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The Gendercide in Asia: Why the Continued Quest for Sons is a Problem

Throughout history, we as humans have always tried to grow our population with producing male children for many different cultural, religious and economic reasons. Boys would carry on the family name, work the fields, and provide for aging parents (Kazmin 3). In the article “Gendercide Crisis” by Robert Kiener, historian Stephen Miller is quoted stating that in China, evidence of this traditional preference (in the form of female infanticide) goes as far back as the sixth century B.C.E. Daughters were seen as an “expendable luxury” (Kiener 15) due to the main fact that they would not only leave home to care for their husband’s family but they would have to bring a dowry with them that sometimes cost up to three years her family’s income. Even though, 40 years ago, dowries were made illegal in India (where they were most prevalent) they are still an underground practice and are done not only in India but in Pakistan, Vietnam and certain parts of China as well (Kiener 27). Before population numbers were a problem, families kept having children hoping to have a boy in order to make sure their well-beings were met. However, now with technology and the population cap in China, the gendercide of females has become widespread and is a major cause for concern. The overwhelming number of female fetuses being aborted and infant daughters being abandoned reflects the still ever present inequalities between men and women across Asia. Due to the

local government's inability to curtail this gendercide, there is a large increase in crime that can be directly related to the resulting low number of women.

Female gendercide has become a common practice and the numbers reflect vast inequalities. According to several different sources, the normal number ratio is roughly 103-106 boys per every 100 girls. This ratio has skyrocketed out of proportion in certain countries with 120 boys per 100 girls being born in China, 110.5 boys per 100 girls in Vietnam and 109.4 boys per every 100 girls in India (Kazmin 2-3). Although the ratios do not seem that extreme, over the course of time these numbers add up. The Chinese census done in 2010 "...[shows] 34 million more men than women. [This is] comparable to the entire male population of France" (Kazmin 5). In an attempt to help Eastern cultures in the 50's and 60's, the West introduced sex-selection as an acceptable form of population control. British microbiologist John Postgate wrote an article for the *New Scientist* stating that due to this population control method of sex-selection "...a form of purdah might be necessary. [A] women's right to work, even to travel alone freely would probably be forgotten transiently" (Hvistendahl 3). This complete disregard for the importance of women and their rights has led to these horribly skewed ratios. Feminists in Asia worry that as women become [more and more] scarce, they will be pressured into taking on domestic roles and becoming housewives and mothers rather than scientists and entrepreneurs. Since women make up a large amount of the manufacturing workers in China, the current "...workforce is aging [with not enough women to take their places once they retire]. [This] hurts [China's] ability to compete in manufacturing [and] has led some companies to move operations to other countries" ("China: One-child Policy" 1). If this gendercide is not curbed, these inequalities and ensuing results are only going to become worse.

Although these alarming numbers are an obvious result of gendercide, the lack of value placed on women as a whole is a huge culprit for why we cannot seem to end it. If women are viewed inferior as adults, why would someone want to raise a little girl as a baby? It is not just men that are the problem, it is all of us. Njoki Wainaina, the founder of FEMNET, was quoted in Karen Foerstel's article stating that women are also to blame because "...they are gatekeepers of patriarchy... Whether educated or not they have different standards for their sons and husbands than for their daughters... How do you start telling a boy whose mother trained him [to] only disrespect girls to honor women in adulthood?" (29). This is an excellent question. Cultures across the globe, not just Asia, have placed women in the background. Ena Singh of the UN Population Fund in Delhi, India stated that "if the situation of women...were to radically transform tomorrow, parents would make different decisions about having daughters" (Kazmin 6). Once we give our daughters the same educational opportunities it will help erase the worry that daughters will not be able to provide for their parents in their old age. Another point, said French demographer Christophe Guilmoto, is that if we change the laws and customs that prevent women from inheriting property that would take the pressure off of couples to have a male child (Kiener 21). We need to start treating women the way they deserve: with respect and equality. If we cannot do so, there is nothing that any government or population can do to help fix this crisis.

