a sexual undertone have become available in Japan recently, indicating that many Japanese people have begun to use these services as a substitute for a real relationship with the opposite sex. The options are not limited to male clients but instead a number of options have popped up specifically aimed at women, such as for instance the host bar. The word ‘host’ refers to young men working at nightclubs that cater exclusively to women. These clubs are most prominent in Shinjuku district of Tokyo (Osaki, 2010).

Japanorama, a BBC television series headed by UK the personality and presenter Jonathan Ross, launched an episode in 2007 featuring host clubs in Tokyo. Based on their research and findings, the idea is said to originate from Japan’s Geisha culture, in which women, as Geisha’s were trained to serve and please men. In the host bars the gender roles are reversed and young men are trained to serve women. The costumers are usually rich and successful unmarried women looking for a way to satisfy their romantic or even sexual needs. Others are the lonely wives of business men who lack romance in their marriage. Some women are regulars and come as often as 5 or 6 times a week. The host shows an interest in their customer appearance and makes them feel attractive and feminine (Barth, 2007, March 26).

At host clubs, the customer chooses a host of her liking from a photo list of candidates. The host she chooses will then keep her company and make sure she is happy as long as she is willing to pay for expensive drinks. The host will receive a percentage of the future sales generated by that customer. After the customer steps out of the club the host will most likely go after her and ask for personal contact information in order to call or text the woman. This is part of their job, trying to get women to come back to the club and “to live up to the customer’s expectation” (Osaki, 2010). The more the guests drink,
the more reckless their spending becomes. A bottle of Dom Perignon “Gold” costs roughly 2000 dollars while a vintage Romani-Conti could cost 15,000 dollars. Such extravagances are not unusual and for instance at Club Ai, a host club in Shinjuku district Tokyo, where they sell around 20 such bottles a month (McCurry, 2004). There have been cases where customers become obsessed with their hosts and have started wanting more from them. These customers will send their hosts expensive gifts in the hopes of becoming their real girlfriends (Osaki, 2010).

Officially, sex is not part of the host service, but it is no secret that hosts end up in bed with customers. Many customers that sleep with their host do not want to pay for their company anymore and never come to the host bar again. Therefore many hosts avoid that situation in order to keep their source of income (McCurry, 2004). The host clubs and hosts are one of the reasons why so many women are not engaging in romantic relationships.

There are various services for male customers in Japan as well. For example, a man that likes anime⁶ can go on a date with a woman dressed as his favorite anime character for roughly 70 dollars per hour. Some services rent out rooms with sex dolls with prices per the hour. At a Japanese cuddle café, a different price is paid for various items on the menu. The girls at the cuddle café are willing to look deep into their customer’s eyes or lay beside them for a fixed price per minute. Many of these services have become available to women too (Duffy, 2013).

Cosplay cafés⁷, especially maid cafés, are extremely popular in Japan. In 1999, the first cosplay restaurant opened on a trial basis in Akihabara, in Tokyo. The waitresses were dressed in high school uniforms. The restaurant received positive responses from customers and in 2000 a coffee shop with the same theme opened. This time the waitresses were dressed as different manga and anime⁸ characters. A year later, in 2001, the outfits changed to traditional maid costumes (Kawamura, 2012). What is distinct about these coffee shops and restaurants is how the waitresses treat the costumers. The

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⁶ Manga: Japanese comic books and graphic novels. Usually the characters are drawn with proportionally large eyes and extreme hair styles.

⁷ Cosplay: Literally "Costume Play." Dressing up and pretending to be a fictional character usually a sci-fi, comic book, or anime character.

⁸ Anime: A style of animation that originated and is still heavily centered in Japan. The word 'anime' is based on the original Japanese pronunciation of the American word 'animation.'
costumers are mostly men and when they enter the shop, the girls say, ‘Welcome home, master!’ The cafés aim to create a soothing and a comfortable atmosphere, in which the waitresses play games, chat and make their customers feel at home (Todd & Hoburg, 2013). One regular customer had a theory regarding the maid cafés popularity:

These days, girls are getting really independent, tough, and strong. It seems that they no longer need us men. But if you go to these cafés, the girls are cute, innocent, and sweet. When a guy meets a girl who looks so vulnerable, it makes you want to protect her. It, in a way, satisfies our ego, and it is also a relief to know what these submissive girls still exist today (Kawamura, 2012, p.81).

