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Engendering Reproductive Policy and Practice in Peasant China: For a Feminist Demography of Reproduction

Susan Greenhalgh and Jiali Li

SINCE THE INTRODUCTION of China's forceful one-child-per-family policy in 1979, there have been reports of abandonment and infanticide of baby girls and, more recently, widespread abortion of female fetuses.[1] As a result of these and other gender-differentiated practices, the sex ratio at birth has been rising steadily. Between 1982 and 1989 the number of boys born per 100 girls born rose from 107 to 114, well above the biologically normal level of 105 to 106. For third and higher-order children the ratio of boys to girls exceeds 125 (Zeng et al. 1993, 284). The sex ratios are most distorted in the rural areas, where the bulk of the population lives: in 1989 the sex ratio was 110 in China's cities, 113 in the towns, and 114 in the largely rural counties (Hull and Wen 1992, 29). The numbers tell a frightening story: little girls are being eliminated from Chinese society—at close to 1.2 billion, the largest society on earth—on a massive scale.

The problem of China's missing girls has attracted sporadic international attention, largely from Western journalists and from demographers, both Western and Chinese, who discovered the gender gap in births in the course of analyzing their large-scale data sets. Despite the importance of this issue to feminism, remarkably few feminist scholars have written on it.[2] Whatever the reason(s)—distaste for quantitative research, distrust of demography, or simply lack of relevant expertise and

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[1] See Yan 1983; *Beijing Review* 1989; Johnson 1993; and Kristof 1993.

[2] Some who have are Johnson 1993; and Croll, Davin, and Kane 1985.

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research experience—the result has been that demographers have defined the terms in which the issue is now understood.

This silence about the skewed sex ratios in China is symptomatic of the relative detachment of feminism generally from demography.[3] While the other social sciences have been thoroughly interrogated and to varying extents transformed by feminist scholars, demography has taken only the first step of adding women to the equation (Riley 1993). The more fundamental tasks—of challenging basic assumptions and reformulating central concepts—remain largely undone.[4] Today, as books in feminist anthropology, sociology, and political science proliferate, the term *feminist demographer* remains an oxymoron.

Yet the feminist remaking of demography—the critique of demographic thought and praxis and the construction of a politically engaged demography motivated by feminist concerns and informed by feminist theory—is a critical project for feminist scholarship. Its importance rests on empirical, theoretical, and political grounds. The empirical importance of this critique stems from the value of demographic data to feminist scholarship. Male-female demographic differentials, because they deal with vital matters such as life and death and because they provide a bird's-eye view of the whole population under study, can provide stark clues to the changing relations between the genders in the society as a whole. Changes in the sex ratio at birth in China, for example, could shed light on transformations in the value of females in the reform era. Demographic data such as these, however, remain underexploited, as the many feminists in the mainstream social sciences rely increasingly on qualitative data and the few feminists in demography, working in isolation from the larger feminist community, labor away at their computers trying to convince their colleagues in demography that sex-based disparities merit more attention.

The theoretical need for a feminist demography lies in the narrowness and general weakness of demographic theories of reproduction, problems widely recognized by demographers themselves (Schofield and Coleman 1986; McNicoll 1994). A highly mathematical discipline known for being long on methods but short on ideas, demography remains wedded to positivist methods of data collection and analysis.[5] Theory construction is highly constrained by the fact that only elements of social life that can be quantified and treated as individual-level variables can easily be incorporated into causal models. While some social and economic factors

[3] An exception is the critique of demography's role in the design of family planning programs; see esp. Hartmann 1987; and Dixon-Mueller 1993.

[4] A recent contribution to this project is Riley 1993; see also Folbre 1983.

[5] Not all demographers rely exclusively on positivist methods. McNicoll's institutional demography (1994) draws on a very different methodological tradition.

are adequately measured in this way, hard-to-quantify forces such as power and politics, which many feminists place at the heart of reproductive dynamics, remain outside the scope of analysis. Moreover, in recent decades demography has not kept up with theoretical developments in social science at large.[6] Concepts such as culture and gender, when treated at all, tend to be regarded as residual variables and formulated in the sorts of apolitical and ahistorical ways that prevailed before social constructionist approaches became popular.

These theoretical limitations are apparent in the demographic treatment of the missing Chinese girls. As in demography generally, the bulk of the demographic literature on the missing girls is devoted to quantifying the trend and describing its spatial and temporal patterning.[7] Some of this work, however, deals with causal forces. Although the authors concentrate on proximate causes (such as the underreporting of girls and sex-selective abortion), implicit in their discussions is a simple causal model of the larger forces at work. According to this model, growing discrimination against infant girls is a product of traditional (so-called feudal) patriarchal culture, which valued sons more than daughters. Although the demographic manifestations of this traditional bias disappeared during the first few decades after the revolution of 1949—sex ratios at birth were normal from the early 1960s to the late 1970s (Li and Duan 1986; Coale 1993)—values that had lain dormant for decades resurfaced in the 1980s with the introduction of the one-child policy. That policy restricts peasant couples to one, or at most two, children, forcing them to discriminate against their daughters in order to get the culturally treasured son.

