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Benefits of Reducing Population Growth and Urbanization in China

Throughout the history of China, a stable food source to feed the massive population has always been a problem. This is reflected through age-old Chinese traditions; people often greet each other with the simple sentence “ni chi le ma”, meaning, “have you eaten?” One is inevitably well and healthy if they are fed. As the country with the largest population, as well as quantity of exports in the world, China is considered one of the fastest growing major economies. With such a dense population, food security becomes a problem. With a current population of 1,336,718,015 (July, 2011), along with a birth rate of 12.29 births per 1,000 people (2011 est.), the country has the largest population in the world, and is expected to increase to 1.4 billion by 2020 (United States). The Communist government of China with felicitations from local administrations, sought to increase its importation to satisfy such high demands in dietary sustenance; China currently is the second largest importer of goods and products in the world. With over five thousand years of history, the civilization continues to expand. Urbanization flourishes within the country, with a 47% urban population as to date (United States). After the fall of the last monarchy, the Qing dynasty in 1911, the People’s Republic of China was established. The region entered a period of technological innovations, aiming to improve the general well being of the people through scientific advancements. After the Chinese Economic Reform in 1978 led by Deng Xiaoping, China finally opened up to foreign investments, and permitted entrepreneurs to start up businesses. In 2001, the country formally joined the World Trade Organization, sustaining an average annual gross domestic product growth rate of 10.5% (China’s Average). China’s current growth rate is equivalent to all of the G-7 countries’ growth combined. Urbanization played a vital role in its economic developments; wealth aggregates within cities, attracting people to the mainstream modern lifestyle. China has an uneven distribution of growth; some geographic regions are growing faster than others. The wide gaps in living conditions between urban and rural areas are not sufficiently benefitting the economical growth and development of the country. Improvements are mainly concentrated in heavily urbanized eastern coastal regions. As the already over populated population expands rapidly, along with urbanization escalating in such high rates, annual yield in goods and production are continuously decreasing. Farming is no longer profitable for farmers in China. Limiting urbanization and the distribution of wealth within the country, as well as limiting general population growth are surely essential issues for China in securing food production and availability.

A “typical” Chinese family cannot be distinguished due to the different regional traditions. China’s overall population is made up of a combination of fifty-six different ethnic groups. The twenty-two diverse providences in China also contribute to the unconventional lifestyles. Although the lifestyle varies between regions, all families have one thing in common—economic standpoint. The average gross domestic product for Chinese people are 7,600 US Dollar (2010 est.), significantly lower when being compared to the 4, 7200 US Dollar (2010 est.) of the United States (United States). With 36.3% of its total population living under 2 US Dollar, poverty is a prominent predicament (Poverty Headcount). The Chinese Communist government does not provide any subsidized healthcare or insurance, in any shape or form. With the circumstances being described above, children being born in a farmer’s family are genuinely unable to afford education, matriculating in a college is seemingly an unreachable dream for many families.

Within the Chinese tradition, giving birth to many children and having a large extended family is a symbol of prosperity. Most notably, boys are more preferable than girls because they were the ones usually held responsible for the family’s well being, and to sustaining it’s wealth. The wife of the family only held the burden of bearing males for the family; if a girl is born, the wife is expected to continue on

bearing children until a boy becomes an addition. This culture started long ago when the Mongols ruled the area of present day China. As hunting and gathering tribes, men were expected to hunt and support the family, while women stayed home with household obligations. In addition, only male family members honor Chinese family names; the name can only be passed on through the males' line. Continuing the legacy is a goal for male members of the family. This situation happens within farming families as well; men are naturally stronger and better field-hands than women. Sexism is one of the reasons why the Chinese government passed the One-Child Policy (also known as the Family Planning Policy) in 1987. The policy regulates couples in urban areas from having more than one child. The policy aimed to secure food sources through minimizing the population's demand in food consumption. Another purpose is to alleviate the economical and social issues that large populations create. A family who violates the policy is required to pay monetary penalties, along with accepting the possibility of unemployment. However, families living in most rural areas are allowed to have a second child if their first born is a girl, or a child with disabilities. Government authorities have claimed that since the introduction of the policy in promoting one-child families, 400 million births has been prevented from 1979 to 2011 (China Steps Up "One Child" Policy). With the overall effectiveness of the policy, surveys of the Chinese population reflect that 76% of the Chinese population actually supports the policy (The Chinese Celebrate Their Roaring Economy, As They Struggle With Its Costs).

Even with the current policies in place for birth regulations, China still exceeds its population ceilings, causing the country's food security to be threatened. With the policy in place, as the country gains more wealth, citizens become harder to control and regulate. The implementation of the policy can only prevent baby booming from happening in China, the population is continuously expanding and rapidly growing. Since the regulations usually only apply to those who live in urban areas, inefficient enforcements cannot control rural areas.

Due to its increasingly affluent population and industrial development, land for agricultural usages has been consistently shrinking. Urbanization and a surge of prosperity became fundamental reasons in the loss of some of China's most prosperous farmland. China has suffered loss of over 6% of the country's total arable lands since 1990s (Agri-Food Consumer Profile - China). The minimum average requirement per individual in China for food is roughly 400 kilograms of row grain. Under the current condition of land availability and taking into account the population growth, in order to fulfill the imperative of basic self sufficiency, at least 580 million tons of grain will need to be produced in the upcoming year. This is compared with a total output of 546 million tons in 2010. (Agri-Food Consumer Profile - China) These seemingly impossible issues have been central themes in China's development and implementations in policy. Although most major countries now face the same problem, the path of China's developments has a conspicuous difference. As compared to the West: when China's industrialization and urbanization started, the country was already densely populated. Rises in land productivity is soon exceeded by losses in cropland, the net decline in food production due to land loss has greatly influenced its food security.

