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## China Story Yearbook: Control 治

By Jane Golley, BEcon '93

Each year the Australian Centre on China in the World produces a *China Story Yearbook* centred around a broad theme that encapsulates the major political, economic, social and cultural events in China during that year.

For the 2016 edition, the theme is 'Control' with the corresponding Chinese character 治 (*zhi*). 治 has many meanings and uses beyond 'control': it also signifies to manage, govern, take care of, arrange, put in order, punish, cure (an illness), exterminate (a pest or disease, for example) and stabilise. So many options to explore!

'Control' is a divisive word. Some of us like to be in control, taking the label of 'control freak' as a compliment, even when it is meant otherwise. I fall into this category. Others prefer a more chaotic and spontaneous life.

Within my academic discipline, economics, perhaps *the* biggest, unresolved debate centres on how much control the government should exert over the market – with neoliberals arguing for close to none while others, like me, see a greater need to counter the chaos and destruction that market forces bring with them.

This makes much of the book's contents controversial, because we all have different ways of looking at the world and at China in particular.

My chapter looks at population control and what I call 'the ups and

downs of one and two'. The one-child policy has been replaced with a two-child policy, ending three and a half decades of the strictest form of population control ever implemented anywhere in the world. The new policy is intended to raise GDP growth and reduce the negative impacts of China's rapidly ageing population. I discuss why I don't think this is the best policy to achieve these two goals.

This is not to say that I think the two-child policy is a bad idea, but I side with Deng Xiaoping in being a 'population pessimist', someone who thinks that low population growth is

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good for economic performance and for per capita income growth in particular. This is why I see the likely 'low-fertility trap' that China is heading for – with many Chinese couples choosing not to have a second child even now that they can – as being not such a bad trap at all.

Other chapters in the book explore many of the diverse methods used by the Chinese party-state to influence/govern/control and sometimes 'cure' their citizens.

Likewise, an extraordinary degree of Internet and cultural censorship, alongside efforts to 'eliminate' or ban phenomena that the party finds threatening, offensive or unsafe – including Bon Jovi, April Fool's Day and some 12,000 'sensitive words' – highlight the various forms of control that Chinese people are subjected to daily.

Much of this control is frightening to the outside observer. The ABC's *Four Corners* recently revealed China's growing influence in Australia

via political donations from wealthy Chinese business people to both major political parties, Communist Party propaganda to shape our Chinese-language media content and Chinese student associations within our universities, committed to ensuring the 'party line' is upheld. Some of the ABC's accusations were not well founded in my view but the overall picture highlighted the need for careful, clear thinking about how to deal with this rising power – one that uses controls in ways that none of us truly understand.

However, I believe some other forms of control in China should be celebrated. Greenpeace described China's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) as 'quite possibly the most important document in the world in setting the pace on climate change'. In the wake of Trump's decision to pull America out of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, I look forward to China's growing role in leading, managing, governing and putting in order the global state of climate change affairs. And I don't think that makes me a control freak!

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