POPULATION GOVERNANCE IN THE PRC: POLITICAL, HISTORICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Birth Control in China, 1949-2000: Population Policy and Demographic Development, by Thomas Scharping. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics, by Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005.

China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005, by Tyrene White. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006.

Since the one-child policy was introduced by the Chinese state almost thirty years ago, it has commonly been seen by Western observers as a disturbing paradox. Just as China was "freeing up" in other ways, following the death of Mao Zedong and the demise of the Gang of Four, it embarked on the most "draconian birth control campaign in history"[1]—a state-led attempt at social engineering as intrusive into peoples' private lives as anything the Maoist years had witnessed. Yet, until the last few years, the existence of this paradox and its social and political implications have rarely been explained, explored or questioned.[2] Western discourse on the one-child policy has been dominated by sensationalist journalistic reports of its horrors on the one hand, and dry, quantitative studies of its demographic impact on the other. Save for the demographers, few social scientists have made China's population program their main domain of research.

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1 Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 3, cited in Gary Sigley, "Governing Chinese Bodies: The Significance of Studies in the Concept of Governmentality for the Analysis of Government in China", *Economy and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (November 1996), p. 458.

2 Gary Sigley, "Governing Chinese bodies", p. 458.

Mostly, this reluctance has been due to the sensitive moral issues which the program raises, and the fact that those moral issues have been such a political football in Sino–US relations. This has put severe limits on ethnographic fieldwork and made it hard for any Western scholar to present a sophisticated, nuanced discussion of the population program—especially the one-child policy—without being stigmatized by one group or another. As Tyrene White so succinctly puts it, "these sensitivities make it easy to start an argument but hard to actually communicate".[3] Compounding this, the social and political implications of China's population program tend to fall in the gap between the disciplines—anthropologists, for example, tend to view them as outside their purview of "authentic" culture and social relations, while political scientists tend to view this as an area of "soft" policy, less vital and serious an arena of decision-making and power than, say, foreign policy or the economy.

In the last few years, however, a few political scientists and anthropologists have ventured "where angels fear to tread", analyzing the place of population control in the Chinese state's shifting political, economic and social agendas; the political dynamics motivating population control policies; and the ways in which the state-led population program has shaped political discourse, institutions and practice, cultural expectations and values, and social relations. The three examples considered here are all written by scholars recognized internationally as leaders in the study of China's population program, and each book represents the culmination of many years of work, including documentary research, interviews and other interactions with leading scholars and policy-makers, family planning officials at all levels of government, and others.

In each of these books, at least half of the discussion is devoted to the politics of population policy and implementation, and some attention is also devoted to its social consequences. In addition, all examine the population program within essentially the same timeframe—the 1950s to the 2000s—and each, with varying degrees of explicitness and reflexivity, presents "a history of the present".[4] In other words, each begins with the post-Mao one-child policy as the puzzle, and then, by taking advantage of hindsight and looking at the trajectory of events that lead up to the present, presents a historical explanation of how and why that puzzle occurred, and provides some indication of the trajectory that the future might take. Given this, and given the benefit of hindsight from essentially the same moment in time (although Scharping's study, published earlier, has less insight into the 2000s), there are some quite marked differences in the historical accounts offered by these books. These differences run right the way through, from the books' organization and style, and their underlying assumptions, concerns, theoretical

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3 Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. xiii.

4 Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 5.

frameworks and arguments, to their interpretation of particular actors and events.

Published most recently, *China's Longest Campaign*, by the political scientist Tyrene White, is focused most narrowly on the politics of the Chinese state's efforts to control childbirth through the adoption of plans and quotas. White has a particular interest in how birth planning has been designed and implemented in the countryside, and her book is especially useful for its description and analysis of how birth planning has been enacted at the commune and township levels of government. She also includes a chapter on peasants' "strategies of resistance" against the one-child policy. This chapter makes links with other literature on rural politics by employing similar categories of resistance—"evasion" (hiding unplanned pregnancies), "collusion" (local-level corruption, in which rural cadres turn a blind eye or accept payment to bend birth planning regulations), "cover-up" (hiding or embellishing the truth when reporting the results of birth planning work to higher authorities), "confrontation" (violence against rural cadres trying to enforce birth planning), and "accommodation" (female infanticide, infant abandonment and sex-selective abortion). The framing of these issues as "resistance" is useful in moving us away from looking at peasants as merely passive victims to a focus on the state's population program. I wonder, though, about the political and scholarly value of discussing infanticide and infant abandonment, in particular, in terms of "resistance" and not in terms of oppression, desperation and suffering.

