

The Transnational Politics of Public Health and Population Control: The Rockefeller Foundation's Role in Japan, 1920s-1950s

By Aiko Takeuchi

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of American Civilization
Brown University
82 Waterman Street, Box 1892
Providence, Rhode Island 02912

Aiko_Takeuchi@brown.edu

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The research conducted at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) will form an important part of my dissertation on the transnational politics of female reproduction in the context of U.S.-Japan relations before and after World War II. My study starts from the period right after World War I, notably the events surrounding Margaret Sanger's first tour around the world, which began with her trip to Japan in the spring of 1922. Sanger's visit not only stimulated the modern birth control movement in Japan, but it also brought about the rise in transnational birth control and population control movements. Sanger, however, was not the first person to notice the special need for population control in Japan. Her transnational activism represented a broader interest in the United States concerning the rise of Asian populations and the threat that it posed to world peace - more specifically, to the status of "white supremacy" in the world.¹

¹ Books on world politics written by eugenicists warning of the inflow of "swarming peoples" to American land became best-sellers around the 1920s, namely Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) and Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920).

The American interest in population issues in Asia, particularly in Japan, intensified in the 1930s and 1940s, as the Japanese military's aggressive expansionism seemed to be driven by the lack of land and natural resources to support its increasing population. Population control was further institutionalized as a global initiative - led by the Western power - in the post-World War II period, when it was believed that political instability caused by rapid population increases in developing countries made these regions particularly vulnerable to communist influences.

The Rockefeller Foundation (RF), through projects sponsored by its various divisions, notably the International Health Division (IHD), played vital roles in forming pioneering research projects and bringing together scientists and activists in the United States and in Japan in the fields of population studies and public health. While the majority of existing studies on global population control start *from* the formation of the Population Council in 1952, I am interested in exploring when and how the RF's interest in population issues started and developed *before* 1952 by focusing on the RF's roles in Japan.

My research at the RAC has proven that the RF's prewar activities in Japan set an important precedent for its postwar involvement in the Japanese population issue - and eventually in larger-scale global population projects. Some of the extensive works on global population control, such as Matthew Connelly's *Fatal Misconception* and Judith Nagelberg's *Promoting Population Policy*, describe in some detail the RF's role in postwar population control across the world, including Japan. However, they do not highlight the RF's prewar involvement in these issues and the historical context in which the RF became involved in population control in the first place.

Other studies that explore the RF's prewar projects in the fields of public health and biology, such as John Farley's *To Cast Out Disease* and Lily Kay's *The Molecular Vision of Life*, give comprehensive descriptions of the International Health Division's activities across the world, but they carry little information on their roles in Japan. My research at the RAC has

helped me fill these gaps in historical accounts concerning the RF's longtime investment in population and public health issues abroad.

The majority of materials I consulted were located in the Rockefeller Foundation Archives. To capture the internal politics and individual endeavors of the RF officers, I paid special attention to officers' correspondence (mainly in Record Groups 1.1, 1.2, and 2) and diaries (Record Group 12.1). Because the contributions to birth control and population studies organizations before World War II were chiefly made through the personal donations of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and John D. Rockefeller 3rd (JDR 3rd), materials related to this period on fertility issues in the United States were often located in the Rockefeller Family Archives (Record Group 2, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller, Medical Interests series). I have also looked into the JDR 3rd Papers in the Family Archives, particularly for material on the Williamsburg Conference in 1951, which led to JDR 3rd's formation of the Population Council.

I. Prewar Projects

The Rockefeller Foundation became involved in assisting public health projects and personnel in Japan after the 1923 earthquake destroyed the entire city of Tokyo. The possibility for the RF to assist medical education in Japan in fact existed before the earthquake, mainly prompted by the suggestion of Charles A. Beard, who was invited by the mayor of Tokyo in September 1922 to help lay out plans to improve the city's health service. But because Japan already seemed to have developed a fairly modern system of medical education, it was the earthquake that "created a new situation" in which the RF could become involved in the form of city "reconstruction."² In particular, the establishment of the Institute of Public Health (IPH) and the College of Nursing at St. Luke's International Hospital - both in Tokyo - were part of the

² George E. Vincent to R. B. Teusler, Sep. 11, 1923, folder 7, box 1, series 609, Record Group 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter designated RAC).