Governments in China and India are both trying to give incentives to families in order to encourage them to keep and raise daughters. Beijing has enacted a "care for girls" campaign that give parents, with a daughter, money stipends in their old-age. Girls are being awarded extra points in college entrance exams and credits towards their tuition (Kazmin 4). This is a

strong start in the right direction. It is obvious that these governments did not intend for this gendercide to happen nor wish it to continue but since it is, they are trying to reverse the alarming consequences of it. Billboards are shown across the countryside with parents and a single daughter in the middle advertising that 'caring for girls is caring for the future of our nation!' or 'boys and girls are both treasures' (Hitchens 4). Government involvement does not always have the desired affect however. Due to the population control law in China, children are being kidnapped at an alarming rate with both boys and girls being taken. Due for the cultural need for a male heir, boys are taken and girls are taken in order "...to be brought up as child brides for cherished, spoiled boys, who will not have to worry about the increasing shortage of girls" (6). Although governments are trying to almost bribe their citizens to birth and raise girls, it doesn't seem to be working.

Another step that governments are taking is making it illegal to reveal the sex of a child before they are born or to abort a pregnancy solely on the basis of gender. In India, the "...Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique Act [has been a law] since 1996" (Verma 1). This law makes it illegal to reveal the gender of the fetus to the family except for medical reasons. Even though it has been in effect for over 15 years, government officials themselves seem to feel as though the law is unimportant. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that the "...Central Supervisory Board [of this law is supposed to] meet every six months [yet] has been non-existent for three years" (1). With these laws not being vigorously upheld, the number of sex-selective abortions is still on the rise. Even if the parents are stopped by these laws in discovering the sex of their child, a high number of them are abandoning their daughters at birth. New Delhi doctor and 'girl champion' Puneet Bedi is quoted in Kiener's

article stating that "...you can [decide] whether or not you want to be a parent, but once you do, you cannot choose whether it is a boy or girl..." (10). Unfortunately people are choosing, whether illegal or not, and it is adding to the crisis at hand.

Historically having a high number of single, young men has led to spikes in crime and even full rebellion. Crime rates in both India and China have skyrocketed due to the growing number of unattached young men. Work done by economists at Columbia University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong have found links between areas with a high male population and increases in crime (Hvistendahl 5). Not only crime such as robbery but crime specifically against women is on the rise as well. "India had recorded an upsurge [of crime against women]...including gang rape and honor killing" (Kazmin 2). History has shown us that in China, the criminal gangs are powerful and that police forces are sometimes corrupt making these rising, unchecked numbers a serious concern. Rates in China have doubled over the past decades (in all areas) and it was also found that a 1% increase in the sex ratio (at birth) resulted in a 5-6% increase in the crime rate of that area (Kiener 20). If the ratios between men and women become even more uneven, the crime rate in the areas affected is only going to get worse.

The decreasing number of females has led to an increase in crime involving the exploitation of women. Trafficking, prostitution and illegal bride-buying are now at the forefront. In July 2011 alone, police in China rescued 179 babies (most of them girls) from kidnappers preparing to sell them as child brides or into sex-trafficking (Kiener 20). If not kidnapped as infants, they are lured as young adults through false promises. An increasing number of sex slaves are procured through women leaving home under the pretense that they

will be given legitimate jobs overseas (Foerstel 8). Mara Hvistendahl wrote that when she was “in China, along the Mekong Delta, [she] visited an island village where local women were sold by their parents for [just a] few thousand dollars to ‘surplus’ Taiwanese men” (5). The first generations truly affected by sex-selection are growing up which is leading toward the scramble for men to find women, leading to these horrid sex crimes. Villagers in India interviewed by Amy Kazim “[were] once fussy about caste [but] are now prepared to buy young girls who not even speak their language [in order to have brides for their sons]” (2). Unfortunately, a growing number of toddlers and children are being sold due to this fear of low availability of women in the future. If this gendercide does not stop, the influx of these crimes against women will continue since the number of unattached men is going to increase as well.

Although our world’s industrialization has led to more job opportunities for women and a record number of women are holding governmental positions; the sex inequality is still there. The fact that women make up “...70 percent of the world’s poorest inhabitants and 64 percent of the illiterate” (Foerstel 1) is evidence that educational opportunities are still not what they should be. We, as a population, need to understand what is going on throughout the rest of the world. Overall, women and men in the United States and other modern countries have no concept of how women as a group are treated worldwide. If governmental laws and incentives are not enough to end this female gendercide, then what will be? We need to stand together and let the world know that we are aware: we are not okay with it. If the birth ratios continue the way they are, China’s inequality will only increase and “...by 2021 India will have 20 percent more men than women” (Kiener 20). The continued failure of government programs and traditional cultural prejudices against women will only lead to greater inequalities and higher

crime. If families do not cease this heartbreaking gendercide by cherishing and raising their daughters there will be no brides for their sons nor mothers to carry the next generation.

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