

Loss Control in Southeast Asia: The Impact of Depopulation in Japan

ABSTRACT

This article discussed the impact of depopulation in Japan that influencing Southeast Asia. The phenomena of depopulation are dangerous problem, but many people didn't notice. In case of Japan, having economical power in Southeast Asia, it can potentially lose control of economy. Depopulation can make the Japan power decrease economically. China even be superior to Japan as the state with overpopulated people in economical rivalry. Depopulation as one of the factors that make Japan loss control can be estimated as important factor. This article used qualitative methods, supported by statistic and literature data. By the article, it can be concluded that the problem of depopulation as an issue is not cheap issue, but its significant and dangerously. The case of Japan can be a good review for analyzing negative impacts.

Keyword: depopulation, Japan, China, economy

INTRODUCTION

Depopulation is a world phenomenon. This phenomenon occurred when centuries ago in Europe. European was facing some of pandemic phenomenon such as Bubonic Plague (1331-1351), Smallpox (1520), and Russian Flu (1889-90). This event made shrinking of population in Europe so that emerging new phrase as "depopulation". In historical context, the perspective of depopulation based on the death of society because of the disease and declined amount of population in big numbers. For example, it can be seen for the case of Republic of Ireland when the population declined from 6,5 million in 1841 to 5.1 million within ten years due to of "great Famine." Then, the population was declined continuously at 2.8 million in 1961 (Lutz & Gailey, 2020). According above, the case shown that depopulation make declining of society consistently, not just one or two years.

But in 20th centuries, there was demographic transition of world society that make depopulation loss. The human population growth rapidly in 1927 and 1960 because high fertility rates and low mortality rates. There was increasing of health quality so that enhancing population growth and avoiding decline. Some of adagium support the higher of population growth such as “many children, many fortune” or “children are treasure”.

However, the challenge of demographic transition back to depopulation in 21th centuries. There was some of transformations in mindset that contrast with already mindset. In this era, we face different perspective about reproduction. Many people saw preserving children as a “cost”, not a “treasure”. It happened because of many factors. As one, the perspective of education that oversaw demography as pessimistic make huge effect of the perspective of society. The whole society was viewed as competitions, and it impact for seeing children as a cost. Social scientist, Robert Malthus, for example, think that the human population growth as threats. He argued that while the population grows geometrically, the food supply grows linearly because of limited of land. If it didn't stop, he believed that there are the great famines (Lutz & Gailey, 2020).

Many countries all over the world facing the same problem: minus demography. Even though it is not including for all countries, but some countries in many continentals did. According to United Nations 2019, there is top 20 countries with fastest population decline in 2020-2050: Bulgaria (22,5%); Lithuania (22,1%); Latvia (21,6%); Ukraine (19,5%); Serbia (18,9%); Bosnia and Herzegovina (18,2%); Croatia (18%); Moldova (16,7%); Japan (16,3%); Albania (15,8%); Romania (15,5%); Greece (13,4%); Estonia (12,7%); Hungary (12,3%); Poland (12%); Georgia (11,8%); Portugal (10,9%); North Macedonia (10,9%); Cuba (10,3%); Italy (10,1%) (World Population Review, 2024).

According to data, we can see that many countries that having the fastest population decline occurred in Europe. Eastern Europe is the most significant population decline with Bulgaria, Latvia, and Lithuania that experience over 20% reduction by 2050. In research, the factors of reduction including emigration, aging, fertility rates below normal; and high infant mortality (World Population Review, 2024).

Depopulation is not a normal problem. It could make society becoming the demographic aging due to decline fertility in many countries. Depopulation could impact to economic problem, followed by health care, pension system, and labor market. The states could result many costs for pay the price because of demographic aging and depopulation. In prediction, the share of the world's population older than 65 would be doubled among 2008 (7,8%) to 2040 (14,7%) (Krstic, 2017). This prediction that there is alarm for nations civilization, and it run to disaster.

The interesting topic for the countries is focus on Japan as the only one country in Asia that obtaining one of the biggest populations decline in the world. Japan is one of the largest countries that influence the world in many things. It is the countries that have maturity in industry. As the industrial country, Japan support the world for transportation, infrastructure, trade and investment, knowledge, and human resource development. Japan support technology of transportation and infrastructure to Europe, America, Africa, and Asia to flourish development. They build many cooperation for many organizations and countries for the development. The role of Japan as the developed country is not forgotten by many countries.