RF's wider endeavors to establish schools of public health and nursing across the world in the first few decades of the twentieth century. However, the RF's hesitance to appear as if they were pressing their service upon the Japanese government and intervening into local politics with grandiose American money, in addition to deteriorating U.S.-Japan relations, prevented the RF from developing anything substantial from these early public health projects in Japan, at least during the prewar decades.³

One of the prewar RF projects related to human fertility issues on a global scale, which has almost been forgotten in history, was Edwin R. Embree's Human Biology Commission (1924-1927), under the auspices of the Division of Studies. Its relative obscurity may be due to the short life of this project. However, the project represented the RF's broader interest not only in global public health issues, but also in race biology and eugenics, which were relatively new and unexplored - albeit controversial - areas of study at that time.

As Director, Embree used the newly established Division of Studies to explore topics related to race betterment and race mixture, which were gaining wider attention in the United States in the 1920s. Japan offered a unique opportunity for Embree and interested scientists to explore these themes. Embree had already been to the Far East in 1922 as part of the RF's investigative trip to explore the possibilities in the fields of medical and nursing education in this part of the world. In 1926, he embarked on another trip to the Pacific, now under the Human Biology Commission, with the aim of assisting university personnel and institutions in race biology and anthropology in Hawaii, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific Islands. Japan, in particular, offered "a promising field" in human biology: namely in eugenics (with a highly developed family system and genealogical records), race mixture (because the

³ See for example, G. E. Vincent to R. B. Teusler, Jan. 11, 1924; G. E. Vincent to H. S. Houghton, Aug. 14, 1924, folder 7, box 1, series 609, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

Japanese race was composed of many racial elements), and population studies (Japan's overpopulation problem was gaining intense attention across the world).⁴

Leading biologists in the United States, including Edwin G. Conklin (who accompanied Embree on his trip to Japan) and Raymond Pearl (professor of biostatistics at John Hopkins University), offered many comments, suggestions, and encouragement for the survey trip as well as for the smaller projects that resulted from the trip. It is important to note that these biologists - and Embree himself - had strong hopes for the study of eugenics, although they often distanced themselves from older, more conservative eugenicists such as Charles Davenport and Harry Laughlin.⁵

Out of the Japan trip, the RF developed two major projects for Japan: sending visiting professors from the United States to Japanese universities in the field of human biology and population, and inviting young Japanese scientists to visit U.S. universities and biology institutions. By the time some of these plans were taking place, however, the entire Human Biology Commission was closed because of a broader reorganization within the RF.

Support for population and birth control issues, however, continued in other parts of the RF, on a smaller scale and on more personal basis. Since the 1920s, John D. Rockefeller Jr., through the Bureau of Social Hygiene (and later through the Medical Sciences Division) made "anonymous" contributions to organizations such as Margaret Sanger's Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau, the American Birth Control League, Planned Parenthood of America, and Robert L. Dickinson's National Committee on Maternal Health. Since the 1930s, the focus of support for fertility issues shifted from birth control to population studies organizations such as

⁴ Edwin G. Conklin to Edwin R. Embree, Aug. 21, 1925, folder 45, box 7, series 609, RG 1.1; Embree, "Japanese Notes," Family Journal No. 8, Feb. 24, 1926, folder 35, box 4, series 100, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

⁵ These "reform eugenicists," including Pearl and Conklin, paid more attention to environmental factors in human development, while they certainly did not dismiss the importance of innate qualities and biological inheritance. However, unlike the older "mainline eugenicists," they admitted that little was yet known scientifically concerning human heredity and that large scale, coercive eugenic programs had little effect on improving the entire race.

the Population Association of America (PAA) and the Scripps Foundation for Research in Population Problems at Miami University.

While the PAA's projects centered on the issue of differential fertility in the United States, the RF's support for the Scripps Foundation included studies on the global dimension of differential birth rates, specifically the overpopulation issues in the Asia-Pacific region. This started with sociologist Warren S. Thompson's request in late 1942 to the RF to assist his research for his upcoming book on world politics and the population problem in Asia and the Pacific. Thompson had published a book on related issues in 1929 entitled *Danger Spots in World Population*, which predicted that another major world war would erupt unless international measures were taken to grant fair access to land and resources to nations with rapidly increasing populations, namely Japan. For his new book, Thompson already had in mind the issues of postwar population problems and redistribution of resources, asking questions such as: "What is likely to happen to the Japanese if Formosa and Manchuria are returned to China and Korea is given complete independence? What is the prospect for improved levels of living in India and China at current rates of population increase?"⁶

In 1944 and 1945, the Division of Social Sciences also provided major support to the Princeton Office of Population Research for work on the international phases of the population problem, particularly in Asia. Irene B. Taeuber was one of the demographers in the Princeton Office, whose research on the population of Japan was supported through the U.S. Department of State, the RF, and the Milbank Memorial Fund.⁷

⁶ Warren S. Thompson to Joseph H. Willits, Sep. 24, 1942, folder 4555, box 533, series 200S, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

⁷ Irene Taeuber's work was later published as *The Population of Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958).

