Recent Birth Rate Decline and Quality of the Population

A third unusual population phenomenon in postwar Japan will most likely force population experts to revise predictions of future trends announced only in February 1975. On the basis of the 1970 census the report predicted that the Japanese population will come to a stabilization at about 144,810,000 in 2050. However, recent birth statistics indicating a sharp drop in birth rates since October 1974 will make it necessary to revise these forecasts.

The birth rate in Japan had been on a gradual rise since 1970, reaching 19.4 births for every 1,000 people in 1973, when our institute experts predicted an annual birth rate of 19.3 for 1975. But the rate took a sudden decline in October 1974 and went further down in the following months. After a temporary recovery in January and February 1975, the rate went down again and did not recover as of mid-1976. The annual birth rate for 1974 settled at 18.6% and that of 1975 at 17.1, the fourth lowest since the end of the war and 2.2% lower than the institute's projection. The 1976 annual birth rate is expected to be the second lowest in postwar years. Thus, the future population level will reach a stabilization at a lower level and much earlier than previously projected.

We believe that the oil shock of late 1973 and the subsequent inflation and business slump were the major causes of the sudden, unforeseen drop. The birth rate decline began 10 months after the oil supply cut panic gripped Japan in late 1973 causing widespread inflation. Obviously, couples who had planned to have a third child gave the idea up and many who had considered a second child either delayed their plans or abandoned the idea.

This was the third unusual demographic phenomenon to occur in Japan since the end of World War II. The first was the halving of the birth rate in 10 years from 34.3% in 1947 to 17.2% in 1957. The second was the spectacular drop in the birth rate in 1966, the year of hinoeuma. According to superstition, it is well said that a girl born in this year, occurring once every 60 years in the sexagenary cycle of the Chinese calendar, is liable to do evil to her husband. Statistics showed that this superstition was still believed by a surprisingly large number of Japanese. The birth rates which in preceding years were 17.3 in 1963, 17.6 in 1964, and 18.6 in 1965 suddenly dropped to 13.7 in 1966 and bounced back to 19.4 in 1967 and returned to a normal level of 18.6 in 1968.

Such population phenomena indicate that Japanese are capable adjusting population growth according to need. This can be traced to the Tokugawa period, when Japan was completely isolated from the rest of the world for more than 264 years and the total Japanese population remained stabilized at about 27 million. The population was maintained by means of abortion and infanticide widely practiced among farmers. The present population control may be traced back to this historical background. It should be noted that the government never urged birth rate reduction in the postwar years when the rate topped 30. Statistics and facts were announced and the people seemed to have reacted accordingly.
A return to a normal birth rate level once the current business slump has passed is likely but not to the extent where another drastic revision of forecasts would be necessary. Historical documents show that Japanese had an average number of four children until Japan began modernization in the Meiji era. One or two of the four usually died of disease or other causes before reaching fertility age, and thus a steady population level was maintained. The population quickly increased from the Meiji era as the country grew economically and the government encouraged the people to have a large number of children. This and other factors indicate that more couples will probably try to have a third child once business picks up but few will have four or more children.

In this connection, our chief concern is the quality of the population rather than fear of overpopulation. By quality we mean the attributes of the population as a whole, which will be affected by heredity, education, and various other factors. The recent urbanization trend, for example, can have a significant effect on how children are brought up and how people make a living. In 1920, only 18.1% of the total Japanese population lived in urban areas and in prewar days the rate increased to around 30. With rapid economic growth, the rate of urban population was 56.3% in 1955 and 72.2% in 1970. It should be noted, too, that the trend to urban life also affected rural living. Thus, the impacts of urbanization on behavior and physical characteristics have been major topics of discussion in conferences of the Human Ergology Research Association. Symposia and panel discussions on effects of urbanization were organized by the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, ninth, and tenth conferences of the Association. Therefore, a review of all these discussions is urged.

Politicians and administrators pay little attention to the fact that population forms the very basis of solutions to social and welfare problems. We should develop jointly our own research project to fit our special population circumstances.

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Conditions Typifying a Resting State

The term 'resting' is of practical importance in experimentation as well as in field research. It has been used intentionally and inadvertently to describe a standard condition on which observed results are based. Experimenters and examiners are likely to rely upon the term gaining tacit acceptance. Conceptually, however, it is unlikely that the term can have reasonable meaning without adequate explanation. To examine this, let us consider the being-at-rest conditions of human subjects in various experiments and measurements.

In medical fields, resting is often considered to be a condition of being free from physical activity, particularly in regard to metabolic conditions. This is significantly dif-