

In recent years much has been written about the 'death of the West', the underlying cause being demographic weakness, and more fundamentally those values that supposedly lead to that weakness such as the decline of religion, and a preference for welfare over production and reproduction. Demographic 'decline' and the heavy burdens of welfare and ageing that follow from it will lead to eclipse on the world stage. Military security; energy security; geopolitical weight will be lost. The EU will be marginalised by the US, (Laqueur 2007), both, eventually, by the growing size and power of currently developing countries (Last 2013). The economic and geopolitical future is Chinese according to Jacques (2012), or possibly Indian.

This paper examines critically these two propositions: of 'Western' decline, demographic and otherwise, and the inevitable rapid rise to global domination of the major countries of the developing world.

Recent evidence suggests that reports of the imminent demographic demise of the West (Europe and the countries of European heritage) have been exaggerated. A slow upward trend in period fertility has been apparent since the 1908s in some countries of Northern and Western Europe; and more recently that trend has become general. There is no reason to suppose that the dip in period fertility evident in some (but not all) of those countries is permanent. Recuperation (Bongaarts and Sobotka 2012) and intensification of fertility have replaced postponement. Cohort fertility in NW Europe has remained relatively robust and in most countries its projected trend is upwards (Myrskylä et al. 2012).

A number of analyses report a favourable relationship of fertility with female workforce participation, human capital and – possibly - education, GDP and HDI (Myrskylä et al. 2009) all of which can be expected to develop further. There is also a positive (though variable) effect of higher education on second birth intensity and on projected labour force productivity. Furthermore, although large-scale immigration brings its problems, population reproduction is powerfully augmented by it, to replacement levels and beyond in many EU countries (Ediev et al. 2013). This option cannot be available to very large populations with low fertility (Coleman 2009).

Second, for all its undoubted ills, European societies enjoy some advantages of age, of demographic and social maturity. Many European societies possess long-term properties of resilience: of established and consensual democratic institutions, rule of law and of complex civil society. Whatever the new problems of social fission arising from immigration, most societies have put behind them ancestral divisions of tribe and language; trust tends to be relatively high. For the most part, *gesellschaft* has replaced *gemeinschaft*. More broadly, current developed world populations appear to face severe climate change than in 'global South'.

In terms of numbers, the rise of Asia, Latin America and Africa is inevitable. As those economies develop, a great re-equilibration should be in progress, with economic growth transforming mere population size into economic, political and military power. That

might be expected to restore the balance of power and wealth between East and West to its position in the 17th century. Indeed it should go beyond that, as Europe will henceforth comprise hardly 7% of global population instead of its historical 20%. Furthermore, modern communications and globalization could enable the future dominant powers of the East and 'global South' to exercise much more power globally than was possible in previous centuries. Are those critics right, then, who see future demographic marginalization confining Europe henceforth to the sidelines, even if it can survive its internal demographic problems?

Possibly not. The developing world is likely to encounter some stumbling blocks on the road to world primacy. The speed of demographic transitions and of economic growth in some non-Western countries is often unmatched by needful adjustment in society, culture and political institutions. Cultures very different from those in which economic and demographic transition arose may find it difficult to adjust to the conditions necessary for success.

It is already apparent that fertility in some developing countries may fall lower than that in Northern and Western Europe and the Anglosphere, bringing rapid and severe ageing such that some countries (e.g. China) become 'old before rich' (Bloom et al. 2011). Over two billion people in the developing world now live in countries where total fertility is at or below replacement, in a number of cases below the level seen in the developed world. UN projections – themselves 'optimistic' – assume that some countries face decades of sub-replacement fertility (e.g. China, Iran, Thailand, Indonesia). Some of these (e.g. China, India, Brazil) are too big to be 'rescued' by migration from population ageing and labour shortage (Coleman 2009). Do they face a fertility future like that of East Asia? Might fertility recovery not happen, and a new 'great divergence' arise, this time in demographic behaviour?

Some evidence already points to the emergence of sub-replacement fertility ideals. Desired / ideal family size., previously almost always above two children, is so no longer in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China (Gu and Basten 2013). Chinese urban generations free to have two children do not want two children and do not have two children. This pattern is now seen more widely: for example period fertility in Thailand is now 1.85; In urban India, surveys of vanguard groups there reveal that up to 25% desire a one-child family. Increasingly in those societies., no stigma attaches to a 'One Child Family'. Has China, and others, therefore, fallen into a 'low fertility trap'?

Why is this happening? According to some, cultural factors may reinforce low fertility in those societies. Many are by tradition authoritarian, familist, with low trust (e.g. Almond and Verba 1963, Landes 1998, Harrison and Huntington 2000). The gender revolution of public and private roles for women is incomplete or scarcely begun. An obsessive investment in education in East Asia is an extra burden that falls on women. Marriage has become less attractive to increasingly well educated and independent women but so far remains the only acceptable setting for childbearing. Population is increasingly concentrated in large cities that offer only small family-unfriendly apartments. Family policies to restore demographic balance have for the most part been ineffective, ignoring

or unable to reach the fundamental cultural causes of low birth rates.

Some familist societies in the course of modernisation have been slow to adjust gender roles to new opportunities for women outside the home, tending to impose a dual burden on women and thus restricting fertility. Many societies in the developing world, especially in Asia, are 'familist' in some sense. If and when such societies modernise, fertility may well fall to a low level, slow cultural change preventing rapid recovery. If that is so, a long period of damaging population ageing, possibly eventual decline, may be expected. Population ageing in the developing world could overtake ageing in NW Europe. UN projections suggest that population ageing in Brazil, China, Iran, Mexico, Turkey and others may equal that in NW Europe and the US by around mid-century, while economic projections give them only half the per capita GDP.

Other special challenges need to be considered. Rapid economic growth unchecked by democratic pressure has generated damaging levels of environmental pollution, especially of water. China, followed by India (Sengupta 2012), appear to have the world's most damaged environments. Centralised economic policy, corruption, low economic freedom, has handicapped economic growth and led to extreme forms of economic change. Job-poor growth risks wasting 'demographic dividends'.

Problems of resource adequacy from large population size and continued population growth risks provoking shortage of natural resources. In India, urban population is projected to rise from 380 million to 600 million and energy demand to triple by 2030. 80% of the India of 2030 is unbuilt. Most scenarios suggest that the most severe climate change challenges will fall on the 'global South' (e.g Beardson 2013, Littwak 2012, Guha 2012, Schumbaugh 2013,). In many of the populations concerned, democratic transition lags well behind demographic and economic change. In China, rigid party control impedes the solution of corruption, local oppression and economic inequality, perhaps provoking political instability.

We conclude that while the West's share of world population, power and wealth must decline, its demographic outlook is more stable and sustainable than supposed. That positive outlook cannot, however, yet apply to all European countries. Most existing developed countries also benefit from some degree of economic and political maturity and geographical advantages that may lead to a more manageable future environment. The currently developing world has to overcome some challenges of its own which are likely to hamper their progress. These include faster transitions from initially higher fertility levels, leading to faster ageing, persistent traditional, authoritarian or 'familist' cultures and immature political systems ill-suited to adapting to rapid economic growth and with non-family adaptations to population ageing. Some must cope with substantial population growth in environmentally vulnerable areas. And their size and growth will encounter resource problems, especially if confronted by severe climate change. It would be wrong to exaggerate these difficulties, but the rise to the global primacy implied by demographic growth faces some serious impediments (De Jonquieres, 2012).

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