While demographers have made a valuable contribution in exposing the growing discrimination against baby girls, their theoretical framework is limited by their exclusive reliance on aggregate demographic data. Such data tell the end of the story but shed little light on the complex processes leading up to it. The demographic interpretation, for example, has little to say about such matters as politics, the role of the state, and historical transformations in gender values.[8] Yet these are fundamental features of reproductive reality in the People's Republic,

[6] Readers of this journal may be surprised to learn that demographic theories of fertility still draw heavily on modernization theory, whose popularity in other fields peaked in the 1950s and 1960s. A critique of demographic theories of fertility from the perspective of contemporary anthropological theory is developed in Greenhalgh 1995. Some of the reasons for the intellectual isolation of demography from the more humanistic social sciences are explored by Szreter 1993.

[7] Li and Duan 1986; Liu 1988; Hull 1990; Johansson and Nygren 1991; Xu and Guo 1991; Hull and Wen 1992; Tuan 1992; Coale 1993; Zeng et al. 1993.

[8] Some demographers have been sensitive to the role of state policy in fostering the increase in the sex ratio at birth. A notable example is Terence Hull (esp. 1990).

where the politics of policy formulation and implementation forms a central dynamic of reproductive change; where the party-state is an ever-present force in reproductive decision making; and where patriarchal culture—that is, gender ideologies—has been made and remade many times since the Communist regime took control in 1949. The aggregate data also do not allow for very sophisticated notions of culture. Thus, while giving culture its due (what else could account for the gender disparities?), the demographic work relies on an ahistorical view of culture, presenting culture as simply surviving from the past and neglecting contemporary forces that may impinge on its reproduction. To see these forces in operation, we need types of data that demographers characteristically do not collect, in particular local-level case studies of policy enforcement in political-economic and sociocultural contexts. Until such evidence is brought to bear on these questions, our understanding of the growing gender inequalities will be badly incomplete and traditional peasant culture will be blamed for an outcome to which other parties have heavily contributed.

Finally, the political urgency of the feminist critique stems from the fact that demography is a powerful field whose definitions of and solutions to "the population problem" sometimes serve as tools of domination (Hartmann 1987). The field's overriding emphasis on relieving what it considers a global population crisis through the implementation of fertility control projects in southern countries has kept feminist concerns—which are often in conflict with the high-tech, top-down strategies of fertility control generally employed—off the research and policy agenda (Jaquette and Staudt 1985). As a result, relations between feminism and demography have been strained for decades.[9] Individual demographers who may be sympathetic to feminist concerns are likely to find themselves constrained by the institutional configuration of their discipline. Heavily dependent on governments for their large-scale data sets, research funds, and in many cases also employment, demographers have a harder time than most criticizing official policies that produce adverse consequences for specific groups such as women or girls.

Such political problems are extreme in the Chinese case. Because of their dependence on the Chinese state for demographic data and access to China itself, specialists in Chinese demography must be circumspect in the extreme. While many of these demographers personally are appalled by the rising sex ratios at birth,[10] they must couch their criticisms in

[9] Relations have improved in the past year or so as both demographers and feminists have come to see that investments in women's education and earning ability can both improve women's lives and lower the fertility rate. These issues rose to the top of the international population policy agenda in anticipation of the UN International Conference on Population and Development, which was held in Cairo in September 1994.

[10] There are some, however, who feel that the end justifies the means.

oblique language that does not direct blame at the one-child policy, designated a "basic state policy" of the People's Republic, that is, off limits to criticism. Chinese demographers who overstep these bounds risk being labeled enemies of the state and losing their jobs in government bureaucracies or state-supported universities. Overly critical foreign demographers are likely to lose access to carefully cultivated contacts in key state bureaucracies and, with them, their ability to monitor developments in the future.

With these and other critical voices muffled, the political dynamics surrounding the issue of the missing girls tend to reflect the underlying sexist strands in Chinese cultural and political life (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Gilmartin et al. 1994). Public concern focuses not on the fate of the abandoned or aborted girls but on the plight of the men who will be unable to find brides twenty years hence. Since mid-1993, when the rise in the sex ratio was first officially acknowledged, virtually the only policy that has been adopted to counteract it is a ban on the use of ultrasound B equipment for prenatal sex determination, an ineffective step at best. Meanwhile, top officials continue to boast of the country's extraordinarily low fertility level—today in the area of 1.8 to 2.0 children per woman—not mentioning the fact that it has been achieved at the cost of violence against untold numbers of infants. Politics of this sort is unlikely to reverse the tide of missing girls any time soon.

Clearly, or so it seems to us, demographic-cum-political issues like these are too important for feminists to ignore. Moreover, relative to demographers, feminist scholars enjoy certain advantages in dealing with these questions. Less dependent on governmental support, they have more political space in which to criticize existing practices and propose alternatives more favorable to women's interests. Not tied to positivist approaches, feminists can draw from a wider range of conceptual, theoretical, and methodological resources. These include political theories of reproduction, social constructionist concepts of culture and other forces, and the field research methods of some of their home disciplines. Using analytic tools such as these, feminists can appropriate demographic data for feminist purposes, supplementing them with qualitative information to ensure their proper interpretation.

Focusing on the demography of gender among the youngest Chinese, we (an anthropologist and a sociologist/demographer) seek to make a small contribution to this larger project of feminist critique and reconstruction. We deal here with the theory and politics of the missing girls, leaving the critique of demographic methods and underlying epistemologies for the future. Our approach draws on a politics-of-reproduction approach advanced by other feminist scholars and extends that framework to embrace the demographic consequences of reproductive politics. Field data from three villages in northwestern China allow us to enrich

the demographic account, showing how growing gender inequality emerged from a complex interweaving of cultural values with political processes involving peasants and representatives of the party-state. We see the gender dimensions of reproductive values not as contemporary manifestations of traditional culture but as something newly constructed out of the residues of the past and the exigencies of contemporary life. Thus, politics, the state, and history, which are missing from the demographic account, take center stage in ours. We first develop these arguments and then elaborate them with ethnographic and demographic data from the study villages.