There are other places where men can find cute, sweet and submissive young girls to keep them company. These girls are even willing to become their girlfriends. There is only one catch, they are virtual and live inside a computer game.

### 3.3 Girlfriends of the ‘LovePlus’

Some Japanese men choose to have digital girlfriends rather than real ones, thanks to the newest advance in technology, girlfriends in virtual reality have become a possibility (Rani, 2013). Most men who have a virtual girlfriend are otaku, nerds or geeks captivated with computers, technology, video games, manga or anime. These men have grown up during the last 20 years of economic stagnation and have immersed themselves into their own fantasy worlds (Todd & Hoburg, 2013).

Anita Rani, a BBC presenter, went to Japan and interviewed two men who were currently in a virtual relationship. The men were 38 and 39 years old and both had been in their relationship with their virtual girlfriends for several years. Their girlfriends are characters in a popular Japanese Nintendo DS computer game called ‘LovePlus’. The girls are high-school students and when the men play the game they say that they become high-school students too. "At high school you can have relationships without having to think about marriage," said one of them. "With real girlfriends you have to consider marriage. So I would think twice about going out with a 3D woman." Even though he would like to meet a real woman, he said it was easier having a relationship with a virtual girlfriend. “As long as I have time, I will continue the relationship forever” he added. The other man was married and kept his virtual relationship a secret from his wife. He hoped he would never have to choose between the two of them (Rani, 2013).
The creator of the phenomenally successful ‘LovePlus’ is Akira Uchida, who is a cult game creator with years of experience. In a 2011 interview with the Telegraph he said that he wanted to create a dating game for a hand-held device such as Nintendo DS. Before ‘LovePlus’ was released in 2009, people had to stay in their living-rooms to play dating games, spending hours in front of the computer screen. The aim of ‘LovePlus’, he said, was to make players feel that the girls inside the game were really their girlfriends, girlfriends that had real feelings for them (Demetriou, 2011). Akira Uchida furthermore explained how that could be possible:

> It might seem strange to have feelings for a game character, but people have feelings for characters in novels or TV dramas. It’s not that different from falling in love with an actor. But one big difference is the level of interaction. The interaction [in LovePlus] is intense but innocent. Hands are held, hair is stroked and kisses exchanged by touching a stylus on the screen image of the girlfriend, which unleashes a flurry of little cartoon hearts (Demetriou, 2011).

The feelings ‘LovePlus’ players have for their virtual girlfriends are in some cases very strong. In one case it was so strong that in 2009 a player married his ‘LovePlus’ girlfriend in a ceremony streamed live on the internet. Although they were overseen by a real-life priest, the wedding was not legally binding (Moore, 2009). According to Akira Uchida, many ‘LovePlus’ players are married with kids and they consider the game a substitute for a real love affair. They even become kinder to their real-life partners, because when they find themselves falling in love they become generally more kind to other people (Demetriou, 2011).

The girls in the game demand to be treated as respectfully as any real counterpart. If a player forgets a birthday or does not reply to an e-mail she will become angry and it might take the players a few days to mend the relationship (Bosker, 2014). Many players take their virtual girlfriends to dates in the park, buy them presents and celebrate their birthdays, both in real life and in the virtual life. Some men even take the virtual lover along on holidays, traveling to exotic locations around the globe (Rani, 2013). Only last year, 2014, the ‘New LovePlus+’ game for Nintendo 3DS was released. The ‘New LovePlus+’ has a facial-recognition technology so the virtual girlfriends are able to tell the difference between their boyfriend and someone else (Demetriou, 2011). Even though the ‘LovePlus’ games have not been released outside of Japan, thousands of men and women around the world have become hooked on the companionship of the
girls in this game. For those outside Japan or who do not speak Japanese there is an unofficial version of ‘LovePlus’ available online with the Japanese texts translated to English (Bosker, 2014).

Patrick W. Galbraith, an Alaska-born ethnographer who has studied *otaku* culture for over a decade, thinks ‘LovePlus’ is an exciting experiment in the field of virtual relationships between humans and machines. “I find it very exciting because the ‘game’ is open-ended and real-time. So it’s not really a game: It’s an experiment with love between a human and a nonhuman entity” (Fondi, 2014).