Governing China's Population combines the perspectives of a political scientist (Edwin A. Winckler) with those of an anthropologist (Susan Greenhalgh). It is divided into two parts. The first, written by Winckler, focuses on population policy formulation and implementation at the central and provincial levels of government. The second, written by Greenhalgh, examines the cultural logics of the population program, and its social and political consequences. Compared with most other books in this field, including the other two volumes considered here, this book employs a broader lens to examine the state's population program. This is particularly evident in the last chapter of Part 1 and in Part 2, where the state's increasing attention to reproductive health care and its concern to improve the "quality" as well as reduce the "quantity" of the population are discussed. In addition, in Part 2, the popular and personal politics of population planning—the ways in which ordinary people have responded to it and the multitude of consequences, both positive and negative, that it has had on social relations—are explored much more extensively than in either Scharping's or White's books. Indeed, while this book cannot match the rich ethnographic detail of the case studies that have begun to emerge in recent years,[5] it provides the best overview of the social and political consequences of China's population program published to date.

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[5] See, for example, Vanessa Fong, *Only Hope: Coming of Age under China's One-Child Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

Thomas Scharping's book, *Birth Control in China, 1949-2000*, is a translated, revised and enlarged version of a study published in German in 1995. The new version is more than double the size of the original, each chapter having been revised and updated using documentary sources not previously available, and discussing developments between 1992 and 2001 not considered in the original volume. Divided into four parts (plus an introduction and conclusion), this book covers a lot of ground on the formulation of population control policy; bureaucratic implementation; popular response; and demographic results. However, Parts 1 and 2, on policy formulation and bureaucratic implementation, take up almost half the book. Here, Scharping is very thorough. However, the original study was only unevenly updated and not properly edited, with the result that the reader is left uncertain as to whether, when Scharping writes about trends "in the present", he is referring to the early 1990s or the early 2000s. In fact, most of his discussion of the "present" or recent past still refers to the 1990s. Part 4 of the book, on popular responses, includes only brief discussion of gender roles, family size and sex preferences (Chapter 9) and strategies and evidences of non-compliance (Chapter 10). For demographers, Part 5 provides a useful compilation of statistical data on female marriage trends, fertility levels, and changes in sex and age structure. Once more, however, most of the data is for the 1980s, and the most recent figures are for 1995.

Each of the three books under consideration is framed by a different set of questions and arguments, and, largely as a consequence, develops a different model of China's population program. White's analysis of "China's longest campaign" is explicitly framed by the "draconian campaign-within-reform" paradox that I outlined above,[6] and by three key questions about the one-child policy: how and why did the Chinese state impose such strict limits on its peoples' reproductive behavior? How were they able to maintain and succeed in enforcing such strict birth limits in the face of reforms that undercut their enforcement power at every turn? And finally, why, despite massive peasant resistance, was the state so unwilling to change its policy, other than to grant a second child to those who first bore a girl?[7]

In this volume White achieves a rare balance between rich, historical detail and tightly focused, elegant analysis. She makes three main arguments. The first is that the most historically significant motivation for, and origin of, the one-child policy was not so much the desire to limit population growth as the prior notion that the state can and should plan human reproduction in the same way as it plans economic production.[8] The second argument is that the state's birth planning efforts from as early as the beginning of the 1970s up until the present should be seen as a single political mobilization campaign. This is in contrast to both Scharping—who views mobilization campaigns as

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6 Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign*, pp. 2-5.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 255.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

just one tool of policy enforcement, which leaders used repeatedly but intermittently—and to Greenhalgh and Winckler, who divide the Chinese state's efforts at birth planning into three categories—Maoist-style mobilization, Stalinist central planning and bureaucratization, and neoliberal forms of governance. White argues that in Beijing at different times state officials and scholars did indeed shift in their preference for one approach to enforcement over another, but in rural areas the distinction between approaches was less clear: "At the grassroots, mobilization functioned as an institutionalized and routinized method of enforcement, and as an institution, it persisted into the post-Mao era. Faced with the extraordinary demands of birth planning and entrenched, protracted resistance, campaign methods were very slow to fade".[9]

The third of White's main arguments is that the state's one-child policy has been remarkably successful, both in the sense that it has succeeded in reshaping rural as well as urban child-bearing behavior, and in the sense that the policy has been maintained in its essential form for three decades, despite enormous peasant resistance. Key to this success, White claims, has been the unusual degree of unity in the Party leadership on the issue of population control. Until the late 1990s, she argues, conservatives and liberal reformers were all agreed that population growth was the single greatest threat to China's modernization and development.[10]