Politics, state, history: Analytic issues

Over the last decade or so, feminist scholars in history, sociology, and anthropology have begun to probe the politics of reproduction—itself a deeply gendered process—and the consequences of these negotiations and contests for women's lives and for gender relations and ideologies in society as a whole. Through studies of a wide array of topics, from the new reproductive technologies (Stanworth 1987; Strathern 1992) to the politics of abortion (Petchesky [1984] 1990; Ginsburg 1989) and the medical metaphors of reproduction (Martin 1987, 1991), to name but a few, these scholars have contested the notion that reproduction is a "natural" process that unfolds in the private domain. To the contrary, this work shows, reproduction is a social and political process involving contests over the means, the ends, and the meanings of childbearing.[11] While women and their bodies are usually the object of these struggles, the political drama is much larger, involving individuals and groups at multiple levels of the social system, all with interests in the outcome.

The consequences of such contests for women and gender hierarchies are highly variable and often paradoxical. For example, the use of modern contraception may liberate women from the burden of unwanted pregnancies but at the same time subject them to increased social control by state and medical establishments. Women's efforts to conceal their reproductive secrets that are aimed at inverting gender hierarchies may end up reproducing them instead (Browner and Perdue 1988).

Although rarely applied to demographic outcomes, a politics-of-reproduction perspective provides a useful analytic framework for developing a feminist understanding of demographic issues. Such an approach has particular appeal in a place like China, where the state has subjected reproduction to extensive political controls. The feminist literature on China suggests that throughout the post-1949 period the party-state (or

[11] An excellent overview is Ginsburg and Rapp 1991.

simply state) has been complicit in perpetuating gender inequality in many realms of life.[12] It would come as no surprise if the state promoted gender disparities in the reproductive domain as well.

In China two main sets of actors have been involved in the struggle to shape reproductive outcomes, the party-state and peasant society.[13] Both have vital interests at stake. The Dengist regime that took over in the late 1970s promised economic progress to the Chinese people, staking its legitimacy on its ability to achieve prosperity by century's end. Having seen rampant population growth eat up economic gains in the past, China's leaders were convinced that their economic project would fail if it could not stanch the growth of the population, especially the rural component of it, which made up over three-quarters of the total.[14] The one-child policy provided a drastic solution to this problem: radically curtailing population growth by asking all couples to limit themselves to one child.[15] Peasant society, the main target of the policy, was profoundly threatened by it. The socioeconomics and culture of village life necessitated having more than one child and at least one son. A policy restricting couples to one child imperiled cherished values and undermined the family's ability to reproduce itself.

Reproductive politics and policy

What kinds of politics were involved? Working in the United States, where reproduction is heavily medicalized, anthropologists such as Emily Martin (1987, 1991) and Rayna Rapp (1990, 1991) have shown that women resist the medical model of pregnancy and birth, accepting images, technologies, and practices that serve their interests while rejecting those that do not. Individual and group protests serve not only to contest malpractices but also to alter them. The process is depicted as one of negotiation, in which women can challenge denigrating or harmful practices of more powerful actors and at times transform dominant ideas and practices to better advance their objectives (Ginsburg 1989; Ginsburg and Tsing 1990).

We argue that similar processes mark the implementation of state-run family planning programs, domains of reproductive life as yet little ex-

[12] See, e.g., Johnson 1983; Wolf 1985; Woo 1994.

[13] Of course, contests over reproductive issues also occurred between spouses, between neighbors, and between communities. In this article we focus on the biggest reproductive struggle in contemporary China, that between the party-state and peasant society. Following conventional practice in Chinese studies, *peasant* is used for the Chinese term *nongmin,* a member of the rural population engaged in agriculture.

[14] Although demographers in China and abroad widely believe that current population growth rates pose serious economic and environmental problems, some recent scholarship challenges this alarmist position. See Johnson 1994.

[15] This call was issued in an Open Letter from the Central Committee of the Communist Party in September 1980 (CPIC 1983,1).

plored by students of reproductive politics. Where the state is involved in the process, we must consider not only *politics* but also *policy,* for it is the state's population policy that guides the design and implementation of the family planning program. Moreover, we must distinguish between formal and informal policy. *Formal policy* is specified in the written laws and regulations. *Informal policy,* by contrast, is actually implemented on the ground.

In China's state-directed birth control program,[16] we argue, women have fiercely resisted the formal policies of the state, forcing local enforcers to negotiate new, informal policies to guide implementation in village society. To understand reproductive politics in China, we must consider not only what transpires at the local level, or point of implementation, but also what happens at higher levels of the bureaucracy, where formal policy is made. Despite a common perception that the policy process in China is an exclusively top-down affair, historically top-down initiatives have generally been followed by bottom-up processes, in which the results of local enforcement are used to "perfect" state policy and thereby improve implementation.[17] Thus, there is a third political process, that of state accommodation of locally negotiated reproductive norms by officials at higher levels of the political system.