II. Postwar Projects

Concrete plans in the direction of global population control after World War II started when John D. Rockefeller 3rd, after his trip to Japan in 1946, expressed much concern about the population problem there and decided to “go public” on his support for fertility control issues, unlike the “anonymous” contributions made by his father in the prewar decades.⁸ JDR 3rd also noted that there was little coordination between the medical and the social science divisions in the RF.

During the war years, the Social Science Division had assisted some small-scale population studies projects. The IHD had a long history of assisting various public health projects across the world, but in 1947 the RF trustees were still very cautious about entering the field of population, which was seen as a controversial topic associated with the “propaganda” of birth control.⁹ In the end, the trustees agreed that the IHD would undertake a survey of the global population problem, which came to be known as the “Reconnaissance in Public Health and Demography in the Far East.” The mission was to serve as “some sort of blueprint” which would help the IHD’s Scientific Directors chart possible future projects in this field.¹⁰ The RF thus sent four representatives (two demographers and two RF officers) - Frank Notestein, Irene Taeuber, Roger Evans, and Marshall Balfour - to Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines from September to December, 1948.

⁸ By 1947, John D. Rockefeller Jr. also decided that there was “no reason why we should continue to make the gift [to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America] anonymous.” Memorandum by Arthur Packard, Jan. 30, 1947; Kenneth Rose to Packard, Apr. 10, 1947, folder 32a, box 4, Medical Interests series, RG 2, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

⁹ G. K. Strode diary excerpt, Dec. 2-3, 12, 1947, folder 4, box 1, series 600, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

¹⁰ Memorandum, June 14, 1948, folder 310, box 57, series 900, RG 3.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

Of the countries visited, Japan seemed to offer both the most pressing reasons and the best prospects for concrete plans in fertility reduction.¹¹ Nonetheless, the representatives of the RF mission, as well as other RF members sent to Japan during the Occupation period in Japan, repeatedly expressed their frustration and disagreement with the policy of the Occupation Army (Supreme Command for the Allied Powers, or SCAP) of “benevolent neutrality” concerning issues related to birth control and population. Both Douglas MacArthur (Supreme Commander) and Crawford Sams (head of the Public Health and Welfare Section of SCAP) were wary to discuss the subject not only because of its association with propaganda and the strong opposition from American Catholics, but also for fear of being accused by the communists, and by the Japanese themselves, of being interventionists or conducting “genocides.”¹²

Sams continued to insist that industrialization and urbanization were the solutions to the population problem, and that official policies and campaigns for birth control were useless. Although he was impressed by the report of the RF mission, he had no intention of circulating it beyond the SCAP offices, nor did he plan to make any actual policies out of it.¹³ The only point in the report that Sams openly agreed with was where the authors of the report admitted that the “problem of action [was] complicated, for the interest of a military conqueror in the birth rate of a conquered people [was] politically suspect.”¹⁴ However, the RF representatives in general were not sympathetic to SCAP’s position, as they repeatedly complained that SCAP’s “ultrasensitiv[ity]” to publicity concerning the issues of birth control in effect did not suggest

¹¹ O. R. McCoy to M. C. Balfour, Aug. 19, 1949, folder 3113, box 464, series 609, RG 2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

¹² “RFE Rough Notes on RF Mission Conference with General Sams,” Oct. 1, 1948, folder 6, box 1, series 600, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

¹³ In fact, Oliver McCoy was distressed to find out that the report sent to Sams was “through a misunderstanding” kept in the library of PH&W Section, although later Sams did order to send it to other sections in SCAP. O. R. McCoy officer’s diary, May 1, 1950, box 83, RG 12.1; McCoy to Balfour, May 13, 1950, folder 8, box 1, series 600, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

¹⁴ “A Reconnaissance of Demography and Public Health in Japan,” Sep.-Oct. 1948, folder 10, box 2, series 600, RG 1.1; Crawford Sams to Roger F. Evans, Mar. 8, 1950, folder 8, box 1, series 600, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

neutrality, but instead created an impression among the Japanese that SCAP was *against* birth control programs.¹⁵