In a sense, the elegance of the model that White develops about birth planning, and the rigor with which she develops and maintains that model consistently through the book, is both its greatest strength and its biggest flaw. It means that what otherwise might appear an indigestible amount of empirical detail is, in fact, neatly contained and highly readable. But perhaps White's analytical framework is *too* neat. Her overriding emphasis on the campaign, for example, precludes proper consideration of the family planning bureaucracy, and of new tools of implementation introduced in the 1990s and 2000s, including the 2001 Population and Family Planning Law. White devotes less than one paragraph to this national law, and discusses neither the reasons for the lengthy delays that occurred in its passage nor the political significance of legislation as a tool for enforcing the population program.[11] In addition, White seems to exaggerate the "success" of the one-child policy and the degree of leadership consensus, which she says underlies that success. Even White herself notes disagreements in the top leadership. Scharping gives these disagreements a good deal more weight, noting that "in contrast to the

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9 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 238. In contrast, Greenhalgh and Winckler argue that "a major transition process in the post-Mao period affecting birth planning has been an overall regime shift from reliance on party fiat toward 'rule by law'", and devote three pages to the 2001 Law. They note that the Law introduced a number of progressive changes aimed at reducing abuses, increasing incentives for birth limitation and raising women's status (Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, pp. 158-60).

façade of unity and the urge to present birth control as an unflinching long-term concern, many years of controversy within the Party leadership can be documented".[12]

Also disquieting is White's flattening-out of birth planning history into a single, linear narrative—the "story of an idea—*jihua shengyu* [birth planning]—and how that idea came to serve a particular demographic and developmental challenge" and was then taken to its logical extreme.[13] She asserts: "The one-child policy, when it was launched by the Deng regime in 1979, merely built on the pattern [of planning births as (re)production] that had already been established. It was the logical and radical outcome of the idea of *jihua shengyu*".[14] This conceptual frame, while seductive, contributes little to our understanding of the dynamics of historical change. Fortunately, White's account is not entirely contained within the frame, so that, while emphasizing the notion of the one-child policy as being merely the logical outcome of an idea, she also provides substantial information on systemic economic and political reforms in the post-Mao period and their impact on birth planning; on the role that different actors and institutions played in shaping birth planning policy and its implementation; and, to a lesser extent, on the shifts that occurred over time in the state's population ideology—in part due to the influence of changing international discourse—and the popular reception of birth planning. Unfortunately, however, White's adoption of the "history as logical outcome of an idea" framework tends to obscure, rather than illuminate, the relative significance of, and relationship between, institutions, agents and ideas in processes of change.

Whereas White is perhaps too anxious to develop a singular model of population politics, Scharping seems little interested in developing any such model. This is not to say that his book is not enlightening about the politics of how and why China's population policies developed in the way in which they did, or about how it has been implemented. In fact, of the three books considered here, this is the most informative and detailed about the organizational, bureaucratic and legal avenues through which population policy has been shaped and implemented. However, unsurprisingly, given his background as a demographer, Scharping is more concerned with the technical problems involved in regulating and controlling births on a national scale[15] and with the impact of population politics on demographics than he is with determining whether implementation of the population program should be labeled a campaign, a progression from campaign mobilization to bureaucratization to neoliberalism, or something else again. Actually, the

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12 Thomas Scharping, *Birth Control in China, 1949-2000,* p. 4.

13 Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign,* p. 245.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

15 One of Scharping's main findings is that there has been a continuous decline in the quality and reliability of population statistics (Thomas Scharping, *Birth Control in China, 1949-2000,* p. 5).

dominant sense one gets from Scharping's book is that, at one time or another, Chinese state leaders have tried just about anything and everything to control population, including education and propaganda, planning, mobilizational campaigns, bureaucratization, legislation and marketization. This is a useful corrective to White's model of the population program as a single campaign, but it provides no further illumination on the political nature and historical dynamics of the population program.