Finally, in state-socialist societies like China, where the party-state possesses the power to exert great social control, there is a fourth kind of reproductive politics, one involving submission of local society, peasants and local officials alike, to the will of the political center. This sort of politics emerges when the state decides that achievement of its demographic goals is so urgent that the needs of local society must be temporarily overridden in the service of what the state defines as compelling economic and political priorities of the country as a whole.

Political transformations and their gender consequences

Because politics is constantly evolving, as the resolution of one conflict gives birth to the next, analyses of reproductive politics must be sensitive to historical variation. In China the politics surrounding the one-child policy unfolded in three relatively distinct phases. Although the processes overlapped somewhat, to show how one led into the other, it is useful for analytic purposes to discuss them as though they occurred at different points in time.

[16] Birth planning (*jihua shengyu*), China's solution to the population problem, differs from the Western liberal notion of family planning in that the role of the party-state is paramount: births are planned by the state to bring the production of human beings into line with the production of material goods.

[17] Known as the "mass line," this strategy was formulated by Mao Zedong in the early 1940s and has been central to party leadership since then. For a classic statement, see Lewis 1963, 70–100. A convenient overview of the policy-making process in China is Liu 1986, esp. 247–60.

The initial phase of the one-child policy (roughly 1979–83) was dominated by the *politics of resistance.* The original policy, with its strict demands for one child for all, was starkly out of touch with the realities of life in the countryside. When the economic reforms dismantled the collective structures of rural life, creating space for the politics of resistance, peasant women began to actively defy the policy, insisting on having more children (in many places two), at least one of which was a son.

The second phase (roughly 1984–87) was marked by the *politics of negotiation* at the local level and the *politics of accommodation* at higher levels, leading to the engenderment of informal and formal policy. Faced with determined resistance from the peasants and, after dismantling of the rural collectives, a massive loss of power and resources, local officials (cadres) had no choice but to negotiate new terms of policy enforcement. The two groups struck a deal, working out an informal policy that allowed women to have two children and a son in exchange for agreement not to press for more.[18] While the process of policy engenderment took root at the local level, the political center could not remain a passive actor for long. The original policy of 1979 was ungendered; that is, gender was not a factor guiding reproductive behavior. However, when policymakers at provincial and national levels discovered that increased gender inequality was the price they had to pay for enforcing a restrictive policy among the peasantry, they reluctantly supported it and even institutionalized it by rewriting the regulations so that two children were allowed if the first was a girl. Formal policy thus became engendered as well.

The third and most recent phase (roughly 1988–93) was dominated by the *politics of submission* to state authority. Unfortunately for all groups involved, the politics of negotiation led to a big surge in rural fertility. Fearing that crucial economic targets would not be met, in the late 1980s the political center took resolute steps to strengthen enforcement of formal policy. By introducing a set of tough new enforcement measures, higher officials overrode locally devised policies, smudging out the politics of resistance, leaving in its place the politics of submission to state demographic demands.

These fluctuating politics had crucial consequences for gender relations. While the existing literature on the gender consequences of reproductive politics focuses on the implications for adult women, in China the struggle over birth control touched the lives of the next generation of females as well. Mothers of baby girls were subject to verbal and physical assault from unhappy husbands and in-laws (Wasserstrom 1984; Croll,

[18] Of course, the specific norms negotiated varied from place to place. The two-child-one-son rule, which was implemented in the area we studied, may have been quite widespread, since the fertility desires it reflected—for two children and one son—were very common (Whyte and Gu 1987).

Davin, and Kane 1985), but their daughters suffered too. We will show that as reproductive policy was engendered, so too was reproductive practice, as peasant women discriminated against their baby daughters in order to ensure the birth and survival of a son. The result was growing gender inequality among the littlest Chinese, visible not only in sex ratios at birth but in other areas of demographic behavior such as breast-feeding and adoption. Male bias in demographic behavior evolved over time, changing in form and degree as the politics of resistance gave rise to the politics of negotiation, accommodation, and submission.

The literature on reproductive politics cited above underscores the potentially contradictory effects on gender hierarchies. In China, too, we will see that the effects were paradoxical. For even as couples were subjecting their daughters to gross discrimination, they were beginning to recognize a daughter's value to the family. Ironically, growing demographic discrimination against girls was accompanied by growing cultural appreciation of them.

Culture as historically situated construction

While culture—in this case, gender ideologies or the cultural images and values associated with the two genders—played a crucial role in these outcomes, our view of culture differs substantially from that of the demographers discussed above. The demographic position—that the gender ideologies of peasants today are residues of traditional culture—reflects an older, ahistorical conception of culture as something "out there" or external to its bearers. In social science at large this perspective has been replaced by one that sees cultural values as constructions of human agents acting in historical time.[19] Adopting the constructionist view allows us to question the assumption that today's values are mirror reflections of yesterday's and to look critically at possible differences between the two. In China, we argue, the gender ideologies of the 1980s and 1990s resemble those of the past in their valuation of sons over daughters. On close inspection, however, there are important differences. By placing these gender values in historical context, we will show that they are human constructions reflecting traditional biases that have been reworked in response to specific changes in the political economy of village life in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

The Shaanxi village research

We now elaborate these arguments with data from three villages in the northwestern province of Shaanxi. A relatively backward province both economically and demographically, Shaanxi has experienced smaller in-

[19] A succinct statement is Rosaldo 1989.

creases in the sex ratios at birth than the more developed provinces to the east. In 1989 Shaanxi's sex ratio was 111.6, 2 percent below the national average of 113.8 (although 6 percent above the biological norm) (Zeng et al. 1993, 294).