In Southeast Asia, Japan have huge influence. Geographically, Japan has near territory as the same part of Asia. Japan has the same thing culturally, and has strong relations with Asia historically. Today, for good development, both the government of Japan and private sector built partnership and cooperative relations with ASEAN countries, including trade agreement, bilateral and multilateral relations, and investments. The Japanese presence in cooperation with ASEAN make the relationship for peace, stability, and prosperity more becoming true (Keidanren, 2021). Even these ties make ASEAN dependent on Japan for economic development.

The UN prediction is Japan derive 16,3% population decrease by 2050 due to aging populations and low fertility rates significantly. The population of Japan is projected loss 20,7 million people between 2020 and 2050. The problem of demographic in Japan couldn't be underestimated. This prediction can be making Japan shrinking as industrial country. For the author, it is dangerous as

Japan's threat because it can impact for politics and economic. The paper will explain the impact of minus demographic in Japan, including politic and economy. It analyzes the factors of demography that influence the power of Japan.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses qualitative approach as a research method. In research, the author uses literature study to analyze the topic by books, reports, and journal. By those sources, the research makes deep interpretation about Japan as a country and center of influence in Southeast Asia. In searching, the sources that correlating with depopulation is not so many. Thus, the author uses the other way to enhance knowledge. The other important thing is using statistic sources in internet to measures how far depopulation develop in Japan. Statistic can prove and enhance interpretation about depopulation as measurable. the sources were derived from statistic report in World Bank and several Non-Government Organization report. This research synchronizes literature study and statistic by using qualitative approach to explain the phenomena.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Controlling Southeast Asia

The existence of Japan in the world is not something new. As centuries goes, Japan have been experiencing in building their power over the world. The record could be traced by the involvement in world war I and II; playing in industrial manufacture; investments; and trade agreement. People of the world recognized that Japan is one the largest and develop country in the world, as we seen when japan being as a G7, seven develop countries in the world.

Japan have huge influence in Southeast Asia, not just today. History reveal that the role of Japan in Southeast Asia was significant. It can be seen that the record in 20th century. Since 1941, Japan possessed big political power in Southeast Asia as a new stage. This country replaced Britain, United States, France, and Dutch imperialist controlling the territory (Hong, 2017). Japan made invasion in many territories in Southeast Asia to take over the economy for the war fulfillment. Though it just three years, but the power of political Japanese is very strong.

The political power of Japan is not just nonsense. They have capability to control Southeast Asia as region economy subordinate, becoming second economic supplier. They made economic control under Japanese management. Japan could build permanent basis for the construction such as supplier of raw materials and commodities. Then, they could integrate with Japanese military and political economy institution (Hong, 2017). This moment was used by Japan's government to maintain war to the West. Thus, Japan was regarded as "new" colonialist after West colonization, even just three years.

Though Japan loss the war in 1945, Japan was not giving up. They loss their military capacity and capability because consequence of the war. But the magnificent effort on economy was successful. Japan could rise again in several decades. In 1950s, Japan focus on reconstruction and rejoin with international community. In 1960s, Japan achieve economic growth rapidly, and could build some huge infrastructure such as fast train and Summer Olympic Games. Then, in 1970s, Japan could overtake West Germany in economic size and become the second largest economy after United States (Ohno, 2018).

As the second largest economy, Japan still focus on Southeast Asia. In 1970s, the penetration for controlling the region was began. Japan could influence modern diplomacy in ASEAN by the Fukuda Doctrine that promoting mutual and strong relations, peace and prosperity, in 1977. The reaction was not easy because of the mass protest such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. But finally, the doctrine was accepted slowly but surely. Japan could offer US\$1 billion for ASEAN Industrial Project. During 1975-1987, Asia received 65% Japanese foreign aid. One of the Southeast Asia's country, Indonesia, becoming

the major destination for Japan's official development assistance (ODA) until 1982. Some of industrial commodity such as transportation, manufacture, and infrastructure were controlled by Japan. Japan gave credit to Thailand of 39 billion yen in 1979 and 85 billion yen in 1982 (Akraanee & Prasert, 2003). Japan maintained Southeast Asia's economy significantly.