Aside from this, Scharping's study is generally less theoretically reflexive or innovative than that of the other authors discussed here. In some places, he repeats conventional interpretations of history that are simplistic and/or misleading. Most obviously, in his treatment of the respective roles of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in the development of population policies Scharping gives us the conventional account, according to which Mao Zedong was pro-natalist. Scharping portrays Zhou Enlai, on the other hand, as the main advocate of birth control in the 1960s and 1970s and describes him as "the discreet yet influential opponent of Mao Zedong in birth-control matters".[16] In contrast, White and Greenhalgh as well as Winckler portray Mao's views on birth control as more ambivalent and complex. Even more importantly, both books stress the fact that, aside from his ambivalent attitude toward birth *limitation*, Mao was responsible for the idea of birth *planning*. This leads both books to give a more accurate picture of the part that Mao played in developing China's population program, and the greater degree of complementarity between his position and that of Zhou. As Greenhalgh and Winckler note, "the father of the concept of 'birth planning' for limiting the quantity of China's population was Mao Zedong" while "the godfather who repeatedly rescued that nearly abandoned offspring" was Zhou Enlai.[17]

Compared to the other studies under consideration, *Governing China's Population* is a little short on concrete, empirical detail but, in terms of theoretical innovation and the ways in which it relates China's population program to broader political trends, it is the most insightful and thought-provoking. Key to this is the way in which the authors draw on recent theorizations, inspired by Michel Foucault, of "governmentality" and "governmentalization".[18] For Greenhalgh and Winckler, "governmentality" refers to a particular, modern regime of government, two aspects of which are key. The first is that it is concerned with "biopolitics"—a politics of the administration of life, the primary aim of which is to maximize the health,

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16 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

17 Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, p. 56.

18 An excellent introduction to the concept of "governmentality" is Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage, 1999). For Foucault's own thoughts on "governmentality" see Michel Foucault, "Governmentality", in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 87-104. For other discussions of governmentality in China, see a recent special issue of *Economy and Society*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (November 2006).

welfare, security and prosperity of a population. The second is that it is "a form of rule that goes beyond old-fashioned sovereign state power to draw on three forms of power that, analytically, constitute a triangle".[19] These are governance through the institutions of "government" understood in the conventional sense; governance through "intermediate" disciplinary institutions, such as schools, hospitals and prisons, usually run by professionals on the basis of particular expertise; and self-governance by individuals of themselves. "Governmentalization" is a dual process, involving both the increasing pre-eminence of this triumvirate of forms of power over older, separate versions of state sovereignty, institutional discipline and self-cultivation *and*, within this triumvirate, a growing predominance of governance through "intermediate" institutions and of self-governance.[20]

In China, Greenhalgh and Winckler argue, "governmentalization" can be observed in the gradual, incomplete shift from Maoist mobilizational and Stalinist bureaucratic approaches to population governance, which reached their peak under Deng Xiaoping, to a "neoliberal" approach in which the state seeks to limit its direct forms of regulation in favor of governance through the market and the legal system and by communities, families and individuals themselves. Neoliberalization began, they claim, under Jiang Zemin, from around 2000, with the advocacy and then gradual and partial implementation of a set of changes in governance which, over the ensuing decade, were to coalesce into a program of "Comprehensive Reform". The first of these, reflected in the promulgation of the 2001 Population and Family Planning Law, was a shift from direct state planning of reproduction to its indirect regulation through law. The second was an expansion of the domain of population governance, reflected in the renaming of the Birth Commission as the Population and Birth Planning Commission, and involving an improvement of reproductive health services and increased efforts to improve the "quality" of the population. The third set of changes was the growing involvement in population governance of a range of institutions other than the Population Commission, including various other state bodies, overseas development agencies and funding bodies, which played a major role both in funding reform efforts and in shaping their direction, as well as commercial enterprises and independent professions, which advertised products and provided services and advice. The state also began to make limited use of grass-roots non-governmental organizations and village self-government as a means for promoting voluntary compliance with population policy.[21]

According to the authors, "governmentalization" serves as a thematic bridge between the two separately authored parts of *Governing China's Population*. In practice, however, it does this only poorly. The first part of the book is grounded in the historical and rational institutionalism of political

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19 Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, p. 23.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

science. Both because of this, and because so much of Part 1 is concerned with the first stage of the governmentalization of population—the construction of bureaucratic, government institutions for the direct, state administration of population—this part of the book looks much the same as any other rundown on the history of birth planning. In fact, it is not until two-thirds of the way through this part, in the discussion of the beginnings of neoliberalization that occurred during the Jiang era, that governmentalization is mentioned at all.[22]

Part 2 of the book is very different. Chapter 7 begins with a brief discussion and critique of the state's official population discourse, with its dubious grounding in "science"[23] and then moves on to consider the shifting politics of population at the grass-roots level, firstly in the countryside, and then in urban areas. Chapter 8 then provides discussion of an extremely important consequence of China's population program usually neglected by scholars—the restratification of Chinese society. As Greenhalgh notes, the state's birth planning program made use of, and exacerbated, existing divisions in society, in particular between urban and rural, male and female, and, in effect, harnessed cultural discourses on peasant feudalism and female inferiority to serve its own ends.[24] Finally, Chapter 9 examines the ways in which shifts in the population program in recent years have been part of, and have contributed to, broader shifts in state–society relations, and discusses the impact of the population program on China's global standing.