These three villages were the site of ethnographic-cum-demographic field research by one of us (Greenhalgh) and collaborators at Xi'an Jiaotong University. Most of the research was conducted in 1988; during a brief restudy in 1993 we updated some of the findings and the municipal Birth Planning Association implemented a special survey on fertility. Carried out during the first six months of 1988, the initial project involved the collection of reproductive histories from all women in the villages who had ever married (941 women), intensive interviews with 150 randomly selected families, in-depth interviews with present and former cadres, and documentary research in local newspapers, journals, and other sources. During the research period Greenhalgh lived in the largest village for one month, commuting from Xi'an during the rest of the time. Village residence as well as regular village visits afforded the opportunities to engage in casual conversations and make ethnographic observations throughout the research period. All interviews and discussions with ordinary peasants were conducted in the privacy of people's homes or family fields, with no cadre present. Our empirical analyses focus on the period 1979–87, for which our data are most complete. However, we also deal briefly with the most recent period (1988–93), when trends in gender inequality took a sharp turn for the worse.

Rural reform and the remaking of gender ideology in three Shaanxi villages

Located in the Wei River valley just west of the provincial capital of Xi'an, the three study villages belong to Weinan Township (a pseudonym, 1993 population 28,510), a subdivision of Xianyang City. Although the villages vary in size—their mid-1993 populations were 1,716, 1,126, and 797—because of shared political and economic histories, as well as social and cultural backgrounds, we can treat them as a single locality for the study of reproductive policy and politics.

Rural reform: Transforming the economics and politics of village life

Vegetable growers for the nearby urban populations, the villagers are fairly well-off by Shaanxi standards, although only lower-middling by China-wide criteria. In 1991 their per capita incomes stood at 800 yuan, 50 percent higher than the provincial average (for the rural population [Shaanxi Provincial Bureau of Statistics 1992]). Rising incomes have brought dramatic improvements in consumption standards. In 1987 two

in five families owned a television, while washing machines, motorcycles, and other trappings of modern life adorned the homes and courtyards of the wealthier villagers.

These striking improvements in economic well-being were a product of the economic and political reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1979 and 1980 private plots were turned over to peasant households, free markets were opened, and short-term wage work was sanctioned, allowing villagers to supplement their meager income from the collective with private earnings. The key package of reforms—division of the collective land, dismantling of the collective workpoint system, and introduction of household responsibility systems—was put in place in late 1982 and early 1983. Since that time peasant households in the three villages have had virtually total control over the use of their plots and marketing of their produce. Political reforms followed in 1984. By eliminating the production brigade and production team structures and transforming them into villages and neighborhoods run by small committees, the political reforms sharply reduced the number and power of the cadres controlling peasant life.[20]

The dismantling of collective institutions also had profound effects on reproductive life, transforming both the politics of reproduction and the socioeconomics and culture of childbearing. Here we discuss the impact on politics, leaving socioeconomics and culture for the following section. As the local cadres tell it, birth control and other policies were relatively easy to enforce in the 1970s, when the collective socioeconomic regime was still in place. Brigade and team cadres controlled access to all the essentials of peasant life—work assignments, income, rations of basic necessities, and medical care, to name a few. If a couple failed to comply with the reproductive rules, team cadres could simply deduct the stipulated fine from their income and/or withhold essential goods and services. The reforms destroyed that system of near-total control, turning the enforcement of birth control into a major headache for local officials.[21] By eliminating collective income accounting, allowing peasant incomes to rise rapidly, and reducing the power and prestige of local cadres, the reforms opened up space for the politics of peasant resistance to the one-child policy and the politics of peasant-cadre negotiation of a new, informal policy on reproduction.

Reproductive ideologies and their gender dimension

The reforms also had striking effects on the socioeconomics of family life and, in turn, parents' ideas about childbearing. While the economic

[20] For details, see Shue 1984. On the impact of these reforms on local cadres, see White 1987; White 1991.

[21] For a discussion of the devastating effects of the reforms on the enforcement of the one-child policy, see Greenhalgh 1993. For a description of the process in China generally, see White 1991, 1992.

advantages of having many children remained limited—plot sizes were small and industry and commerce remained undeveloped—the direct and indirect costs of raising the next generation soared.[22] In 1988 parents worried about the escalating costs of food, schooling, and weddings, all of which had to be paid for in cash. By 1993, these worries had grown more intense and focused on the exceptionally high cost of raising three children and two sons. Caring for three children, informants said, would engage a mother full-time (with only two children she could take them to the fields), while having two sons would require the construction of a second house.

Increases in the costs of child rearing were, of course, not the only factors affecting reproductive decisions. Since the early 1970s the birth planning program has been inundating the villagers with propaganda explaining the societal benefits of limiting population growth. These messages, especially when reiterated by local leaders and backed up with tough administrative and economic sanctions, must have had some unmeasurable effect on childbearing aspirations. We might also expect that cultural values such as the desire for a son to carry on the family name and perpetuate the descent line would carry weight in these decisions. Oddly, though, the villagers never mentioned these factors. It was economic considerations—especially the "heavy burdens" (*fudan zhong*) of raising children—that dominated discussions about family ideals.