In 2000s, Japan still bound the economy with ASEAN. We can see effort of Japan Government in 2013 that held ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit. Japan and ASEAN celebrated cooperative relations with ASEAN over past 40 years (Japan's Official Development Assistance White Paper, 2013). It shows that ASEAN was key destination of economy for Japan as good business partner. Then, Japan was always followed ASEAN platform, including ASEAN community that consist of three pillars: economic community, political-security community, and socio-cultural community.

As a long story, Japan successfully invest many projects in several territories of Southeast Asia. Japan built infrastructure corridors that bridging east-west and north-south by economic development. The infrastructure projects were part of it, especially in road construction and improvement. It can be seen in economic development of the Mekong region, such as Cambodia and Laos. Then, bridge construction in Cambodia (Kizuna Bridge and Second Mekong Bridge); airport and port improvement in Cambodia (Sihanoukville Port) and Vietnam (Da Nang Port). Japan built contribution in island countries too, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines to improve development of Maritime ASEAN Economic Corridor. The projects included Subic Bay Port in Philippines and Johor Port in Malaysia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014).

The effort to built good relationship between Japan and ASEAN was very real. We can see in 2013 that Japan made 40th year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. This event wanted to make strong engagement among the nations by arraying exchange programs and conferences in wide range, such as economy, politics, culture, tourism, and youth exchange. Besides that, Japan held ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in Tokyo to strengthening Japan-ASEAN in the mid-long term. According above, Japan seems have strong interest in Southeast Asia. As a giant industry, Japan would maintain their control to the

territories which they built. The purpose is to keep gain capital industry to the states. By the action, they still preserve their power to become Asia political-economy power. The things that Japan doing is the way to preserve their capability as superpower Asia.

Declining

The problematic of Japan's control to Southeast Asia emerge in the present. Japan facing the big challenges as the develop country haven't. As an educated country, Japan was faced with demography. Many of civil in Japan didn't want to married and having children because of the consequence of life complexity. Having children, as many modern people do, is bother. It wipes all cost of life, meanwhile the life cost in the modern era is very high. As educated person rationally, they unable to have children because of increasing life cost.

This phenomenon impacted to Japan as a country. Japan got problem of depopulation which increase every year. According to World Bank Statistic, the peak of total population of Japan was held in 2010 amount 128 million people. After the year, the population was declined until the year 2023, amount 124,5 million people. The statistic can be explained in the picture as follow.

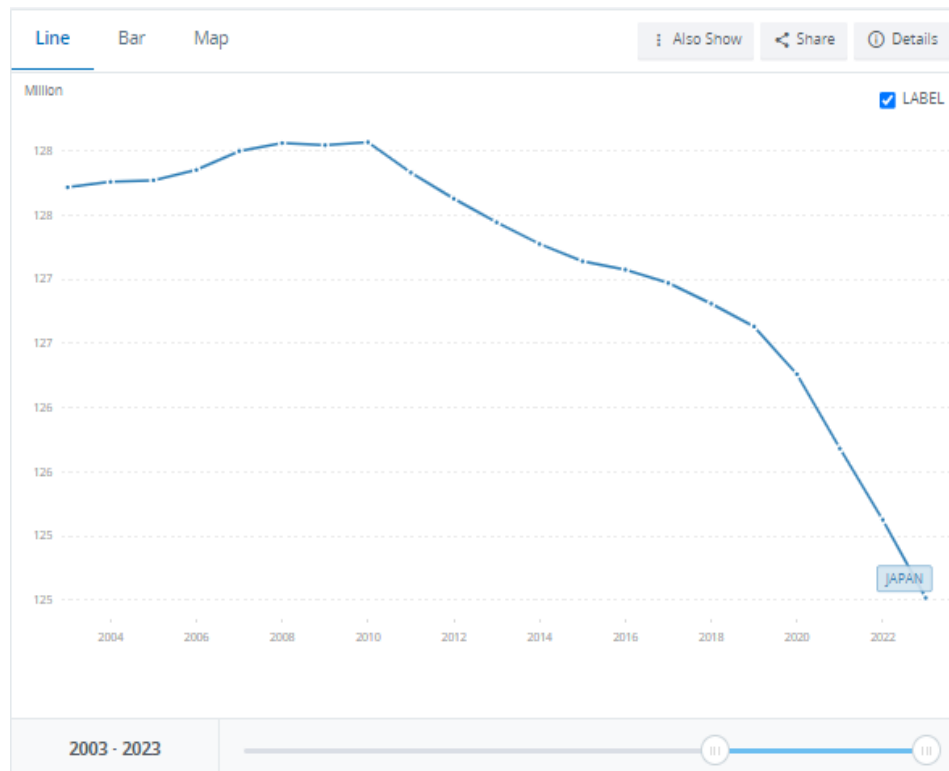


Figure 1: statistic of demography in Japan (World Bank)

