

THE PROBLEM OF POPULATION IN ASIA

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I. *The Asian Demographic Position in the World Population*

If we roughly take two billion four hundred million as the total population of the World today, we must first note the fact that Asia, comprising merely one-fifth of the total land surface of the World, has a population of more than one billion two hundred million, which is over one-half of the total population of the World. One of the characteristic features of Asia, as compared with other underdeveloped areas, is the immense population pressure upon its land and natural resources. "The Asian masses", "Asian type of poverty", etc. are often used to describe the state of over-population, characteristic of Asia. The reason why the Asian population problem has a special significance in the World population problem is not only because the Asian population comprises one-half of the total population of the World and has a numerical superiority, but also, because the increments to World population in future are more likely to take place in these areas of Asia alone.

The modern law of population growth shows a sequence of high birth—high death, high birth—low death, low birth—low death. Now, if we classify the population of the World into groups in reference to this process of transmutation on the basis of the differentials shown in the population growth, we shall clearly find the Asian demographic position in the World population.

The first group is what Warren Thompson calls "the *stationary* peoples", or what Frank W. Notestein calls "the *incipient decline* type".¹ To this group belong the peoples that have completed the final stage in the cycle of population growth according to the modern law. The characters of this group are.....1) the death rate is low, 2) the birth rate is low and falling down more rapidly than the death rate, 3) consequently, the population ceases to grow, or even begins to decrease. The second group is called "the *expanding* peoples" (Thompson), or "the *transitional growth* type" (Notestein). In the countries belonging to this group, there are some areas

¹ Warren Thompson, *Population and Peace in the Pacific*. Chicago, 1946. pp. 29-34; Frank W. Notestein, *Population, The Long View*. In: *Food for the World*. Ed. by Theodore W. Schultz. Chicago, 1945. pp. 42-52.

in which the birth rate began declining, but it is still considerably high. Here the death rate is dropping, at least as rapidly as the birth rate. The third group is called "the *pre-industrial* peoples" (Thompson), or "the *high growth potential* type" (Notestein). In the countries of this group, both the birth rate and the death rate are high and uncontrolled, fluctuating year after year due to situations arising from time to time. All countries of Asia, with the exception of Japan, belong to this group. There can be no doubt, however, that with the progress of the industrialization of these countries, they will sooner or later enter the second stage of population growth.

The classification of the peoples of the World according to their characters or trends in reference to the three phases of the demographic cycle is a familiar and well-established method adopted by modern demography. There is also another method which might be applied for comprehending more clearly the demographic situation of Asia. It is the five-phase theory of S. Chandrasekhar.² According to him, (1) "The *high stationary* phase, which is the population condition of agricultural communities living near the subsistence level and is characterised by a high birth rate and an equally high death rate. (2) The *early expanding* phase, which is marked by a high birth rate and a lower or falling death rate. This stage is the initial reaction to modern influences. (3) The *late expanding* phase, which is marked by declining birth and death rates. While both birth and death rates are relatively low, the death rates are invariably lower than the birth rates, so that annual population increases still occur. (4) The *low stationary* phase marked by a low birth and death rate. Here the net reproduction rate stands about unity and the population is advanced, industrialised and rather stabilised. (5) The *declining* phase marked by an actual excess of deaths over births and by a fall in population numbers."

The important population problem of the World today is the population growth in the second and third phases of the demographic cycle—the early and late expanding phases—almost all countries of Asia primarily being in the second phase. For a long time the population of Asia remained in the first high stationary phase. The birth rate stood as high as 40 per 1,000; the death rate was also extremely high. There was no universally rapid population increase. The death rates, especially, fluctuated between wide extremes, depending on the presence or absence of war, pestilence, and famine. But the Asian population may not forever remain stationary, nor stand in a state of saturation. Once political stability, economic advancement with adequate sanitary facilities be gained, a rapid population expansion will undoubtedly follow, according to the modern law of population

² S. Chandrasekhar, Population Growth, Socio-Economic Development and Living Standard. *International Labor Review*, Vol. LXIX, No. 6, June 1954. pp. 530-531. His detailed treatment of the subject is found in: S. Chandrasekhar, *Hungry People and Empty Lands: An Essay on Population Problems and International Tensions*. London, 1954. pp. 27-42.

growth. Generally speaking, Asian countries, subsequent to 1920, may be regarded as having passed the first phase and entered the second. Now we shall examine what are the recent trends of the population situation prevailing in the various countries of Asia.