Peasant reproductive ideologies bore the clear mark of these concerns. Both in 1988 and in 1993 the villagers expressed strong preferences for two children. This reproductive ideal was remarkably pervasive: in the reproductive histories gathered in 1988, 86 percent of the nearly one thousand women in the three villages named the two-child family as the best. (Three percent thought one child was best, while 11 percent believed three or more were just right.) The two-child norm was even stronger among young people: 92 percent of those married during the period 1979–87 considered two children ideal. The villagers settled on two children because neither three nor one was acceptable: raising three was too costly, while one child was simply not enough—if that child died, the couple would be without issue, a social, cultural, and economic tragedy in peasant China.[23]

[22] For details, see Greenhalgh 1994b. Many observers feared that economic reforms would have pronatalist effects by increasing the labor value of children. Perhaps because of the skill-intensive nature of vegetable production, such effects did not materialize in the area studied.

[23] The uniformity of these answers might lead some readers to suspect that they were tailored to the demands of the regnant policy. Several facts argue against this interpretation. First, the answers were given in a period of policy relaxation; even the deputy township head in charge of birth planning was fairly relaxed about policy implementation. Second, informants of all ages and both genders, including many who could not possibly be policy targets, gave the same reply. Third, the villagers had compelling social

As important as the number of children was their gender: at least one had to be a son. Despite (or because of) decades of Communist intervention in peasant family life, in the 1980s the families of Weinan remained patrilineal (property was passed through the male line) and patrilocal (newly married couples lived with the husbands' parents). These features of family organization made sons much more essential to the reproduction of the family than daughters, who would join their husbands' families at marriage. Most important, a son was needed to support his parents in old age. A son was also needed to carry on the family line, although, as we have seen, few villagers mentioned this factor. In a village culture that continued to view women and girls as lesser beings, girls were restricted from engaging in some crucial agricultural activities, making sons the prized members of the family labor force.

While the necessity of having a son was a persistent theme in discussions with the villagers, the image of the ideal family also included a daughter. Indeed, in the reproductive histories only 4 percent of the women in the three villages considered a family with no daughter ideal. The great majority—94 percent—said one daughter was the best number. Extended discussions on this subject left the impression that sons were expected to meet parents' economic needs, while daughters were to fulfill their emotional ones. The result was a strong and insistent demand for a son and a weaker but still present longing for a daughter.

The construction of gender ideology in the reform era

The demographic literature on China has portrayed such gender ideologies, in particular the preference for sons, as reflections of a traditional culture that has survived relatively unaltered from the past. While the past is almost always carried forward in some form into the present, field data allow us to develop a more complex view of the connections between past and present. These data reveal that the preference for sons has persisted but that beneath this global gender preference lie subtle changes in the valuation of sons and daughters. Moreover, the roots of today's views can be traced to specific changes in the political economy of village life in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. In this section we trace out those roots, arguing that the gender ideologies of today are best viewed as contemporary constructions forged by the villagers as some of their most fundamental family traditions were undermined by the massive political, economic, and social changes of the late Maoist and early Dengist eras.

Traditionally, sons were thought to bring many benefits, while daughters carried few if any. Today these ideas are being discarded. While the

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and economic reasons to support their beliefs. And finally, the answers were offered with such strong conviction in the interviews that I (Greenhalgh) came away with the feeling that they reflected deeply held personal beliefs.

old saying "Many sons [bring] much happiness" was something of an idealization, the fact that some older villagers still defended it in the late 1980s suggests that it contained more than a kernel of truth. Before the policies of the Communist state eliminated significant private property and altered the distribution of resources in favor of the young, the parents of two, three, or four sons could realistically hope to be relatively well-off and to enjoy a comfortable old age surrounded by at least one son, his wife, and some grandchildren. In the 1980s and early 1990s the connection between a houseful of sons and family prosperity was no longer apparent to the villagers. Asked to reflect on the wisdom embodied in the above saying, most villagers scoffed at it, adding that, far from being sources of wealth, sons were onerous economic burdens. One informant reminded us of the heavy fines imposed on couples having a second son, implying that the question was less than sensible.

Today, as we have seen, peasant couples want at most two sons. Increasingly, they want only one. These ideas were formed in response to the political-economic realities of contemporary life. Many villagers interviewed in 1988 believed that having three or four sons was a bad idea because they often fight over who will have to support the elderly parents, causing humiliation and even economic hardship for the parents. While such squabbles between brothers have always been part of Chinese family life, during the collective era they may have had increasingly negative consequences for the parents, as family division began to occur sooner after marriage (i.e., earlier in the parents' lives). As older villagers tell it, fraternal fights have become even noisier and more prevalent during the reform years, because young people, now free to pursue economic activities on their own, no longer want to be saddled with the burdens of listening to and caring for old people, whom they consider hopelessly old-fashioned and an obstacle to getting ahead. Increasingly, older parents are finding themselves left entirely alone, as even the last son demands his freedom and separates from his parents. Cases of older people abandoned by their sons and unable to fend for themselves in the rapidly changing, highly competitive reform environment[24] have convinced many people that sons just cannot be counted on any more even to honor their most fundamental obligation. As one older man put it, "These days sons are useful to parents only after the parents die; then they throw huge funerals to show how filial they have been."

