

Chinese Law Requires Adults to Support Aging Parents

Welcome again to the daily magazine show As It Is. For VOA Learning English, I'm Mario Ritter.

In this program, we hear about China's slowing economy and what that means for some of its neighbors. But first, we told you in one of our earlier programs about a new Chinese law that requires adults to care for their aging parents. Today we report on some of the issues facing 200 million Chinese over the age of 60. Jim Tedder has more.

A new law in China requires adults to provide mental and financial support to their aging parents. If adults fail to honor this responsibility, they face fines and other punishment. The measure became law earlier this month. It is placing hardships on children who struggle to live up to traditional values of family loyalty.

Until recently, it was common to find several generations of Chinese families living in one house. But, the need to find jobs, follow a career path and become financially independent is forcing many young people to leave home. Often, older parents are left behind.

Han Yujing directs the Qianhe retirement home in Beijing. He believes that it is easy for younger generations of single children to lose contact with their parents.

"They live in a transition time where have both older and younger generations to look after. Here they have their work and their career. They have to try and manage elder parents, family and work, allocating the right amount of energy and resources."

The retirement home opened for business this year. About 50 older adults live there now. Mister Han says the home eases the concerns of men and women who want their parents to receive the kind of physical and emotional care they can no longer give. He says they want their parents to live in dignity and not face loneliness while they are living somewhere else. For this, the children are willing to pay about \$650 a month.

Lu Jiehua is a professor of population studies at Peking University. He says 90 percent of older adults live off their family's support. However, as the number of children shrinks because of family planning policies, there are few supporting resources for the elderly.

By the end of the year, China will have more than 200 million people over the age of 60. With the new law requiring adults to support their aging parents, many see business possibilities. Websites like Taobao, an online store, are offering services to visit older people in place of their children. Since the beginning of July, more than 100 elderly care service providers have been registered on the website.

The providers offer families a different way of showing family loyalty at prices that go from about two dollars to more than \$300. However, Professor Lu Jiehua says caring for the emotional needs of parents is usually more difficult than providing for their material well-being.

"People who work in a different city send money home to their elder parents and provide material support. But the biggest problem is when they get ill. Who is going to look after them? These children live miles away and the elders also suffer emotionally."

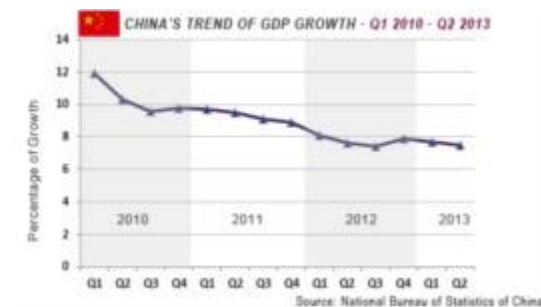
There are also moral questions the law cannot fix. Professor Lu says the issue of family loyalty and taking care of parents involve moral issues that cannot be solved by enforcing a law. While the measure can make a difference, it can also cause families to pull away from each other and the elderly.

A woman in Jiangsu province was the first to take action against her daughter under the law. A court ordered the young woman to give money to her mother and visit her every two months.

To free younger adults from being the only ones responsible for their parents, China's government is now urging more community and institutional support for the elderly.

Slowing Growth in China Could Affect Its Neighbors

Economists are warning that China's slowing economic growth may be something for neighboring countries to worry about. Milagros Ardin has more.



China's Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, had decreased in the period from 2010 - 2013.

Last week, China reported that its economy grew seven and a half percent between April and June, compared to the year before. The growth rate was generally what economists expected. But it was far less than nearly 10 percent rate that China experienced for many years.

The slowdown is partly the result of continuing weakness in the international economy and the policies of China's central government. Chinese officials have been working to cool some areas of the economy by making it harder to borrow and by permitting the value of the country's money, the yuan, to rise.

The slowing Chinese economy has increased concern across East Asia and the Pacific. China's continued growth has helped the area survive the international economic crisis since 2008.

Donghyun Park is an economist with the Asian Development Bank. He says the slower growth shows China's past policy of "growth at all costs" may have passed.

"The Chinese authorities are more than prepared to swallow or accept slower growth in exchange for greater stability down the road."

In recent years, China's government has provided support to investors and lenders to keep the economy growing at almost 10 percent a year. Such growth lifted millions out of poverty. But the expanding economy also led to rising concerns about its environmental and social effect.

Now that China is willing to control growth, nearby countries are predicting slower growth in their most important industries. For years, Australia and Indonesia have profited from China's demand for raw, unprocessed, materials. Mr. Park says the outlook for economies in Asia and the Pacific is a mixed one. But in the end, what is good for China is also good for the rest of the area.

I'm Milagros Ardin.

We hope you enjoyed today's show. Let us know what you think by visiting our website, learningenglish.voanews.com.