II. *Perspectives of the Present Situation*

It is difficult to know exactly how the natural increase of population is fluctuating by the excess of births over deaths in Asia, as statistical data on population are inadequate. However, roughly speaking, there are many countries in Asia where over one per cent of natural increase began to appear, and in some areas the rate of natural increase reached two to three per cent. Ceylon, Malaya,³ and Singapore are striking examples. But, the most important are the trends of population in China and India, as both of them have an extremely large population. Even if the natural increase of population in Ceylon and Malaya be three per cent, the initial population condition of these countries is respectively seven million and six million after all.

On the other hand, the population of China and India is about 470,000,000 and 350,000,000 respectively. If the rate of natural increase be 0.5%, their additional absolute increments will be so large as to stand beyond all comparison.

Moreover, China under the revolutionary regime has shown and will show more than one per cent of natural increase in several future decades with the progress of its rapid economic development. The current trend of the Indian population indicates a similar phenomenon.

As statistical data on China are not adequate, we shall examine the Indian situation, since we can find many available data. According to the 1951 census, the population of the Indian Union is 356,830,000, which includes about 109,000,000, of the additional increment made during the past 30 years (1921-1951).⁴ The fluctuation of the Indian population up to 1921 was of sporadic nature, showing irregular changes. But since then, the trend has shown a stability. As the crude rate of natural increase for the period 1921-1931 was 10.1 per 1,000, for the period 1931-1941 14.0, for the period 1941-1951 13.0—the average rate of natural increase for the past 30 year period being 1.2%.⁵ In view of these past records, it may be reason-

³ For Malaya, see T.E. Smith, *Population Growth in Malaya: A Survey of Recent Trends*. Royal Institute of International Affairs. London and N. Y., 1952. 126 pp.

⁴ S.R. Sen, *The Problem of Population and Food Supply in India* *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Agricultural Economists*, Oxford Univ. Press. London, 1953. p. 66.

⁵ Kingsley Davis, *The population of India and Pakistan*. Princeton Univ. Press. Princeton,

able to expect that in the next twenty years the increment of approximately 100,000,000 will be added to the present Indian population, the total being 450,000,000. If the rate of natural increase be 1%, the present population of India will be doubled in 70 years. Such a thing has happened in Japan. The population of Japan was multiplied by 2.36 during the period 1870-1940. Generally, the estimation of a future population increase is difficult, as the change in population involves numerous complicated factors. To calculate a future population on the basis of its past record is meaningless, and even dangerous. Even we are aware of this, still we may reasonably estimate the World population in A. D. 2000 and set the hypothetical figure as 3,360,000,000, of which 2,000,000,000 will be the Asian population under the influence of the progress of economic development in Asia.⁶ It will be seen how important the Asian population is in respect to the change of the population of the World.

The most decisive factor that will influence the natural increase of population is the decrease of death rates. The striking characteristics of the population phenomena in Asia are the high birth rates and high death rates. But, along with the achievement of political stability, progress in social and economic status, advancement in public health and medical services, the death rates in Asia are rapidly falling. On the other hand, the birth rates do not fall as rapidly as the death rates, due to social institutions, deep-rooted traditions, and the way of life. Consequently, the direct effect of industrialization and economic development is apparent in the decline of the death rates, while the birth rates remain unchanged. Thus the population continues to grow. The rapid growth of population in Asia after World War II is the result of this decline of the death rates.

To illustrate this, we shall examine India. The 5-year average death rate which was 26.3 per 1,000 in 1921-1925, declined to 22.5 in 1941-1945,⁷ and further made a sharp drop to 14 in 1952. On the other hand, the 5-year average birth rate for the period 1921-1925 was 33.0 per 1,000, for 1941-1945 28.3, but in 1952 it still remained at 27. Thus, during the period from 1921-1925 to 1952, the speed of decline of the death rate was more than twice as high as that of the birth rate for the same period. In Ceylon, this contrast is more conspicuous. In 1920, the crude birth rate was 40 per 1,000, the crude death rate 32, thus, the natural increase being 8 per 1,000. But, 30 years later, the crude birth rate remains at 40, while the crude death rate has been reduced to 12, and the rate of natural increase

1951. p. 85

For future projection of the Indian population, see, *ibid.* p. 89.