The ‘LovePlus’ could be one of the reason for why the fertility rate is getting lower in Japan. As some men are loosing interest in relationships with real counterparts because they think it’s easier being in a relationship with a virtual woman. A new device has taken a step further creating a virtual experience for those who wish enter it. Unlike the ‘LovePlus’ this device will not be released only for the Japanese market but for the whole world. There are some that believe that this virtual reality technology will further decrease the birth rates of the world as a number of people might lose the need to socialize with each other face to face (Kelly, 2014).

### 3.4 Virtual Reality

A device called Oculus Rift, is a new virtual reality headset that allows players to step inside virtual worlds and experience them as if they were real. On the Oculus VR official website they claim that the headset has a custom tracking technology that provides ultra-low latency and a 360° head tracking. This allows the player to look around the virtual world just as he would in real life (Oculus VR Official Website, 2015). In Japan, virtual reality dating games have already been created. To make the virtual experience as realistic as possible, the players can buy cushions in the shape of a woman to hold her hand, sleep in her lap or touch her thighs (Kelly, 2014).

The social network Facebook Inc. bought Oculus VR in March 2014 for 2 billion dollars. Mark Zuckerberg, chairman and chief executive of Facebook, said that virtual reality will be the next social communicational platform (Dredge, 2014). In addition to that, a Chinese company called Dexta Robotics is currently working on an exoskeleton glove for virtual reality. Aler Gu, founder and CEO of Dexta Robotics, said that with this glove, the player will be able to experience feedback from the virtual world by
holding and feeling the weight and textures of different virtual items (Gu, 2015). A documentary by Vice called ‘The Digital Love Industry’ looks further into how virtual reality can be used for sex and or relationships. The porn-industry has already used virtual technology to create next generation porn. There, users can be stimulated with genital shaped devices that imitate what they see with their Oculus Rift headsets (Fuertes-Knight, 2014).

From this we can conclude that there will be more virtual options for both sexes in the near future. Not only for the Japanese market but also for the whole world which could result in a lower global fertility rate. A decreasing birth rate and the increasing number of senior citizens will have a negative impact on the economy if nothing is done to prevent it. The Japanese government is trying to reverse this evolution in Japan in order to maintain Japan’s status as an economic super power. Other countries with similar problems are also trying to preserve their economy with diverse methods.
4 The government steps in

If the Japanese government wishes to keep the nation’s status as the third largest economy, action must be taken. The Japanese government has recently reacted to the nation’s population crisis by trying to change some aspects of Japanese society. However the task is not as easy to tackle as they would have hoped. Many traditions which can be asserted are part of the problem but they have been rooted in Japanese society and cannot be altered in a short span of time. This chapter will first look at how the Japanese government is trying to increase the Japanese birthrate. Following is an overview of the actions of the governments of other countries in their fight against their nation’s negative population growth.

4.1 Means to boost the Japanese economy

To be sure, an increase in the birthrate is no quick fix. Even if Japan were to increase its birthrate next year, it would take at least a generation before the country began to tackle its demographic imbalances. The only shortcut would be a significant increase in immigration, a deeply controversial subject in Japan. Conservative politicians and right-wing groups are opposed to bringing in more workers from overseas, and some Japanese worry that foreigners would not assimilate well (Harney, 2012).

The former head of Tokyo’s Immigration Bureau, Hidenori Sakanaka, is calling for a large-scale immigration as a solution to the shrinking workforce and to preserve the Japanese economy. Japan however, doesn’t have much experience in living with other ethnic groups as it is an island country, closed off from foreigners for over two centuries. When Japan encouraged Brazilians of Japanese descent to return during Japan’s economic growth in the 1980s many of them were sent back when the bubble burst in the 1990s. The Brazilian immigrants of Japanese descent had a culture different from the Japanese and the children who couldn’t speak good Japanese were bullied, many of them dropped out of school which in turn made their job prospects worse. The Japanese government has said the solution to the shrinking workforce is to give more foreigners, working and training visas for three to five years, however Sakanaka has
expressed the opinion that more is needed. He believes that the government must have a real immigration, with full rights for it applicants, in order to maintain Japan’s economic status as one of the biggest economies of the world (Carney, 2015).