Overall, Greenhalgh and Winckler's experimental combination of very different approaches results in a book that hangs together more loosely and has a messier feel than either Scharping's or White's. It is, however, a very readable book, full of insights and ideas. Some of the most important of these relate to the discourse of *suzhi* or "quality", for, as Greenhalgh and Winckler note, most studies of China's population project have focused on its efforts to reduce "quantity", and relatively little is known about the state's project of enhancing the "quality" of the population. This is despite the fact that concerns about the "quality" of the next generation were already evident in official pronouncements in the 1980s, and by the 2000s were dominating both state and popular discourse on population.[25]

At the macro-level of analysis, *Governing China's Population* is important in suggesting a new way of looking at the "paradox" or "anomaly" of the one-child policy and of conceiving the relationship between past, present and future in the relationship between population and governance in China. In

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22 *Ibid.*

23 The fascinating story of the politics behind the discursive construction of China's population program as "scientific" is discussed in more detail in Susan Greenhalgh, "Science, Modernity, and the Making of China's One-Child Policy", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (June 2003), pp. 163-215; and *Of Missile Born: Making China's One-Child Policy* (University of California Press, 2007 forthcoming).

24 Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, p. 246.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

conventional accounts, including those of Scharping and White, the paradox of the one-child policy is explained in terms of a lag—in other areas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the state "liberalized" and decreased its intervention into the private sphere, whereas in relation to birth control it persisted with mass mobilization campaigns and highly intrusive forms of control and surveillance. Now, however, those forms of social engineering are gradually being abandoned, the state is withdrawing from the private sphere, and its power over people's lives is waning. In contrast, for Greenhalgh and Winckler, the one-child policy does not represent an anomaly or lag, but an important, "productive" moment in the progression of governmentalization, in which new biopolitical discourses, institutions and objects of power have been created. In the 2000s, they suggest, governmentalization is progressing to a new stage, but this is *not* one in which state power is weakening. Rather, in order to rule more effectively, the state has changed its mode of governing, so that the population is now subjected to an increasingly diffuse form of power, exercised through a range of institutions, rather than through direct state intervention alone.[26]

Greenhalgh and Winckler's characterization of these shifts in population governance in the 2000s as part of processes of governmentalization and, more specifically, neoliberalization, that are common to modern states, is useful in locating Chinese politics within modern, global trends, rather than seeing the Chinese as fundamentally separate and different from "us" and China as some sort of blip or blight on the landscape of global modernity. As a corollary, *Governing China's Population* makes a greater contribution to broad debates and theorizations in social science generally (as opposed to China studies) than previous studies of China's population program have managed. However, the contribution is marred by a degree of confusion about what constitutes neoliberalization. In the broader literature, two different perspectives on neoliberalization can be distinguished. On the one hand, the term is most commonly equated with something like marketization and refers, above all, to the decline of the welfare state, a withdrawal of the state from economic regulation and from other spheres of life, and the rise of an ideology promoting market competition as a universal decision mechanism and individual choice in the market as the model by which all human behavior should be understood.[27] On the other hand, Foucauldian scholars generally characterize neoliberalization as the development of discourses and modes of governing which promote and produce citizens who are autonomous,

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[26] The recent special issue of *Economy and Society* on "Chinese governmentalities" pushes yet further with this understanding that the Chinese state is not "retreating" but rather "regrouping". See *Economy and Society*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (November 2006).

[27] Andrew Kipnis, "Neoliberalism Reified: *Suzhi* Discourse and Tropes of Neoliberalism in the People's Republic of China", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 13 (2007), p. 385; Raewyn Connell, "Chicago Values: The Neoliberal Dream and Howard Government Politics", *Overland*, Vol. 183 (Winter 2006), pp. 32-34; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

responsible and "self-governing".[28] In this perspective, marketization is not the chief concern and in fact, attempts to produce self-governing citizens through greater state intervention (for example in the provision of welfare) and through marketization and decrease of state intervention can both be considered neoliberal or neoliberalizing.[29]