According to graphic, it can be seen that there is a little stagnation of increasing population in Japan. After 2010, the population fall on sharply decrease until 2023 (World Bank, 2024). In 2023, the population of Japan was consisting of 60,5 million males and 64 million females that fall on the same with the demography (World Bank, 2024) (World Bank, 2024). It reveals that the population experiencing crisis demography that potentially toward to dangerous.

This condition impact to economic growth for Japan, especially on growth domestic product (GDP). In statistic, the GDP of Japan in 1995 amount \$5,5 trillion, then having peak growth amount \$6,27 trillion in 2012, 2 years after the peak of population. After that, the growth run into instability until \$4,21 trillion in 2023. The economic growth reveal that sharply decrease in line with the population as the result.

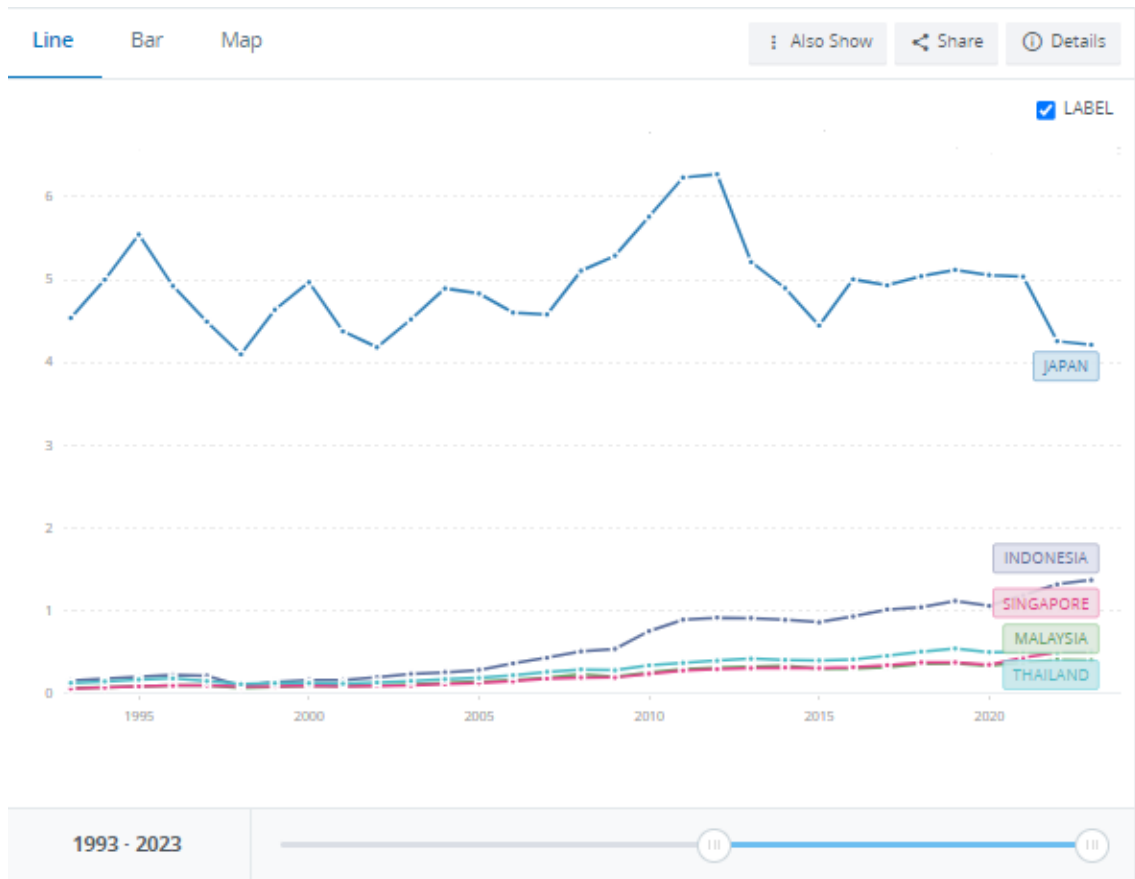


Figure 2: statistic of GDP Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Malay, and Thailand (World Bank)