The representatives of the RF mission nonetheless believed that the RF visit had stimulated the Japanese leaders and even SCAP to take more active consideration of the population problem.¹⁶ Sams fully supported the dissemination of birth control as a *public health* measure, as long as it was not mistaken as propaganda. In fact, after the RF mission he carried out training programs for public health doctors on instructions in contraceptive methods and urged that contraceptive information and devices should be readily available in maternal and child hygiene clinics in healthcare centers. Sams' actions reflected the views of RF officer Oliver R. McCoy, who in June 1948 became a consultant to SCAP in connection with the management of the Institute of Public Health (IPH) in Tokyo. McCoy strongly believed that birth control should be "freed from the hocus-pocus of eugenics, genocide, religious and moral issues and emphasized as a public health activity."¹⁷

Still, the RF officers found more freedom and opportunity for the RF to assist in this direction after the termination of the Occupation.¹⁸ McCoy continued to play active roles as consultant to the IPH in various projects related to public health in which population issues figured prominently. While McCoy was prohibited by SCAP from taking any conspicuous role in promoting population programs during his duty under SCAP, after the Occupation he became

¹⁵ McCoy to Balfour, June 20, 1950; McCoy to Balfour, Jan. 14, 1950, folder 3354, box 501, series 609, RG 2; Frank Notestein to Balfour, Feb 5, 1951, folder 3629, box 543, series 609, RG 2; McCoy diary, Mar 10, 1950, box 83, RG 12.1; Notestein, "Preliminary Reconnaissance in Public Health and Demography in the Far East," folder 7, box 1, series 600, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

¹⁶ McCoy to Andrew J. Warren, Feb. 8, 1949; R. F. Evans, "Japan: Population, Professor Warren S. Thompson," May 16, 1949, folder 3113, box 464, series 609, RG 2, Rockefeller Foundation, Archives, RAC.

¹⁷ McCoy diaries, Feb. 5, 24, Aug. 5, 15, 1949, box 83, RG 12.1; McCoy to Balfour, May 13, 1950, folder 8, box 1, series 600, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

¹⁸ McCoy to Balfour, May 28, 1951, folder 3629, box 543, series 609, RG 2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

openly involved in population projects carried out by Japanese public health officials by providing them with ideas and financial assistance through the RF.

As early as August 1951, just before the official conclusion of the Occupation, McCoy submitted a proposal to the RF trustees for a grant-in-aid to assist the IPH's investigation into factors that led to the marked downward trend in the Japanese birth rate of the past few years. After receiving some feedback and advice from leading U.S. demographers - namely Frank Notestein, Irene Taeuber, Warren Thompson, and P. K. Whelpton - McCoy narrowed the project to two case studies: one on induced abortion and the other on sterilization legally performed in rural villages in Japan.¹⁹ These and other studies conducted by IPH officials Yoshio Koya and Minoru Muramatsu later gained worldwide attention among demographers and policymakers as one of the most "successful" experiments in fertility control.²⁰

Despite these individual endeavors, the RF remained ambiguous about its position and approaches to global population problems after the Far East mission in the fall of 1948. Admitting that "it may take a considerable time for the Foundation to work out a long-range policy concerning its activities in the field of population problems," Frank Notestein repeatedly urged the RF trustees to at least, as preliminary steps, provide fellowships for foreign training and introduce foreign consultants.²¹

Meanwhile, the IHD was making slow progress in its "human ecology" project, the preparation and consideration of which stretched over a period of three years. Marshall C.

¹⁹ McCoy to Andrew J. Warren, Aug. 22, 1951; Warren to McCoy, Sep. 10, 1951; McCoy to Balfour, Oct. 6, 1951; Grant-in-aid approval, Nov. 29, 1951, folder 44, box 6, series 609, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

²⁰ The results of the studies were published in journals both in the U.S. and Japan, including the *Milbank Memorial Quarterly* and *Eugenical News*. The assistance of Rockefeller Foundation, notably Oliver McCoy, is acknowledged in some of these publications. Upon JDR 3rd's suggestion, the studies were compiled into a book and published as *Pioneering in Family Planning: A Collection of Papers on the Family Planning Programs and Research Conducted in Japan* (Tokyo: Japan Medical Publishers, 1963).