Greenhalgh and Winckler claim to take a Foucauldian approach to neoliberalization, but they also at times put great weight on the market and marketization. Indeed, in the introduction to their book, when they refer to the Hu era (2003–) as having brought about "a profound if partial shift from Leninist to *neoliberal* biopolitics", they define the latter as "a politics of the administration of life by increasingly market-oriented means".[30] In the conclusion, they write that, since the 1990s in China, "the disciplines of the Leninist state have been vying with—and collaborating with—Foucauldian forces and the disciplines of the capitalist marketplace, bringing broad shifts in the power to shape population norms and practices from the state to transnational corporations".[31]

One problem with this is that the role of the market and the meaning of the phrases "the administration of life by increasingly market-oriented means" and "the disciplines of the capitalist marketplace" are not properly explained. Those who understand neoliberalism as marketization might interpret the latter phrases to include the decline of collective reproductive and other health services and subsequent marketization that occurred in China in the 1980s. They might also see it as including the fact that, since at least the 1990s, those with money have been able literally to buy themselves out of the state's population program, being permitted to have a second or even third child, once they have paid a fine. In fact, however, Greenhalgh and Winckler do not discuss these trends, and they see the neoliberalization of population governance as emerging somewhat later, in a period when new investments were being made in reproductive health services *by the state*, as well as by other institutions.

Another problem is that, while the market and marketization are accorded great significance in the authors' more abstract discussions of neoliberalization, in the core descriptions of the supposedly "neoliberalizing" reforms of the 2000s provided in Part 1 of the book, they are scarcely mentioned at all. They are discussed rather more in Part 2 of the book, in two different ways. In a section titled "A marketization of village family norms", Greenhalgh explains that in rural China marketization and the spread of urban consumer culture accompanying it made childrearing increasingly expensive and therefore increased the willingness of couples to limit themselves to just

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28 Andrew Kipnis, "Neoliberalism Reified", pp. 385-86.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 386.

30 Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, p. 9.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 326.

one child.[32] But marketization is not here described as part of neoliberalization, and the period discussed predates the beginning of neoliberalization as it is outlined elsewhere. Later in Part 2, Greenhalgh discusses the role of the market in governing population in terms of the contribution that domestic and transnational corporations have been making to the creation, since the early 2000s, of desires and practices of consumption and self-governance which lead to the cultivation of a smaller but "higher quality" population.[33] This is presumably what the authors mean when they refer to neoliberal biopolitics as "the administration of life by increasingly market-oriented means". Still, I cannot help feeling that this exaggerates the contribution of market entities and downplays the ongoing role of the state and other institutions in creating new desires and practices of self-governance.

Aside from its lack of clarity about the meaning of "neoliberalization", *Governing China's Population* points to a need for further comparative research into the histories of neoliberalism, as well as "biopolitics" and "governmentality" in non-Western as well as Western contexts, and indeed, for debate regarding the very validity of these terms outside the Western liberal societies in which they were developed. To give one example, the Chinese discourse of population "quality" and the way in which it is employed in furthering self-governance look very similar to "neoliberal" discourses dominant in other parts of the world, and have undoubtedly been shaped by the latter, as Greenhalgh and Winckler, and others, have suggested. Yet the discourse on "quality" also contains traces of Confucian notions of self-cultivation, as well as early Modern Chinese anxieties about "national characteristics" and Marxist efforts to plan and construct a new socialist order.[34] In other words, the origins and history, and therefore to some extent the political and cultural significance, of the "quality" discourse in China are specifically Chinese. Perhaps these can only be masked, not illuminated, by being subsumed under the rubric of "neoliberalism" or "neoliberalization".[35]

With respect to the fraught question of the morality of China's population program, each of the three books under consideration recognizes "the dimensions of China's population dilemma",[36] but is also critical of the ways in which the state has sought to address this problem. Each portrays China's attempts at controlling population growth as problematic, but there are

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32 *Ibid.*, pp. 227-31.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 231-44.

34 For further discussion see Tamara Jacka, *Rural Women in Urban China: Gender, Migration, and Social Change* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), pp. 31-58; Andrew Kipnis, "*Suzhi*: A Keyword Approach", *The China Quarterly*, No. 186 (June 2006), pp. 296-313; and Gary Sigley, "Suzhi, the Body and the Fortunes of Technoscientific Reasoning in Contemporary China" (n.d.).

35 Cf. Gary Sigley, "Suzhi, the Body and the Fortunes of Technoscientific Reasoning", pp. 10-11. For a different argument against framing quality discourse as a form of neoliberalism, see Andrew Kipnis, "Neoliberalism Reified", p. 385.

