

Fertility, Family Planning, and Population Policy in China

Edited by

Dudley L. Poston, Jr, Che-Fu Lee,
Chiung-Fang Chang, Sherry L. McKibben,
and Carol S. Walther

Routledge Studies in Asia's Transformations

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Fertility, Family Planning, and Population Policy in China

China's one-child population policy, first initiated in 1979, has had an enormous effect on the country's development. By reducing its fertility in the past two decades to less than two children per woman, and developing a family planning program focused heavily on sterilization and abortion, China has undergone a significant transition in status to a demographically developed country.

Fertility, Family Planning, and Population Policy in China brings together contributions from leading scholars on such developments as family planning policy and contraceptive use, biological and social determinants of fertility, patterns of family and marriage, and China's future population trends. As such it will be essential reading for academics, researchers, policy-makers, and government officials with an interest in China's demography, fertility, and population policy.

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contributors, their own chapters

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To our co-editor, Che-Fu Lee, who played a major role organizing, editing, and writing this book, but who did not live to see it published.

Requiescat in Pace!

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Preface

The idea of a book on fertility, family planning, and policy in China was introduced at the meetings of the North American Chinese Sociologists Association (NACSA) held in Anaheim, California in August of 2001. Earlier versions of several of the chapters in this book were presented at the NACSA conference. Che-Fu Lee of the Catholic University of America served as the NACSA conference organizer. Since the authors of several of the NACSA conference papers were at the time graduate students of Dudley Poston at Texas A&M University, Lee and Poston discussed developing a China fertility book using the NACSA papers as a base. They approached several other scholars who did not make presentations at the NACSA conference to write chapters for the book, to help fill voids and to flesh out theoretical and empirical aspects of Chinese fertility and family planning not covered in the conference presentations. Poston then asked Chiung-Fang Chang, Sherry McKibben, and Carol Walther to assist him and Lee in putting the book together.

In the subsequent development of this book, we are very much indebted to Mark Selden of the State University of New York, Binghamton, who serves as a China book series editor for Routledge, for assisting us in the preparation of a book proposal; to Zoë Botterill of Routledge Publishers for working with us in developing the book contract; and to Helen Baker of Routledge Publishers for helping us get the book ready for production. As the book chapters were revised and/or written, the five editors each, in turn, read and edited them. The edited chapters were then returned to the authors for revision. Poston was responsible for the final reading and editing. All the chapters were then copy-edited at Texas A&M University by Chris Lewinski, who then discussed and reviewed the final changes and edits with Poston. We thank her for her dedicated and timely work, and all the others who assisted us.

When the book was in the final stages of editing in February of 2005, we were saddened to lose our co-editor Che-Fu Lee, who died at the age of 64. Without Che-Fu's encouragement and hard work, this book would never have been completed. As already noted, Che-Fu was the organizer of the 2001 annual meeting of the North American Chinese Sociologists Association where several of the chapters in this book were first presented. He was very instrumental in commissioning several of the other chapters, he provided valuable editorial assistance to the authors of all the chapters, and he wrote two of the chapters with his colleague Qiusheng Liang. We dedicate our book to him.

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Prologue

Dudley L. Poston, Jr and Carol S. Walther

This book focuses on fertility, family planning, and population policy in China—the most populated country in the world. In 2004 China had nearly 1.3 billion inhabitants. After India, the United States is the third most populated country, with a population in 2004 of 293 million. But China has a land mass slightly less than that of the United States (9.6 million square kilometers of surface area compared to 9.8 million of the United States) with a population that is 4.4 times larger.

China has reduced its fertility in the past two decades to less than two children per woman, has a family planning program focusing heavily on sterilization and abortion, and a population policy based on one child, and no more than two children, per woman. The country's fertility transition, family planning programs, and one-child policy have captured the attention of academicians, researchers, policy practitioners, government officials, and laypeople the world over. Indeed, some have seen China's experiences as providing important lessons for the demographic transitions of many countries in the developing world. Others have denounced the policy's system of quotas, and particularly forced abortions, as gross violations of human rights. What is certain is that the transition has made it possible for China to achieve in a relatively brief time the status of a demographically developed country. Its fertility, family planning, and policy dynamics that are analyzed in the chapters of this book need to be considered in this context. This Prologue first places these demographic issues in a historical perspective.

