

**BIRTH CONTROL IN ASIA**

# BIRTH CONTROL IN ASIA

A Report of a Conference held  
at the London School of  
Hygiene & Tropical  
Medicine  
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## PREFACE



WHEN the Birth Control International Information Centre undertook the heavy task of organising the Conference recorded in this volume, and in preparatory work extending over several months achieved the supreme diplomatic triumph of bringing together, in amicable discussion, experts belonging to countries whose armies were at that very time engaged in settling problems for which birth-control is sometimes prescribed as a remedy, its purpose was to obtain, and as far as possible itself to provide, answers to a series of questions which had an important and direct bearing upon its propaganda in the densely populated countries of the East.

For instance: in what sense was it true, if at all, that these countries were over-populated? India had increased its population by over thirty millions between the censuses of 1921 and 1931, and Japan was growing at the rate of over one million persons a year; but if such rates of increase were excessive, then excessive in relation to what? In relation to the actual or to the potential economic resources of the territories in which they prevailed? Were indeed these and other countries of the East overpopulated even in a relative sense (that is, relative to their economic development at the moment), or was the poverty of their inhabitants due primarily to an inequitable distribution of what were in fact sufficient resources? Granted an affirmative reply to the latter question, were there any other grounds—medical, social, or personal—on which birth-control propaganda in the East could more effectively be based?

There were also a number of practical problems. What were the chief impediments to the practice of birth-control in India, China and Japan? Were the masses of working people in these countries too poor to use contraceptives, or was one reason for their poverty

the fact that they had not yet learnt to use them? If the propaganda for birth-control succeeded in creating a public opinion in its favour, would the contraceptive methods and materials that have proved suitable in the West be equally so in the East? What should be the first aim of birth-control clinics and teachers in the East, mass-production or perfection? In short, should the methods imparted be those conferring the completest attainable security against undesired pregnancies, or less efficient methods which, by reason of their cheapness or simplicity, had the best chance of being adopted on a large scale?

It is to such questions as these that the speakers addressed themselves and to which this volume supplies what I believe to be the most accurately informed replies at present available. What perhaps was most striking in the proceedings of the Conference was the large measure of agreement that existed with regard to remedies among speakers who differed sharply on the subject of diagnosis. Those who held that no considerable cultural progress could be looked for in India, China, and Japan except as a sequel to drastic changes in their economic systems were not less convinced than the exponents of the view that "over-population is the cause of poverty" of the immediate need for pressing forward the propaganda of birth-control in these territories. The general view was admirably summed up in the *British Medical Journal*: "Even if birth-control alone would not serve as a complete remedy for the economic problems of Asia, granted even that the difficulties in the way of its dissemination were created by the very miseries it aimed at relieving, it yet offered, all speakers were agreed, a contribution to the solution of these problems; and they differed only in their estimates of how important (in relation to other measures) this contribution might be."

The Conference had one outcome that was even more gratifying. Its effect on public opinion in India was such that leading social workers invited the Birth Control International Information Centre to send a representative to the All India Women's Conference to put

the case for birth-control before the delegates there assembled. As I write these lines Edith How-Martyn, Honorary Director of the Centre, is in India in response to this invitation. Thus the Centre is continuing the work begun by its President, Margaret Sanger, whose pioneer propaganda tour is generally recognised to have been the most important single factor responsible for the establishment of the birth-control movements of India and the Far East. Some faint conception of the magnitude of the task thus brilliantly initiated and pursued may be obtained from a study of the data recorded in this volume.

MICHAEL FIELDING.