Dissertation Thesis Review

Dissertation title:
Asian Fertility Transition

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Dissertation thesis of Ms. Enkhtsetseg Byambaa **Asian Fertility Transition** has 139 numbered pages and it is divided into five basic chapters plus Introduction, Summary and Conclusion, References and Appendix consisting of three tables.

The submitted thesis reflects one of the most profound population issues of today Asia – developments of fertility and transition from extensive to intensive forms of demographic reproduction. Its author addresses the studied phenomena in a logical manner – in their historical retrospective and in the context of social and economic development including its selected components. She examines not only fertility changes themselves but also their patterns and determinants.

The historical retrospective length adopted by the author corresponds with the period when the recent fertility and its structures were formed in a major extent. Regional focus of dissertation is on Asian countries except Iraq, Bahrain, Brunei, Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and United Arab Emirates. The first country was excluded by the author due to the current war state in the country and the others due to "highly unusual development experience" related to the fact that they belong to the major oil exporters as stated by the author herself. This special-purpose selection is partially understandable regarding pragmatic aims of the author but rather discussable from the methodological point of view. Moreover, to list Lebanon, Syria and Yemen among the major oil exporters seems to be a bit courageous, especially in a given research context. These exclusions substantially reduce

comparability of findings gained on the level of particular countries and the sub-continental regions since these data comprise also data for the countries excluded. It concerns especially Western Asia, where selected countries represent less than a half of the region total population. In brief, if the dissertation time delimitation fully corresponds with its dissertation theme and aims then the spatial one remains a matter of discussion.

Regarding thematic relevance of the thesis, there is no doubt about the topic's research relevance behind this evaluation. The dissertation theme and adopted approaches promise a valuable contribution to the recent discussions on the fertility changes in Asia and their context with widely defined social and economic development, and policy measures. In particular sense, the results of this work could (and should) help to correct views, opinions and concepts regarding fertility and its possible role in future population development in the continent and consequently also in the entire Eurasian area.

Dissertation's findings utility and applicability is supported by its text building. Its structure fully refers to the general requirements on a scientific work logical structure. Fulfillment of the structure is assured by the compact theoretical and methodological base adopted by the author. In this respect the only weaker point are content overlaps among chapters II, III and IV which are unavoidable but only partially, in a lesser extent than presented in the dissertation. On the other hand, these chapters represent relatively autonomous units which can be studied without strict need to read the previous text.

Quality of any scientific work is also dependent and strengthening by information sources employed. In this respect, the author demonstrated very good orientation in historical as well as recent literature and relevant sources of data. Ms. Enkhtsetseg Byambaa using the UN and USCB databases selected definitely the most compact and comparable information available. Also the number, volume and detail of materials studied by her are well covering the topic and no principal Anglo-Saxon title seems to be missing in the list of literature used.

Volume of literature read and data sources used is, of course, an important assumption however not a principal guarantee of the dissertation quality. Confrontation of the author, his/her findings and concepts with other specialists as well as originality and logical coherence of his/her findings and thoughts are better signs. In this respect, the results presented in the work can be assessed as original ones, mostly in the sense of updating and completing existing knowledge. The findings ordering and logical coherence is mostly good. First of all, I would like to stress and welcome replacement of crude birth rate (CBR) by total fertility rate (TFR) in core descriptions and analysis in mapping the process of fertility transition. Most of the populations concerned are characterized by irregular age structures in recent years and CBR is not more a suitable characteristic of changes in natality and does not allow tracing the process of demographic transition more. On the other hand, I have been missing author's critical approach to the date used and deeper

discussion of their reliability. This approach and step should undoubtedly lead to less deterministic or rigid interpretation of the results obtained. How substantial differences in estimates and how "soft" the numbers used are, it could the author recognize at any brief comparison of the same characteristics presented by different sources. This remark is concerning any demographic indicator and its empirical values appearing in this dissertation. My specific notes are concerned:

(1) Table 3.5 – (a) no explanation what the gray cells mean; (b) Thailand $f_{(15-19)} = 0$ is nonsense; (c) the age-specific fertility rates in the Table 3.5 seems to be in their sums substantially different from the estimates of TFR in the Table 3.3

(2) Table 3.6 – the title does not correspond with the content of table

(3) Page 107: the text: "The difference between subregions, however, has diminished over time" does not correspond with reality described in the Figure (labeled as Table) 4.38

(4) The text on the page 108 is not consistent with the findings presented in the Tables 5.2 and 5.3

Formal presentation of the submitted dissertation is satisfactory. The text is readable, language with minor exceptions is fully understandable. The thesis layout respects most of the principal standards; the number of misprints is not very high. The quotations used should, however, more consistently respect adopted norms (they are written behind the full stops, not unified writing of initials or full names of authors, superfluous introducing of abbreviated and full references together below the figures and tables, etc.) and also some principal statements should be supported by representative quotations or evidence (e.g. p. 118 when stating that "… evidence from some urban areas signifies the initiation of the second demographic transition in Asia.").

In sum, the reviewed dissertation thesis comply with the requirements on PhD dissertation set by the Czech Republic law and rules of the Charles University in Prague. Therefore I hereby recommend the reviewed work for defense with believe that the honorable members of the Commision for defense of doctoral dissertations will find Ms. Enkhtsetseg Byambaa worth of awarding her the scientific degree Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Demography.

RNDr. Květa Kalibová, CSc.

31.7.2006