As a response to the falling birthrate, day-care institutions for seniors have become available throughout Japan (Hendry, 2013). The younger members of the house can now drop the elderly off to a daycare center, just as they would do with their young children, when heading to work. These senior day-care centers give modern Japanese women a chance to seek full time jobs as they won’t have to take care of the elderly themselves anymore (Hieda, 2012). Some ventures have even tried to brighten the image of these businesses in order to make the day-care institutions more attractive to the older generation. They started to call them the “silver business” and the aging population the “silver boom”. Silver being the designated positive version of grey (Roberts, 1996).

Taro Aso, the finance minister of Japan, said in 2013 that the solution to the economic crises was to relieve pressure on the state to pay medical care for the aging society of Japan. Caring for the elderly is a major challenge for Japan’s stretched social services as 40% of total households receive welfare to care for family members 65 years or older (McCurry, 2013). The 72 year old Taro Aso, said this about the elderly in Japan in a public speech:

Heaven forbid if you are forced to live on when you want to die. I would wake up feeling increasingly bad knowing that [treatment] was all being paid for by the government. The problem won't be solved unless you let them hurry up and die (McCurry, 2013).

Later he acknowledged in a public forum that his language had been "inappropriate" and insisted he was talking only about his personal preference (McCurry, 2013).

The current Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe (re-elected 2012), wants to ensure Japan's status as the world's third biggest economy by placing more women in the workforce. He wants to solve the problems women face today so that they will be able to join the labor market. Many women resign from work because of difficulties in obtaining child care, and those who do have a job, have to battle Japan's male corporate culture (Carney, 2014). Additionally, there is also a huge wage gap between men and women. Women only earn about two thirds of men’s wages due in part to significant
differences in occupation. Fewer women are assigned to managerial positions than men. Another reason is the limited time women work because of, for example, suspension of their careers when they become mothers. (Ogiwara, Tsuda, Akiyama & Sakai, 2008).

Women's empowerment minister Masako Mori claims that active participation by women in the workforce is the government's top economic growth strategy (Carney, 2014). The government is considering to cut the spousal tax deduction, which was introduced back in 1961. By taking the tax deduction away the government hopes more Japanese wives will seek full-time employment. The tax break helped support the typical Japanese family which was traditionally subsisting on the single income from the man, or husband. This spousal tax deduction cuts the taxable annual income of the household’s main earner by 380,000 yen if the dependent spouse is earning 1.03 million yen or less a year. By reducing their taxable income, the main earner and the household pay less taxes overall (Kodera, 2014). According to an online survey by Amazon Japan done in March 2014 people in Japan generally don’t approve of the government’s idea to cut the tax break. Out of 98,340 respondents 67% of them wanted to keep and even expand the spousal tax deductions, while 30% supported reducing them. Some experts argue that what really impedes women from going to work is not the spousal tax deduction but other factors, such as difficulty of finding someone to take care of their children, the lack of decent paying jobs, sexual harassment at the workplace, and of course the social expectations pressuring women to quit their jobs when they reach a certain age, marry or become pregnant (Kodera, 2014).

Shinzo Abe, the Japanese prime minister says the government will reduce child care waiting lists to zero within three years so women don't need to worry anymore about finding someone to take care of their children. Furthermore he is setting a target for women to fill 30% of all Japanese leadership positions in business and government by 2020 (Carney, 2014). During recent speeches, Abe has smiled broadly whilst being surrounded by female business leaders. He has repeatedly stressed the need “to create a society in which women shine” (Ito, 2014b).

Tomomi Yamaguchi, an associate professor of anthropology at Montana State University and an expert on gender issues, believes that Abe is only focusing on improving the economy and taking measures to increase the low birthrate. She also believes that his policy aims only to help support a few elite women at the top and that he is not genuinely interested to increase gender equality in Japan (Ito, 2014a). If this
were to be factual, it would inevitable form a similarity between current Japanese politics and the actions of the government when they claimed to “increase” women’s rights during the Meiji restoration (1868-1912) (Sievers, 1983). The percentage of female executives in Japanese public companies were only 1.6% in 2014. The minister is planning to increase the percentage by 28.4% in only 5 years but many have their doubts if that will work. Some believe that Japanese culture has to change first before women can be considered equal to men in the workforce. Only a small number of women can pursue leadership positions in a society that demands them to choose between a career and motherhood (Carney, 2014).