²¹ Frank W. Notestein, "Preliminary Reconnaissance in Public Health and Demography in the Far East," folder 7, box 1, series 600, RG 1.2; Notestein to Joseph H. Willits, Oct. 18, 1950, folder 9, box 2, series 600, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

Balfour, who was the IHD representative for the Far East mission, along with Marston Bates, presented a report on the subject to the Scientific Directors of the IHD about a year after the mission. Balfour, however, was skeptical about the idea of expanding the theme to “human ecology,” which emphasized a broad study into “human environmental problems” through the synthesis of diverse fields - biological and social sciences, public health, and humanities. He felt that the RF trustees may or may not get the basic issue, which would be the issue of “population as the real interest and crying need.”²²

After this first report made by Balfour and Bates in November 1949, the Scientific Directors agreed that the topic of “human ecology,” including population problems, was “an appropriate field for cultivation” and suggested further study into the matter.²³ The report proposed Ceylon as the primary site of population field study, although Balfour also continued to express interest in developing population policies and programs in Japan, hoping to carry out some of the suggestions made in the reports of the Far East survey.²⁴

The tardiness of progress and the wariness of some RF officers and trustees to deal with controversial topics often left Balfour confused and disappointed. While Warren Weaver, head of the Natural Sciences and Agriculture Division, believed that studies on numerical facts and non-numerical factors relevant to population would be of interest to the RF as a whole, he was “seriously skeptical” about the desirability of setting up “an operating program,” as such action potentially had “the danger of crystallization of immature dogma.”²⁵ Even after they accepted

²² Marshall C. Balfour and Marston Bates, “Special Report to the Board of Scientific Directors of the Int’l Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, Human Ecology (Population),” Nov. 4, 1949, folder 312, box 57, series 900, RG 3.1; Balfour diaries, Oct. 4, 1949, box 14, RG 12.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

²³ “Statement by GKS in Presenting the Human Ecology Report,” Meeting of Trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation, Williamsburg, VA, Dec. 7, 1949, folder 310, box 57, series 900, RG 3.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

²⁴ Balfour to McCoy, Oct. 7, 1949, folder 7, box 1, series 600, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

²⁵ Warren Weaver to CIB, Nov. 28, 1949, folder 310, box 57, series 900, RG 3.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

“an integrated operating program” under indigenous initiative - one that was *not* a “transplantation, full-blown, of the ‘giant oaks’ of our western culture” - they still proceeded only intermittently.²⁶ In 1951, Balfour confessed to Oliver McCoy that “[a]lthough there has been considerable discussion among Officers and Trustees about population and human ecology,” he felt “some uncertainty also whether the light is red, green, or yellow.”²⁷ In fact, the RF grants in population issues remained limited and focused on research until the 1960s.

Meanwhile, ever since his trip to Japan, JDR 3rd had made strenuous efforts to have the RF take an active role in global population issues. These efforts however, often ended in frustration and disappointment. Finally an opportunity came, as a result of a dinner meeting in December 1950 with other RF members and scientists, to organize a conference specifically on the global population problem. This event, which took place at Colonial Williamsburg, VA, June 20-22, 1951, gathered nationally prominent scholars from various disciplines - from demography and sociology to genetics and public health - as well as advocates involved in family planning and eugenics organizations. Topics included various sociological issues, such as agriculture and food production, the role of migration in fertility reduction, and cultural barriers against birth control. A great deal of time was also spent on medical and scientific discussions, including practical contraceptive techniques and the eugenic factors involved in the use of contraception.

In regard to the case of Japan, Warren Thompson called attention to the sudden marked decline in the birth rate in Japan. Discussion ensued over what brought about this change in fertility pattern; to which economic sector the change occurred; the role of outside forces (the Occupation); the role of the government (specifically, the effect of a new law that liberated abortion policies); and the role of propaganda and education. Balfour pointed out that two studies

²⁶ J. H. Willits, “Human Ecology and the Rockefeller Foundation,” Oct. 22, 1951, folder 310, box 57, series 900, RG 3.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

²⁷ Balfour to McCoy, June 5, 1951, folder 3629, box 543, series 609, RG 2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

in progress conducted by the IPH might give answers to these questions. As mentioned above, by this time McCoy had started to seek ways to have the RF assist these village studies conducted by Yoshio Koya and Minoru Muramatsu.²⁸ Many of the points that had been raised repeatedly in the RF's Far East mission report concerning Japan were also stressed throughout the conference: that the American role should not appear interventionist; that they should respect indigenous motivations; that fertility programs should be approached as a "public health" - more specifically, maternal and child welfare - issue.²⁹

It is important to note that the discussion over the Japanese case, as well as the conversations in the meeting as a whole, often involved both the issue of "quantity" and "quality" of populations. Many of the "quantitative" studies of population often dealt with "qualitative" issues, particularly the problem of differential fertilities among different socio-economic classes or among different races and nationalities. In fact, many of the population scholars supported eugenic policies, although they usually rejected the strictly biologically determinist views of older eugenicists.