If we compared with Southeast Asia states (Indonesia, Singapore, Malay, and Thailand), it shows that there is different comparison significantly. As one of the largest GDP in the world, Japan is superior among them. But if we compared by the growth, there is contrast differentiation. Indonesia made GDP amount \$202,1 billion in 1995. At the same years, the GDP of Singapore was \$87,8 billion; Thailand was \$169,2 billion; and Malay was \$88,7 billion. Then, those states significantly made increasing GDP in 2023: Indonesia was \$1,3 trillion; Singapore was \$501,4 billion; Thailand was \$514,9 billion; and Malay was \$399,6 billion. Either Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, or Malay didn't experience depopulation as in Japan. They have good development on GDP, though slowly. The GDP increase in line with the growth of population.

The problem of GDP in Japan reveals that depopulation made Japan less productivity by the time. Though many factors could be caused, but depopulation

problem could be important point. It reduces development of economy too because economy need labors. At the present, Japan have less labors so that the government made impor labors from Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam. This phenomenon could be a new problem socially in the next future. Moreover, many expertise gave the solution by increasing autoboot technology, but the fact is less labors impacted to the Japan industry. Japan's economy potentially made stagnancy economy because of depopulation. If depopulation continued, it run to slowly disaster that come closer to Japan in the future.

New Rival

A new rival for Japan in Asia emerges when China under leadership of Xi Jinping try to change Japan's control. China being one of the biggest economies in the world after United States. China has 1,4 billion people, ten times of Japan's population. The position highest of Japan as trading partner territories was shifted by economic growth of China since 2009, and it increase three times in 2021 (Rahmawati, 2022). This condition has impact to China gaining the global spotlight and it impacted to Japan which seems control Southeast Asia. China which got occupation by Japan in 20th century could be balance with the state.

Rivality among two nations-state bring threats to Japan and its ally. The things that must be considered was there is historical tragedy which China obtained. China had historical sentiment for Japan that never be forgotten. The result is distrust among two nations. This rivalry could transform to conflict from economy to politics.

Japan encountered loss the potential economy of project on Southeast Asia because of China. For example, The High-Speed Rail System (HSR) which built in Indonesia, bridging from Jakarta to Bandung, winning China \$5,9 billion contract in September 2015 (Purba & Purba, 2020). Indonesia choose China than Japan by join venture between China Railway International and four Indonesian state-owned enterprises (PT Wijaya Karya, PT Kereta Api Indonesia, PT Jasa Marga, and PT Perkebunan Nusantara VII).

The existence of China could be a threat for Japan. Japan obtained depopulation which make them performs declined so that it decreases to their economical impact. Economy run to slow phase and sharply decrease. Then, Japan had been facing with China on every economy program to the global, include Southeast Asia. It was difficult for Japan to oppose China's giant economy. In future, Japan would potentially loss controlling Southeast Asia, replaced by China, in line with along the time.

CONCLUSION

The depopulation issue is an issue that couldn't be underestimated. This issue could destroy the nation civilization, at least decrease performs of the countries. By declining of fertility and increasing of demographic aging, depopulation can make negative impact to many aspects. It can be studied in Japan as a nation-state.

As one of the developed countries in the world, Japan can be seeming as successful country. The historical track show that Japan even controlling Southeast Asia, since World War 2. Economical industries, rich culture, and big capital make Japan as a strong state, give unwilling to other countries being a rival. However, depopulation that surge in Japan can decrease performs. It can decrease the GDP because Japan got less labors. China as a rival in East Asia, with overpopulated of inhabitant, even be superior to Japan. China can be a threat for Japan in Southeast Asia by taking the economical power. The factors can be occurred because not only just a rival business, but also the depopulation problem as internal factor. If Japan can't overcome depopulation, then this problem can potentially destroy Japan from within. The case of Japan can be references and reviews for many states, observers, and stakeholders.

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