

THE ROLE OF URBANIZATION IN SOCIAL CHANGE IN ASIA*

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The analysis of urbanization in post-World War II period in Asia, and of urbanization in the Third World generally, has been vitiated by having been poured into the mould of, what has come to be widely known, as the 'over-urbanization' thesis. Taking the pattern of urbanization that developed in West Europe and North America in the nineteenth century (ending in 1914) as the norm for all urbanization in time and space, this thesis characterised urbanization in the Third World as 'over', abnormal, unhealthy and ultimately disastrous. It started by noting the hierarchical organization of urban places, as per the rank-size rule, obtaining in many West European countries and North America and the dominance of primate cities in the urbanization pattern in the Third World. The rest merely followed. "It remained for discussants at a series of postwar UNESCO conferences on urbanization in Asia and the Far East, and Latin America, to put the two together and to point out the links to Louis Wirth's social doctrines. Cases deviating from the rank-size distribution were said to arise from 'over-urbanization' of the economies of lesser-developed countries because of 'excessive' in-migration and super-imposition of limited economic development of a colonial type, creating 'dual economies' characterised by 'primate cities' that tend to have 'paralytic' effects upon development of smaller urban places, to be 'parasitic' in relation to the remainder of the national economy, and to be productive of alienation, anomie and social disorganization. Obviously, each of the words in quotation marks involves a value judgement."¹

The conclusion regarding Asian urbanization reached in the UN/ UNESCO Seminar on Urbanization in Asia and the Far East, 1956, followed logically:

"An excessive volume of rural-urban migration and the consequent relative over-urbanization of several countries of Asia may not last for long; an over-

* By Asia is meant here South and South East Asia.

1. Brian Berry, *The Human Consequences of Urbanization, Divergent Paths in the Urban Experience of the Twentieth Century*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1973, pp. 98-99.