36 Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign*, p. 263.

significant differences in the extent and focus of their criticisms. Though she never says so explicitly, it is clear that White is critical not just of the harshness of the one-child policy, nor of the ways in which it has been enforced, but of the very notion "that childbearing, like grain production, should and could be regulated according to state need and state plan".[37] White recognizes that the thinking underpinning the one-child policy—that development would be impeded unless the state took aggressive measures to limit population growth—was by no means an aberration at the time. Rather (and here White draws on an earlier paper by Greenhalgh[38]), China's attempts at population control have been heavily influenced by Western discourse, and are best seen as "a prime example of social engineering on a grand scale, a defining characteristic of twentieth-century politics".[39] Despite this, however, she refers to the subjection of childbearing to direct state regulation as simultaneously both "radical" and "extremist" and as "backward",[40] stating in the very last line of her book: "that approach, born under Mao, perfected under Deng, and implemented at great human and social cost over the past thirty years, would be best left behind as a relic of the twentieth century".[41]

Greenhalgh and Winckler also express concerns about social engineering, but they do so less forcefully and insistently than White. On the other hand, they are devastatingly critical of the extremeness of the one-child policy, the coercive means that have been used to enforce it, and, in particular, the negative consequences of the policy upon both individuals and society. They write: "In human terms, China's grand experiment in state birth planning was a colossal tragedy ... Were we able to tally up the damage to women's bodies and psyches, the trauma experienced by millions of peasants coercively sterilized as though they were 'pigs being spayed', and the number of young female lives lost through abandonment and neglect (for which we do have some measures), the vicious campaigns of the 1980s and early 1990s would require a place alongside the great human tragedies of the Maoist era in the 'black book of communism'".[42]

Scharping acknowledges that criticisms of coercive abortion and sterilization and other violations of human rights are justified, but he himself gives such practices relatively little attention, and argues that, while they were tacitly condoned by the Chinese leadership in the early phases of the one-child policy, they have been relatively rare since the mid-1980s. Today, Scharping claims, the system of normative, administrative and remunerative pressures used to enforce birth limitation can also be regarded as coercive, but they are much less disturbing. He suggests that the (lesser) harm caused by such

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37 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

38 Susan Greenhalgh, "Science, Modernity, and the Making of China's One-Child Policy".

39 Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign*, pp. 262-63.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 262.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 265.

42 Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, p. 319.

measures should be weighed against the enormous social, economic and ecological burdens that a huge and rapidly growing population will place on China and the world. "There is a need for action", he argues, "even if it is to be admitted that technological change and constant remodelling of economic organization do not permit a final judgement as to the question of maximum carrying capacities".[43]

Personally, I believe that Greenhalgh and Winckler are right to say that "the human and bodily costs of rapid, essentially coerced fertility decline have been enormous, and unevenly distributed in such a way that it has been the most powerless members of Chinese society—rural women, infant girls and the unborn—who have endured the most"[44] and that "in addition to the oft-noted social structural distortions and rarely mentioned bodily damage, that harm includes the cultural injury to people's subjectivity, or sense of self, and to their moral equanimity".[45] The two most profoundly immoral things are, first, the emotional and physical pain inflicted through coercion, and second, the inequality in the distribution of pain—the fact that the most powerless, least privileged members of Chinese society have suffered the most.[46]

Greenhalgh and Winckler are also right to say that the Chinese state's historic neglect of the human costs and traumas resulting from its birth planning program "is not mere oversight but rather is part of a larger, systematic pattern of inattention to the human costs incurred in reaching 'higher goals' for the country set by the political leadership".[47] Having said that, I am not convinced that state intervention into—even planning of—reproduction is inherently or necessarily bad in the way that White implies. Perhaps Scharping is right that "a taboo of state intervention in reproductive behaviour seems to be out of place if the outlook of future generations is severely constrained by dramatically rising population numbers over the past 200 years".[48]

Then again, there are serious questions as to whether the most important constraints on future generations are, in fact, those imposed by dramatically rising population numbers, and whether rapid reductions in population growth lead to improved socio–economic development. Certainly, this was the

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43 Thomas Scharping, *Birth Control in China, 1949-2000*, p. 9.

44 Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, p. 247.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 247.