Peasant attitudes toward daughters have also shifted. In the past daughters were considered "goods on which one loses": they required time and money to raise, then married out of the family, cutting off ties with their

[24] In families in which all the sons divide from the parents, one or more sons usually send small amounts of money to cover the older couple's living expenses. Destitution results when these sums are too small to cover basic living expenses, forcing the older folk to try to support themselves through agricultural production.

parents. While such disparaging views can occasionally be heard today, more young people now actively want a daughter, albeit not as keenly as they want a son. The reasons are many and complex,[25] but the explanation most frequently given in the interviews was to provide emotional support in old age. Some even imagined relying on their adult daughters for economic support—that is, they envisioned moving in with their married daughters if their sons failed to provide for them, something quite unheard of in the past.[26] Such notions could have arisen only in recent decades, when married women have gained more resources and personal freedom and marriages within the village have became common, making it feasible for married daughters to return home for a few hours and tend their aging parents. Intravillage marriages have also enabled parents to maintain contact with their married daughters, a prerequisite to joining them in later years.

It was not only the proximity of married daughters that underlay the strikingly new imagery of grown daughters tending their aging parents. Also important was the growing emotional distance between older parents and the culturally preferred caregivers, their sons and daughters-in-law. During the field research older people complained bitterly about the unfiliality of sons, who often refused to provide pocket money, and the coldness of daughters-in-law, who were known to undertake small acts of cruelty in order to precipitate family division. While stories of daughters-in-law breaking up the large family have long been part of the cultural repertoire, what has changed is the daughter-in-law's ability to force the division. Now important income earners, daughters-in-law are using their economic power to advance their personal agendas. One young newlywed, finding her husband siding with his parents in the great division debate, simply refused to go into the fields. Fearing that their crops would be ruined, the other family members gave in and agreed to split up the family. Such stories have become more common during the reform years, as young people, impatient for economic progress, try to hasten the arrival of the future by ridding themselves of the burdens of the past. Facing these distressing new realities, people are beginning to construct new, regendered images of family life. In these imaginings a daughter has not replaced a son but, unlike the past, she now has a place.

Today's ideas reflect themes in traditional culture, but these themes are being reworked to form part of a different cultural imaginary. The vision

[25] Because they have been encouraged to take part in agricultural labor, daughters now have much greater economic value to their parents than they did before 1949. For a discussion of these and related issues, see Parish and Whyte 1978, esp. 180–92. The preference for daughters appears to be much stronger in the cities. These issues are explored with subtlety by Wolf 1985.

[26] The social histories of 150 families that were gathered in 1988 include no cases of parents moving in with their married daughters. The histories cover the half-century 1937–87.

of a big family with many sons, one of whom lives with and supports the elderly parents, is fast disappearing, undermined by the changing political-economic realities of village life. In its stead is another image: the small-hearted son and selfish daughter-in-law refusing to honor their obligations to their elders and, in their place, the faithful daughter, appreciated at last, coming home to render personal services and comfort in her parents' final years.

The politics of engenderment: Resistance, negotiation, accommodation, and submission

When it introduced the one-child policy in 1979, the Chinese party-state did not intend to foster gender bias in reproductive policy and practice. Top leaders were aware that the policy might produce an excess of males over females, but they dismissed the problem as unlikely and in any case fixable through proper ideological work (CPIC 1983). The original policy was gender-neutral, asking all Han Chinese couples to have only one child. Yet by 1988 two-thirds of China's provinces had incorporated gender considerations into their reproductive regulations, and reproductive practice had become deeply differentiated by gender. Focusing on the three Shaanxi villages, in this section we illuminate the complex political processes out of which gender disparities among the young arose. We will see that, far from being passive bystanders, agents of the state were active parties to the negotiations.

Resisting the one-child rule

Soon after the one-child policy was introduced, peasants in the Weinan villages began seeking means to escape its harshest provisions. In the early years of economic reform, before decollectivization, the means of resistance available to them were relatively limited. The dismantling of the collectives in 1982–83 vastly widened the villagers' circle of freedom, opening up many ways to defy the birth control policy.

Resistance took many forms: economic means such as refusing to pay fines; social strategies such as adopting out second and third daughters; migrational tactics such as temporarily moving to another city to give birth; and bodily techniques such as illegally removing an intrauterine device (IUD), refusing to adopt the stipulated contraception, and concealing unauthorized pregnancies until it was presumably too late to have an abortion.[27]

Reflecting deep-seated desires for a son and much weaker although tenacious yearnings for a daughter, peasant resistance to the policy was

[27] For more on these bodily techniques, see Greenhalgh 1994a; economic strategies are documented in Greenhalgh 1993.

profoundly gendered. We look here at the imprint of these gender preferences, as well as the desire for two children, on the willingness of women to undergo contraceptive surgery and on the size and gender composition of the families they constructed. (Here and below family size is used as shorthand for the number of children a woman has.) The demographic data provide a particularly rich resource for studying resistance. Unlike individual case studies, the demographic data give an overall picture of the number of women resisting the policy and the forms that resistance took. We focus here on the resistances of the early one-child policy period (1979–83). Although peasants continued to evade the birth restrictions into the mid-1980s, the political actions of the earlier years actually provided the impetus for the renegotiation of local policy.

Under the one-child policy all married couples of reproductive age with one or more children were required to adopt effective contraception (i.e., an IUD or sterilization). This demand was clearly spelled out in the provincial birth planning regulations, which specified economic and administrative sanctions for failure to comply.[28] The obligation to contracept was also national policy, enshrined in the Marriage Law of 1980 and the Constitution of 1982.[29] Thus, to choose not to contracept was a bold action, one that defied laws on the books at the highest levels of the political system.