The massive amounts of imports have been a long-term issue that the government seeks to resolve. With the current amount of population, China does not hold the ability to support its demands. Although globalization has sufficiently supported the Chinese economy, the average living standards of a Chinese citizen do not show much improvement since the country adopted new economic policies in 1978. The money gained through global trade networks usually directly benefits the richest portion of the Chinese population. Those who live in cities and urban areas control most of the nation's wealth. In the book *Who Will Feed China*, author Lester Russel Brown, founder of the Worldwatch Institute as well as the Earth Policy Institute, writes about how the issue on food scarcity not only effects China themselves, but also all the countries that participates in the global trade market as well. Brown writes:

It will be tempting to blame China for the likely rise in food prices, because its demand

for food is exceeding the carrying capacity of its land and water resources, putting excessive demand on exportable supplies from countries that are living within their carrying capacities. But China is only one of the scores of countries in this situation. It just happens to be the largest and, by an accident of history, the one that tips the world balance from surplus to scarcity. Analysts of the world food supply/demand balance have recognized that the demand for food in China would climb dramatically as industrialization accelerated and income rose. They have also assumed that rapid growth in food production in China would continue indefinitely.

Rising grain consumption is a problem of why resources are declining. As incomes rise, people diversify traditional diets by adding meat, variety of vegetables, dairy, even alcohol beverages; foods that require various ingredient demands even more grain for production. China's enormous population perpetually pressures the country's grain reserve; keeping grain production up with the population growth is an impossible task. Although China has succeeded in slowing the momentum of the growth rate, it is still adding approximately 12 million people each year to its population (United States). Even a small increase in per capita grain consumption will have a substantial cumulative effect. China is currently dependent on foreign imports to support its population. Dean Acheson, former US Secretary of State predicted years ago, that an unbearable burden will be placed on China, in attempting to feed its cumbersome population. China is currently over reliant on foreign support in food self-efficiently; this also links to national security.

So the ultimate question is: Who will end up feeding China? China is not capable of supporting itself at their rate of over population and urbanization. It is clear that the implemented policies regarding China's resource and food distributions, do not serve its purpose in providing for the people. The main route is through global partnerships and importation from foreign countries. The Chinese government needs policies that are comparably more plausible than the previous regulations in place. The One-Child Policy has shown only a small effect towards the overall birth control because only about 35% of the total population was influenced (Guan). People living in areas outside of urban cities were hardly regulated. The Chinese government needs to improve these regulations to be able to ensure food security within the country. The government should change the focus of the country's development, from technological and scientific standpoints to agricultural stability. Because of the fact that China is still a developing country, farming is labor intensive; local government should assist farmers in helping them increase crop productivity by adapting more suitable practices for crop plantation. Most farmers do not hold direct ownership for the land they farm, so it should be the government's duties to furnish their territories and ensure the productivity of the landmasses. With more sufficient production and an increase in annual yield in plantation, farmer's net income would generally increase. Better generation of product and income for the farmers would make jobs on plantation areas more attractive for the Chinese workers; rather than leaving farming regions to seek better occupations. This would reduce the over population in China's urban cities, and with a more even distribution of the population, it is easier for the government bureaucracies to enforce polices such as the One-Child Policy as well ensure more food security to the population.

The issue of food security within China is closely tied to the world trade market and the global trade networks. As Brown mentioned in his book, China's imports and exports are highly influential; if the food sources in China reaches stability, the overall world economy would certainly benefit through this. The products being bought by the China through foreign trade, promotes the growth of the country which it is being bought from as well; United States, for one, trades the most with China. This is a great opportunity for the United Nations to enhance trade between China and other countries, if products imported into China are evenly distributed amongst other developing countries, instead of centralizing between a few. While China benefits through the trade in supporting its countries demands, the economies of other countries are also stimulated through the processes.

Since the Emperor of the Qin dynasty of China unified the country in 221 BC, China came a long way in reaching today's economical status—being one of the world's greatest traders and producers; the country's role in the global trade network is imperative. From a monarchy to communism, it evolves and matures through rebellions, reforms, and finally unity. The expedite developments in technology and expansion in urbanization, as well as escalation in living standards, are all solid proof of China's opulence. However, poverty still exists throughout the country, food security is still at risk. The rapidly expanding population, along side with the limited amount of land and resources, are all prevailing issues that cannot be avoided. Vast majority of the population cannot afford health care or insurance, education is evidently unaffordable as well. Even though the government has made executive decisions and policies regarding these contentions, they are not plausible solution in the long run. The government needs to recognize the demands of the people, especially those living in suburban areas and plantations. Farming and agricultural production should be encouraged throughout the country and it is the government's responsibility in assisting these developments. Only when the food sources are secure in a country, a country may truly prosper. The people of China needs to realize the importance of this matter as well, instead of the desires for urban city life, promotion of food production and agricultural advancements are burdens among all people; Further appreciation must be dedicated to workers and productions in plantations. The subjective opinion of the Chinese people devoir is to be reversed by the government. Reinforcements in the one-child policy, and reduction in urbanization are the essential components in promoting agricultural stability, and general well being of the people. China has the potential for investing more into the agricultural implementations and polices, if this action is being taken and firmly executed, the results are inevitably beneficial toward the country's development and economy. Agriculture is one of the most important economical sectors of China; it is fair to speculate that if food sources are not secure in the near future, than with the country's net import of food and products, China has the ability in destabilizing the World Food Market. Hopefully in the near future, the usual "ni chi le ma?" (Have you eaten yet) greeting of the Chinese citizens will flourish to "ni chi shen me le?" (What did you eat today?).

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