A concise introduction to the problem of Indian population is: S. Chandrasekhar, *India's Population: Fact and Policy*. N. Y., 1946. 117 pp.

⁶ Frank W. Notestein, *Population, The Long View*. p. 57.

⁷ K. Davis, *Population of India and Pakistan*. pp. 33-34. 68.

has become 28 instead of 8. If the rate of natural increase remains as it is, the population of Ceylon will be doubled⁸ in 26 years to come. The high rates of natural increase in other countries of Southeast Asia are due to the same cause, namely that while the high birth rate remains, the death rate has been rapidly reduced.

The type of demographic cycle of Asia clearly belongs to the early expanding phase, as pointed out by S. Chandrasekhar. The present population increase in Asia bears a high growth potential resulting from the difference by the time lag due to the initial effect of modern economic development, which reacted slowly upon the birth rate, but very speedily upon the death rate.

III. *The Road to Solution*

We have observed the characteristics of the existing Asian population growth and its future perspective. Now, we must examine the solution. The phenomena of population growth are the joint product of the operation of highly complicated factors, demographic, moral, social, political, and economic. Therefore, the method for solution is bound to be of comprehensive nature. No single method can solve the problem.

Generally speaking, there have been two views as to the method of solution of the population problem, each placing emphasis on certain aspects. One is the demographic solution, and the other the economic solution. With regard to the Asian population problem, authorities on demography in more industrialized countries such as Notestein⁹ and Thompson¹⁰ put emphasis on birth control for the areas of heavy population pressure as a means of solution. On the other hand, those who stand on the side of backward pre-industrial countries, though recognizing the importance of birth control, have emphasized that the solution lies in the enlargement of the population-sustaining capacity by rapid economic development through agricultural improvement and industrialization.

This latter view expresses, undoubtedly, an orthodox and permanent solution. Such was the course that Western society took. As historical

⁸ S. Chandrasekhar, *Population Growth, Socio-Economic Development and Living Standards*, p. 531.

⁹ Frank W. Notestein, Problems of Policy in Relation to Areas of Heavy Population Pressure. In: *Demographic Studies of Selected Areas of Rapid Growth*. Milbank Memorial Fund. N. Y., 1944. pp. 133-153.

¹⁰ Warren S. Thompson, Population Growth and Control in Relation to World Peace. *Yale Law Journal*. Vol. 55, No. 5. 1946 pp. 1242-1257; The Need for a Population Policy in Japan. *American Sociological Review*. Vol. XV, No. 1, Feb., 1950.

H. de Meel also seeks a solution for the Indonesian population surplus in birth control. H. de Meel, Demographic Dilemma in Indonesia. *Pacific Affairs*. Vol. XXIV, No. 3. Sept., 1951. pp. 278-283.

experience has shown, the increase in productivity through industrialization and economic development, and consequently, the advancement of standard of living with the increase of real income per capita will necessarily react on the demographic phenomena, and according to the modern law of the demographic cycle, a combination of a high birth rate and a high death rate will be replaced by a combination of a low birth rate and a low death rate, and ultimately, a population balance will be reached. Such a demographic transition took place not only in Western society but here in Japan. It is therefore reasonable to expect that the same phenomenon will occur in other countries of Asia.

Those who hold such a view do not think that the process of population change occurs independently, but they think rather it goes on deeply woven in the process of evolution of social and economic fabrics. Consequently, the new ideal of small families, practice of birth control, and reduction of the death rate are bound to take place, as a natural outcome, in the urban industrial society, of the process of urbanization¹¹ and industrialization, which involves in turn an advancement in education, sanitation, technique, and real income, as well as the highering of the standard of living. Indeed such an ideal is not given from outside or from above unilaterally.

There are sufficient reasons for supporting such a socio-economic approach. However, the advocates of a demographic approach point out the following difficulties.

Firstly, although a population balance may be reached ultimately as a result of the modern economic and social development, it is not possible to wait the whole period of such a demographic process or natural transition. The unavoidable difficulty relating to the Asian population increase is how to keep down to the minimum a rapid population increase¹² which is bound to occur in the initial stage of the modern economic development.