China today is not demographically a country with an aged population. In 2000, only one-tenth of China's population was over age 60, compared to 16 percent for the United States. By comparison, in 2000, 10 countries, all in Europe, had more than 20 percent of their populations over age 60 (United Nations 2003). But China is one of the oldest countries in existence. Statistics on the size of

China's population suggest that the country had a population of around 60 million people at the time of Christ (Durand 1960). Of course, Chinese civilization began much earlier than the time of Christ, with the Xia Dynasty, the first dynasty of China, lasting from about the twenty-first century BC to the sixteenth century BC. There are, however, no demographic records of the Chinese population in the centuries before Christ, other than an estimate of about 13 million at the start of the Xia Dynasty (Sun 1988:9), a figure whose accuracy is difficult to establish.

During the Han Dynasty, China took a population count in the second century AD, and it showed a population size of just under 60 million people (Banister 1992). The population increases and decreases over the almost 20 centuries since the time of Christ have usually been associated with dynastic growth and decay. Typically, the beginning of a new dynasty was followed by a period of peace and order, cultural development, and population growth. As population density increased, it often exceeded the availability of food, and the Malthusian struggle for existence was intensified. Then there would come a period of pestilence and famine resulting in a reduction in the size of the population.

Two thousand years of Chinese records and archives show that for all the centuries prior to the seventeenth century, China's population size increased to around 50–60

million before declining. Indeed at the start of the Ming Dynasty (in 1368) the size of China's population was only slightly larger than it was at the time of Christ. For all the dynasties up until China's last dynasty, the Qing (1644–1911), China's population swayed roughly with the rise and fall of a dynasty (most dynasties reigned for about 200–300 years). The population grew in the initial years of the dynasty, then fell, so that one-third or sometimes one-half of the original population was decimated. Mortality then was too high to allow much of an increase in population.

To illustrate, from 1400 to 1500, the size of the Chinese population grew by around 25 million. It grew by another 50 million from 1500 to 1600. But since the mid-1700s after the establishment of the Qing Dynasty, slight reductions in mortality enabled the population to continue growing. By 1850 there were roughly 420 million people in the country, 6–8 times the traditional level (of 60–80 million) that was the demographic norm 200 years or so previously. The Qing Dynasty was supremely successful at living up to the Chinese ideal of “numerous descendants.” It is indeed ironic that by achieving this ideal, not only was the Qing Dynasty wiped out, but China's dynastic system of almost four thousand years was eradicated. Previously, declines in population resulted in the collapse of the dynasties. The Qing fell in 1911, among other reasons, because the population became too large.

By the date of the birth of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949, the population exceeded 500 million. It is at this point in the country's demographic narrative that we may turn to this book's first substantive chapter “Fertility and population Policy” by Qiusheng Liang and Che-Fu Lee. The authors revisit the process of the formation of the Chinese government's population policies over the past half-century. Their primary aim, through a systematic review of the evolving policies over a period of five decades, is to provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics between policy decisions and their implementation at different points in time since the 1950s. The population policy considerations are reviewed in the context of the political economy and are demarcated into three stages over the past 50 years: (1) the harbinger of population planning in the 1950s, (2) the chaotic decade of the 1960s and the establishment of the birth-control institution in the 1970s, and (3) a policy experiment followed by a decentralization since the early 1980s.

Liang and Lee's policy reviews serve to frame the discussions of China's current fertility by presenting and discussing year-to-year baseline fertility data since the early 1950s. They show how the “on-again and off-again” fertility control policies of the 1950s and 1960s interacted with non-fertility related policies and ideologies to keep fertility rates high, especially in the rural areas. Their discussions provide an important perspective for the contemporary analyses of fertility that follow in later chapters of this book.

Two key features of China's family planning policy are abortion and sterilization. These are the subjects of Chapters 2 and 3 and comprise Part I of the book. The chapter by Juan Wu and Carol Walther deals with induced abortion. In 1957, induced abortion was introduced by the Chinese government as part of the first birth control campaign. This method was to be used during the first ten weeks of pregnancy. In later decades, however, for some women, induced abortion became the primary form of birth control, although the government discourages this practice. In this chapter, the authors show that population policy factors play a significant role in affecting a woman's chances of