On the website of the Japanese MHLW the Employment Security Bureau has presented a mission to fight the declining birth rate in Japan. According to this mission, it will be necessary to create more subsidized public day care centers, which would make child care more affordable for more people. Both the government and Japanese companies should encourage more women to enter the labor force with high-quality jobs on a par with men and offer incentives to women to return to work after child birth. Not just when the economy experiences a downturn but also when the economy is good (MHLW, 2013). In countries where these sorts of reforms have taken hold, from France to Sweden, the result has been a boost to the birthrate and the economy (Harney, 2012). Perhaps, Japan should look into what methods other countries are using to fight the population decline in the hopes of finding a solution to their problem.

4.2 Other countries

Despite the reality that birth rates have been declining in almost all countries of the world since the 1970s, the world’s population has almost tripled since then. Regardless of the risk of overpopulating of the earth, the governments of many countries are trying to increase the birth rate once again in order to maintain their economy. The solutions governments have come up with to fight the declining birthrate differ from country to country but some of them seem to be temporary fixes rather than long term solutions.

During the last decade in Russia, a million more people died every year than were born. Frightened by those statistics various politicians, sociologists and economists speak of a demographic crisis in the country (Kakturskaya, 2003). In 2006, Vladimir Putin the president of Russia, described population decline as the country’s most urgent problem.
He went so far as to correlate the population crisis with homosexuality and used the issue as a justifications for the government’s hostility towards homosexuals. A year later in 2007, the Russian government introduced a program that would pay mothers 11,000 dollars if they had more than one child, and in 2013, Putin signed a law banning advertisements for abortion (Keating, 2014).

Other European countries have created various government programs hoping to ease the burden of parents-to-be. For example, Denmark has come up with baby-ready dating sites, “date-night” childcare and even prize draws for positive pregnancy tests (Russell, 2015). According to the Danish Statistiks Banken, the Danish birth rate in 2013 was the lowest in decades with 1.7 children per family (Statistiks Banken, 2015). Some local politician have gone so far as to plea with parents to have more than one child in order to prevent this from happening (Rodriguez, 2015). The travel company Spies Rejser, created an organized movement called “Do it for Denmark!” in order to encourage more Danes on a holiday to relax and have sex. After returning from the holiday, the couple could send positive pregnancy test and medical records to Spies Rejser, after which that couple would have the opportunity to win three years worth of baby supplies (McCoy, 2014).

Some countries seem to be more creative than others when it comes to increase interest among their citizens to have children. It might take years for statistics to show which methods will be successful in increasing the birth rate. Perhaps, none of them will, only time will tell. That is why Japan might not be able to increase their chances to fight the population decline with any of these methods, as there is no way of knowing which one will work beforehand.
Conclusion

The population decline is not a one sided problem, as decreasing it would prevent overpopulation of the earth. On the other hand the population decline will have a negative impact on the economy of many countries. It creates an ‘aging society’ and decreases the number of people who can work and create the resources necessary for the pension of the elderly. This is likely to result in an economic crisis, a reality which many governments will attempt to prevent.

The situation in Japan is somewhat different from most other countries. The aging society is the largest in Japan and according to many predictions it will continue to grow if nothing is done to alter the situation.

The drastic birth rate decline in Japan is largely due to various social and cultural elements within the Japanese society that come together. Traditional and modern ideas don’t fit together, creating a tension between the old and the new generations. Women are trying to breach the gap between them and the men in the Japanese labor market which results in a dwindling birth rate, as women perceive marriages and children as detrimental to their professional lives. When young men attempt to stay home with their children they are scorned by society and neglected at the workplace. A growing number of young Japanese people have started to resent sexual relationships and many have begun to use new sexual services as a substitute for a real relationship with the opposite sex.

Although the Japanese government is attempting to alter the course of birth rates through various methods, they do not appear to have been successful yet. The government’s top economic growth strategy is to increase the number of working mothers in the following years. Many believe that strategy is bound to fail as the Japanese society has for many decades resented such women in the workforce and the working environment is hostile towards childbearing women.

It is not likely that other countries will experience the same extremes as Japan in the not too distant future. The reason behind the drastic drop in Japanese fertility is due to a
number of complicated factors coming together, overlapping as well as stretching over a long period of time. Many of the problems that the Japanese government is facing revolve around Japanese history and traditions that other nations don’t have. Virtual reality and computer girlfriends are more likely to have a negative impact on the birth rates of other countries as more virtual options for both sexes will be available all over the world in the near future.
Reference


