Book Reviews and Bibliography

JONES, G.W. (ed.)
Demographic Transition in Asia
Maruzen Asia, Singapore, 1984 (ix + 231 pp.)

The book is made up of nine papers by different authors, mostly belonging to the Department of Demography, ANU, or associated with it at one time or the other. The first three chapters of the book provide an overview of the demographic transition as a whole; with emphasis on the prospects of fertility decline in the first chapter, mortality decline in the second, and population mobility in the third. The next two chapters deal with India, the first with the official family planning program, and the next with family planning at microlevel. Chapter six describes the pattern of population growth in Indonesia and its recent success in reducing fertility, and chapter seven the situation in Bangladesh. Both papers raise issues regarding the urgency of controlling population growth in those respective countries. The penultimate chapter takes the reader on an excursion into China's "one-child" family drive, and the last chapter focuses on yet another socialist country, namely Vietnam, which was, until recently, involved in revolution and war.

In the first chapter Gavin Jones starts with the question: Is the demographic transition in Asia successful or stalled? and concludes by saying that it is neither. This ambiguous conclusion results from his effort to cover a very heterogeneous, disparate, and wide canvas. With regard to fertility transition he finds the situation promising. Even in countries wherein the past has been less promising (e.g., India, Indonesia) he finds the current trend very promising. He also finds that, firstly, sharp and sustained declines in fertility can occur in poor, rural populations (e.g., China, Sri Lanka, and Kerala in India; see also Chapter 5), and secondly, sharply increased income levels do not necessarily result in fertility decline without considerable time lags (e.g., Southwest Asia).

While Gavin Jones sees current trends in fertility decline as very promising, Lado Ruzicka finds the pace of mortality decline in India, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand too slow and erratic. He finds that the well-known social causes of excessive mortality - poverty, ignorance, large families (high fertility), malnutrition and inadequate housing, living and working conditions - continue to keep mortality high, at the same time as the better-off subgroups manage to benefit from whatever programs are introduced and whatever facilities become available.

Looking at the relationship between fertility transition and mortality transition, it becomes important to examine whether the demographic transition in many of the Asian countries will still follow the path of the more developed countries, especially if there is an increase in the proportion of the population below the poverty line. Ruzicka's conclusion, that both public health programs and improved living standards are important for future mortality decline and are likely to be more effective in combination, has very important policy implications.
Graeme Hugo has focused upon some major contemporary changes in population movements in Asia and has related them to the Demographic Transition Theory and to some broader development issues. He says that international spontaneous migration is not a mobility option open to the majority of Asians and, therefore, they are like "flies in a locked room". He stresses the need for identification of explicit and implicit policies within the region that are shaping population movements, and the nature of their welfare and development implications.

In the chapter on "Government Interventions to Control Population Growth in India", Reddy describes the successes and failures of the official family planning program at the macrolevel while, in the subsequent chapter, John and Pat Caldwell discuss the working of the program at the levels of the individual, the family and the neighbourhood. Peter McDonald analyses the pattern of Indonesia's population growth in a historical perspective, and then shows that recent dramatic increases in the levels of schooling for girls, the traditionally relatively high position of women, the decline of the influence of parents in the arrangement of marriage, and the necessity for men to delay marriage because of their poor employment situation, are likely to lead to significant fertility decline in the years to come. According to Khuda, in Bangladesh, issues like the market for family planning services, the efficiency of supply of services, motivation and follow-up, the popularization of sterilization, and religion and family planning, are basic and require concerted efforts and resources for any sustained success of the program. In describing the demographic transition in China, Penny Kane analyses the changes in the birth and death rates since the beginning of the 1950s and concludes that the transition appears to be almost complete, with continuing population growth resulting from the age structure of the population rather than high fertility. In the last chapter Jones and Fraser analyse the population trends, and also the trends in birth and death rates, of Vietnam, and then discuss the family planning program in that country.

The book is thus very informative regarding the nature of demographic transition in selected Asian countries. While the book will serve as an excellent text to teachers on this topic, it should induce the planners and policy makers to have a closer look at past policies and the framing of more realistic policies for the near and long term future.

In the literature dealing with empirical verification of demographic transition, little attention has been paid to international and/or internal migration although both these factors have influenced the prevailing birth and death rates in the past in the presently developed countries. In the Asian countries, the role of permanent international migration may be negligible, but the pace of urbanization and rural-to-urban migration is likely to affect the pace of demographic transition and should, therefore, be treated as an integral part of analysis, a fact which has largely been overlooked in most of the essays in this volume.

It would have been somewhat better if the authors of different papers were advised by the editor to follow one pattern of referencing bibliographical notes. Further, in Table 8.2, the birth rates, death rates, and natural growth rates should be per thousand and not per cent.

Mahendra K. Premi