The discussion at the Williamsburg Conference, therefore, centered a great deal on the issue of differential birth rate - on how the high fertility rates of certain racial and ethnic groups in the United States or of overpopulated countries in Asia could be reduced. In regard to Japan, participants were curious to know whether Japan had been successful in controlling the high fertility of the economically deprived class. JDR 3rd observed from his personal visits that relatively few among the "ignorant" and "lower" groups yet practiced contraception, whereas Warren Thomson stated that the practice had to "reach down pretty well into the population" to match the statistical decline in birth rate. Whereas some participants suggested that the idea of

²⁸ Until the RF took more active role, the studies were initially financed by Clarence Gamble, heir to the Proctor & Gamble fortune, who had been involved in financing birth control projects both in the U.S. and abroad since the prewar decades.

²⁹ "National Academy of Sciences, Conference on Population Problems," Williamsburg, VA, June 20-22, 1951, folder 720, box 85, series 1.5, RG 5, John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

“quality” improvement could work as a motivation for contraceptive control, Marshall Balfour (rather inaccurately) observed that there was little or no interest in the subject of eugenics or racial improvement in Japan because “life [was] so cheap in the Far East.” Instead he favored the idea of promoting “quantity control” first, hoping to move on to “quality” later.³⁰

Whether they emphasized “quality” over “quantity,” or vice versa, for the participants in the conference the issues of “quality” and “quantity” of populations were deeply interrelated. Although the Williamsburg Conference showed an crucial move toward establishing a “respectability” for population issues by inviting prominent scholars across the nation, in reality the conversation centered on topics that had often been associated with “propaganda” - namely eugenics and birth control.

Although the Williamsburg Conference received a great deal of discussion and attention, Marshall Balfour was still concerned about what possible action would follow the meeting, as he heard a “rumor” that “JDR might be advised by public relations against support of population study and fertility control.”³¹ As is well known, JDR 3rd ultimately formed a separate organization independent from the RF - the Population Council - on November 7, 1952, to realize his longtime ambition to go beyond research and become actively involved in the actual planning of population programs.

III. Conclusion

My research at the RAC has shown that the RF, mainly through the individual endeavors of RF officers and scholars, played pioneering roles in developing and supporting projects related to human fertility and population problem - topics which were considered highly controversial until the 1950s. They offered support to individual scholars and birth control activists who otherwise would have had difficulty securing financial support for these subjects.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Balfour diaries, Sep. 29-30, 1952, box 14, RG 12.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

At the same time, the foundation as a whole was sensitive about publicity of its role in the field of fertility control. The officers constantly struggled to separate politics and propaganda from “pure science.” In order to prove the respectability of issues related to human fertility, they often emphasized the public health and medical aspects of fertility research - a field in which the RF established its worldwide reputation. Yet, because issues related to human fertility often required interdisciplinary approaches - integrating the fields of public health, eugenics/genetics, economics and sociology - it was virtually impossible to separate them as “pure science.”

Because of this dilemma inherent in dealing with human fertility issues, it was not until the 1950s that the studies of “population” finally reached international recognition and respectability. I argue in my research that Japan offered an ideal field case study for the RF and other American individuals/institutions since the 1920s until they achieved this goal in the 1950s. The data and results from Japan played vital roles in establishing population programs and policies in other Asian regions in the postwar decades.

At the same time, the RF’s involvement in public health/population issues in Japan showed the difficulty of Americans - with big power and big money - in leading this field. Since the beginning of their involvement in international projects through the IHD, the RF officers repeatedly stressed the need to stimulate indigenous movements and incentives, so as not to appear as if they were taking control of the fate of another nation’s people. This problem was not necessarily unique to the RF, but it indicated one of the fundamental issues that the United States had to pay special attention to - even as non-governmental organizations - when dealing with global issues that particularly concerned the sovereignty of non-Western nations.