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H2 Geography – Essay Model
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Topic: Population
Written by Kevin

Explain the key factors affecting the timing of the demographic transition experienced by different countries.

Demographic transition is a function of the fertility, mortality and migration trends of a country over time. The timing of Demographic transition experienced by different countries is thus influenced by the interactions between these dynamic variables. The key factors of these interactions would be the government's population policy, the indigenous culture of the country as well as the socio-economic conditions that the country experience throughout the period of time in concern.

Government's policies have in recent times become an important factor of demographic structures and more so for demographic transition because centralized policy stance is able effect population change rather quickly if the policies are effectively implemented. Take Singapore's population policy between the 1960s and 1980s for example; 'Stop at Two' campaigns and 'Have three of more if you can afford' are aimed at pushing Singapore's demographic structure from the stage 2 of the Demographic Transition Model (DTM) of falling mortality and high fertility to stage 4, which is that of low and stable fertility and mortality. Singapore completed the demographic transition in a period of about 20 years, as compared to over a century for Britain's experience. Likewise, China's draconian 'One Child Policy' (OCP) has initiated China's demographic transition to stage 3, which is that of a falling fertility. During that period, fertility remained high when China started enjoying economic growth and it would not have enter stage 3 without the authority's will to limit population growth.

Besides population policies, the migration policies of the individual countries also have an effect on the timing of the demographic transition. In Singapore, without the migrant-welcoming policy, might risk experiencing declining population. The current policies on migration have helped supply us with a youthful workforce and buffer the effects of the rapidly ageing native population, something which Japan has started experiencing.

The socio-economic conditions of the country also play a part in affecting the timing of the transition. Without the economic growth to push through the social mindset changes and acceptance of western ideas, the population would not be so easily convinced of the two-child norm that was seen as part of government rhetoric. It has in fact been claimed that without the convergence of economic growth and Singapore's population policy stance, it would not have been possible for Singapore to achieve the demographic transition that quickly. Many provinces of India have had such experience. Despite Indian government's urging to control population through family planning and birth controls, the poorer provinces, untouched by economic growth continues to have high fertility rates. This is in contrast with richer provinces like that of Kerala, which experiences very low fertility and more advanced demographic structures.

Finally, the indigenous culture of the country plays a role in affecting the timing of the demographic transition. Islam, which encourages birth and big families, would naturally influence Islamic states to linger in stage 2 of the DTM much longer than other countries even if they enjoy population growth. It would take much longer for social advancements to erode these religious beliefs and thus increase the timing for demographic transition. Catholics, who are against abortion and perhaps even contraception reduces birth control options and thus have similar effects on demographic transition.

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To what extent can the demographic transition model help us to understand future population trends in ELDCs?

The demographic transition model (DTM) is a model illustrating the demographic transition experience of the Britain and a highly Eurocentric model. It has been shown to chart the demographic transition of many of the current developed nations. While it has shown most trends experienced by the ELDCs, especially the earlier stages of the model, the timing of the transition in ELDCs differ very much from what is described by the DTM. More importantly, the variables that effect the fertility and mortality changes described by the DTM have differed from country to country. Thus, the DTM can only help us understand the future population trends in ELDCs to a small extent.

To begin, the DTM initially placed the timeline for transition from stage 2 to stage 4 in terms of centuries but many ELDCs have shown to be able to complete the transition within half a century or less through government policies and rapid social changes due to economic growth. The generic DTM now no longer includes a standard timing, so that the trends predicted by the DTM can still be used as a guide to understand the demographic transition of ELDCs.

Nonetheless, timing is not the only limitation of the DTM that restricts its applicability in the ELDCs. The fundamental correlation that DTM makes between socio-economic advancements and the population dynamics is not wholly applicable to the ELDCs today, which often presents starkly different socio-economic conditions and cultures from the western world. DTM assumes that economic development that first sets in would improve medical technology and reduce mortality, pushing a country into stage 2. Unfortunately, ELDCs often demonstrate very uneven development and thus more often than not, only a very small portion of the populace would experience the reduction in fertility even if there's net economic growth. More importantly, even with the introduction of medical technology, without government policies to improve access to healthcare and lower its cost, it is difficult for mortality to fall since large rural populations still suffer from infectious diseases. On another hand, the falling mortality in most ELDCs today is not a result of improvements in economic conditions but aid from the foreign powers.

Another fundamental assumption that the DTM makes about social advancement leading on to falling fertility is also not applicable to many ELDCs and thus do not provide a good model for understanding future trends they would take on. The DTM suggests that the move from stage 2 to stage 3 is prompted by further economic development that led on to social advancement. Many ELDCs either face falling mortality as a result of foreign aid or because of economic growth from switching to cash crops agriculture (as opposed to the industrialization experience of the developed world). As such, the social advancement is not a logical progression of their growth. Agricultural based economies will retain their agrarian mindsets of big families and this may end up increasing fertility and causing overpopulation that can be subsequently adverse to the economy. Such a deviation that is initially observed in Latin American countries like Brazil is not anticipated by the DTM. Countries experiencing population explosion like Ethiopia and Kenya are stuck in stage 2 because of the slow economic growth it experiences as a result of overpopulation and high youth dependency.

Finally, the DTM underestimated the sheer volume of migrant flows that is experienced in the modern day society, and thus it did not expect migration to have such a strong influence on the demographic transition. In a country like Singapore, migration policies have helped keep our demographic structure similar to that of stage 3 even though the native population is already in stage 4 of the DTM. Cultural elements in ELDCs is also overlooked if we were to try understanding future demographic trends from the DTM – Muslim countries like Pakistan and Malaysia appears

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between stage 2 and 3 but does not progress further as a result of the Islam encouragement of bigger families.

ELDCs today have displayed too many variations from the original conditions that were used to construct the DTM. Although it served as a guide for many population policy makers in understanding future demographic trends their countries may display, cultural differences, policies subsequently instituted by the government, the alternative development pathways followed by the ELDCs would make their demographic transition take on a different course from what is predicted by the DTM. As such, the DTM is only helpful for understanding future population trends of ELDCs to a small extent.

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