Secondly, as mentioned above, the problem is the huge absolute increment on the top of the very massive existing population, rather than the rate of increase. At least in India, there is the terrifying fact that the increment of her population from 4,000,000 to 5,000,000 will occur annually in the next several decades. And it is impossible to provide employment for such a huge annual increment of population in non-agricultural sectors of economy.

Thirdly, even if it is possible, an extremely rapid industrialization must be carried out in such a case as a part of the economic development pro-

¹¹ The following reports are useful in reference to the latest urbanization situation in various countries of Asia. U. N. Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, *Aspects of Urbanization in ECAFE countries. Economic Bulletin for Asia and the Far East.* Vol. IV, No. 1, May 1953 pp. 1-15; *Addendum.* Vol. V., No. 1, May 1954, pp. 60-64.

¹² Frank W. Notestein, *The Economic Problems of Population Change. The proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Agricultural Economists.* Oxford Univ. Press. London, 1953. pp. 22-23.

gram; and we must not overlook the fact that there is an inherent limitation in respect to raw materials, capital, skilled labor, technical knowledge, managerial ability, and markets for trade required for the purpose intended. There is also a limitation in outside aid for capital and technique. And if such a program is to be carried out without outside aid, there will be no other outlet other than to follow the course leading to the establishment of a strong totalitarian government at the sacrifice of democracy. The experience of the Soviet Union made this possible. But, "the Russian example shows that fast industrialization is possible, but it also shows that the cost is heavy."¹³

Fourthly, the present Asian population problem is placed in an extremely disadvantageous international situation as compared with that of 19th century Europe, which rescued its increased population brought into being by the modern economic development from its Malthusian dilemma by mass emigration into new undeveloped areas, development of colonies and expansion of trade markets.¹⁴ Today, such opportunities or frontiers are practically lost. For a country to seek a means for solution outside its own borders is impossible.

As seen above, it is impossible to find a simple and easy way out for the Asian population problem. Asia is suffering from various contradictions and is in a vicious circle¹⁵ in its course of development. The population problem is one of them, and the most serious one. Yet we cannot stand idle simply because there is no easy way to overcome the difficulty. Asia must find its own solution.

Probably, Asia must adopt the following methods in order to solve its population problem. As mentioned above, its attitude should not be such as to choose one or the other, that is either the demographic solution or the economic solution, but rather it should be such as to adjust these two methods and employ them side by side. It should be a fundamental policy to be adopted in the economic development program for Asia to check the growth of population by the practice of birth control and planned parenthood through the planned enlightenment movement, education, and a widespread establishment of facilities and conveniences, weaving the family planning into the economic development program as an integral part, not allowing a rapid population increase tendency, as may be brought about as a result of speedy economic development.

Such a policy has already been adopted by India and integrated into the First Five Year Plan, and the future is not entirely pessimistic. According to the report by Chandrasekhar, generally speaking, there is no

¹³ K. Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan*. p. 229.

¹⁴ Warren S. Thompson, *Population and Peace in the Pacific*. pp. 324-325.

¹⁵ Ragnar Nurkse, *Problems of Capital Formation in Underdeveloped Countries*. Oxford, 1953. pp. 4-5.

organized cultural, institutional or religious opposition to planned parenthood in present India¹⁶ and therefore if the strenuous efforts are made by the Government for the dissemination of universal knowledge and facilities for the practice of birth control, a considerable effect can be expected. In India, organized activities have just begun; although it is quite difficult to expect their immediate outcome, it is praiseworthy that India, fully aware of the fact that the advancement attained by the economic development is most likely to be cancelled by its population increase, has adopted a bold new policy for population control.

The chronic misery and poverty of Asia lies in its low productivity due to its pre-industrial character of production methods. Therefore, in order to achieve a speedy improvement in productive capacity and advancement of the standard of living through modernization of production methods and, above all, to expedite a diversified and balanced national economic structure, correcting its mono-cultural colonial economic structure, Asian nationalism will be bound to endeavor to materialize a large-scale and rapid economic development even though there might occur a speedy population increase at the initial stage of economic development. In that case, it must be remembered that, unless such an economic development program has as its integral part some measures of population control to keep the growing population pressure as low as possible, freedom from poverty and the highering of the standard of living, which are the ultimate goal for economic development planning, cannot be realized.

¹⁶ S. Chandrasekhar, The Prospect for Planned Parenthood in India. *Pacific Affairs*. Vol. XXVI, No. 4. Dec. 1953. pp. 318-328.