46 It is important to acknowledge, however, that some of the most powerless in Chinese society have also benefited from the birth planning program. For example, some young rural women have been able to avoid been pressured by their husbands and parents-in-law into having more children than they wished because of the one-child policy. In addition, in at least some rural areas, as well as in the cities, having fewer children has reduced the extent to which parents favor sons over daughters in terms of education and other forms of investment. I am grateful to the editors for drawing my attention to these points.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

48 Thomas Scharping, *Birth Control in China, 1949-2000*, p. 9.

international orthodoxy in the 1970s. However, since the 1980s, some scholars in China and elsewhere have returned to the view that "it is not overpopulation breeding poverty but rather poverty breeding overpopulation. Economic revolution should therefore precede demographic change".[49] In addition, in the Western literature, the "dividend" school of thought now holds that, if timing and policies are right, a reduction in population growth can result in an economic dividend or bonus, because it provides a surplus of potentially productive adults over dependent children and retirees. After a time, however, reduction in fertility can lead to an imbalance in the age structure, with a too-large proportion of elderly dependents, and can become an economic onus, rather than bonus.[50] Greenhalgh and Winckler argue that "China provides a dramatic case of both the bonus and the onus of the demographic dividend perspective".[51] Thus, the rapid fertility decline of the late Mao and Deng eras provided a demographic bonus that boosted economic development, but it also resulted in a rapidly ageing population which, in the future, may lead to declines in economic growth and in greater poverty, if not addressed with appropriate resource allocation.[52]

The answers to the difficult questions posed here clearly have ethical consequences, for if population growth does indeed impose severe constraints on the outlook of future generations, and if declines in population growth are achieved more rapidly through direct state intervention than through other means, then the Chinese state has some grounds for claiming that its planning and limitation of reproductive behavior is ethical. However, if population growth will *not* constrain future generations to the extent we previously believed, or if state-engineered fertility declines are actually detrimental to long-term social and economic development, the immense suffering and social disruptions caused by such engineering are much less readily justified.

Examining the question of the morality and desirability of the Chinese state's efforts at controlling population growth from another angle, Greenhalgh and Winckler may be rather too optimistic about the neoliberalization of population governance. This is not a matter of overestimating the *pace* of change, for they note that, despite significant shifts in governance, in the 2000s the one-child policy was still in place and "China remained well short of fully pluralistic neoliberalism".[53] However, Greenhalgh and Winckler are too optimistic about the *effects* of neoliberalization and neoliberalism. True, they acknowledge that the "freedom" promised by neoliberalism may be illusory—that "like the First World people they have

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[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 337-38. See also Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign*, p. 208.

[50] Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, p. 305.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] *Ibid.* pp. 305-06.

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 133-34. See also p. 200, where the authors express reservations as to the extent to which neoliberalizing reforms to population governance introduced in the 2000s will be adopted by rural grass-roots cadres, and the impact they will have.

long aimed to emulate, China's people are now 'free' to make reproductive 'choices' that leave them essentially entrapped".[54] Nevertheless, as a whole, their account of neoliberalization reads as an overwhelmingly positive, liberating shift away from coercion toward a more modern, moral, less intrusive form of governance.

As I noted above, one of the most immoral aspects of China's population program has been the exacerbation of social inequalities, and the fact that the suffering resulting from imposition of birth planning has been distributed unequally, affecting most those who are already "at the bottom of the heap" of Chinese society. These inequalities, constructed in the Leninist phases of China's birth program, are well documented by Greenhalgh and Winckler. However, these authors provide no discussion of the impact of neoliberalization on them. They state that "in the market socialism of the 2000s, reproductive subjects … benefit from the population quality and welfare projects of the state, and they enjoy the seductive pleasures of the market".[55] They do not note that only some subjects, and not others, enjoy these benefits and pleasures; that only some, and not others, enjoy self-governance. Further, they do not acknowledge the evidence that neoliberalization is exacerbating these inequalities, rather than ameliorating them.[56] In the area of birth control, as in other aspects of life, we may be seeing the emergence of governance in which those at the bottom of society are subjected to authoritarianism while those at the top enjoy "liberalism".[57] The positive benefits of neoliberalism for the underprivileged are questionable.

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54 *Ibid.*, p. 326.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 327.

56 It is true, as Greenhalgh and Winckler note, that the Hu regime has made some attempts to ameliorate the worst social inequalities and improve the situation of, in particular, the rural population in the impoverished interior, and rural–urban migrants. However, these direct interventions on the part of the state should surely be seen as countering, or at the least supplementing, the trends that these authors refer to as neoliberalization.

57 This argument is not limited to *neo*liberalism or to China. In fact, Mitchell Dean and Barry Hindess argue that Western liberalism's defense of individual liberty has always been underwritten by the distinction between those who are and are not responsible enough to govern themselves. See Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality*, pp. 132-38; and Barry Hindess, "The Liberal Government of Unfreedom", *Alternatives*, Vol. 26 (2001), pp. 93-111. See also Luigi Tomba, "Of Quality, Harmony and Community: Civilization and the Middle Class in Urban China", n.d.; Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).