Despite the severity of the offense, many couples refused to protect themselves against conception. At the end of 1983, five years after the one-child policy was introduced, the level of contraceptive use fell far below the level required by law. Patterns of contraception by family size and composition suggest why. While a substantial majority of couples with two or three children complied with the demand to contracept (74 and 82 percent, respectively), only 22 percent of couples with one child did so, bespeaking fierce resistance to the notion of limiting family size to one.

The gender of the first child did not affect the desire for two children: that is, regardless of whether the first child was a girl or boy, the low contraceptive use rates (about 20 percent) suggest that couples wanted a second child. However, gender preferences emerge clearly at larger family sizes. While fully 85 percent of couples with one son and one daughter were contracepting, only 12 percent of those with only two daughters were doing so, indicating an exceptionally strong desire for a son. Al-

[28] The birth planning regulations of Xianyang City also guided the reproductive activities of the villagers. Since the municipal regulations differ little from the provincial ones, we limit our discussion to the latter.

[29] Article 14 of the 1980 Marriage Law and Article 49 of the 1982 Constitution state: "Husband and wife are in duty bound to practice [birth] planning" (*Population and Development Review* 1981, 369–72; National People's Congress 1983).

though a great deal weaker, the desire for a daughter is also evident in the villages. Among couples with two sons but no daughter, the contraceptive level was 81 percent, 4 percent lower than that found among couples with one child of each sex. The desire for a daughter is weaker in couples with three children, but it is evident nevertheless.[30]

Beneath these aggregate figures, of course, were individual women struggling to produce the children they, their husbands, and in-laws badly wanted while not running afoul of the birth planning cadres. Biologically fortunate women, who got a son and a daughter on the first two tries, had a relatively easy reproductive career, evading only the widely violated rules that each couple have but one child and women with one child wear an IUD. The biologically unlucky ones, who had two sons or, worse yet, two daughters, had to resort to politically and physically riskier measures such as illegally removing their IUDs and hiding pregnancies as long as possible in hopes of avoiding the mandatory abortion that was supposed to end all unauthorized pregnancies.

The gendered character of resistance also emerges from the data on fertility. In the early years of the one-child policy, all couples, regardless of circumstances, were "encouraged" (i.e., pressured) by birth planning workers to limit themselves to one child. Second children were to be strictly limited to couples in exceptional circumstances (some of which are described below), while third and higher-order children were to be "resolutely prohibited." These injunctions were laid out in the provincial birth planning regulations and backed by strong economic and administrative sanctions.[31]

Tough penalties notwithstanding, in the Weinan villages many peasants refused to stop at one child. During the years 1979–83, fully 44 percent of women with one child went on to have a second. Defiance of the rules on second children depended partly on the gender of the first; while 39 percent of women with a son pressed for a second, 50 percent of those with a daughter did so. Resistance became even more gendered as birth order rose. Twenty-two percent of all couples with two children had a third during these years, but 54 percent of those with two daughters and no sons did so. And while only 4 percent of couples with three children defied intense pressures to have a fourth, 25 percent of couples with three daughters took this risky step in hopes of being blessed with a son.

What stands out most boldly from these patterns of childbearing is the intensity of son preference. However, we can also discern the desire for

[30] Couples with three sons but no daughter were slightly less likely to contracept than those with at least one daughter. The percentages were 76 and 83, respectively.

[31] Unlike contraception, family size has never been regulated by national law. Such a law has been drafted and discussed many times but never formally passed.

a daughter. The strongest evidence for daughter preference is that nearly 40 percent of couples with only a son went on to have a second child. (Of course, this behavior might reflect simply a desire for two children.) As the number of children increases, however, the desire for a daughter appears to weaken. While 12 percent of couples with one son and one daughter went on to have a third child, a slightly higher 18 percent of couples with two sons but no daughters did so. A minuscule 2 percent of couples with at least one child of each gender had a fourth child, but 7 percent of those with three sons and no daughters had another child.

The results of this gender-specific resistance can be seen in the gender composition of the families that village couples had constructed by the end of the fifth year of implementation (see fig. 1). At that time, 57 percent of couples with one child had a son, while only 43 percent had a daughter. Clearly, couples were playing with biology, for if biological factors alone were at work, we would expect rough parity in the proportion of couples with one son and one daughter. As families grew in size, the gender gap also grew. Of all couples with two children, 60 percent had the village ideal of one child of each sex. Twenty-seven percent had two sons, while only 12 percent had two daughters. If gender composition were not being manipulated, we would expect a ratio closer to 50-25-25. The gender gap widens even farther in three-child families. Eighty percent of families with three children had at least one child of each sex, 16 percent had all sons, and only 5 percent had all daughters.

Negotiating informal policy

Faced with resolute resistance to the strict one-child rule and, after decollectivization, a massive loss of power and resources, during the mid-1980s local birth planning cadres had little choice but to negotiate new, informal terms of implementation. The political and economic climate at middecade was unusually conducive to reproductive deal making at the village level. Most likely, village-level birth planning workers had long secretly sympathized with peasant desires for two children and a son. After all, unlike higher-level officials, village cadres were members of village society who shared its culture and daily life (Shue 1988). Under the economic reforms, however, the cadres' identification with the villagers—and thus sympathy for their reproductive plight—deepened. By eliminating many of the cadres' official duties and by giving them allocations of land under the household responsibility system, the reforms turned them into nearly full-time peasants whose interests were virtually identical to those of ordinary villagers.

A second factor encouraging local politicking over the reproductive rules was a softening of the demographic demands of the state. In general, local officials in China are duty bound to enforce all state policies,

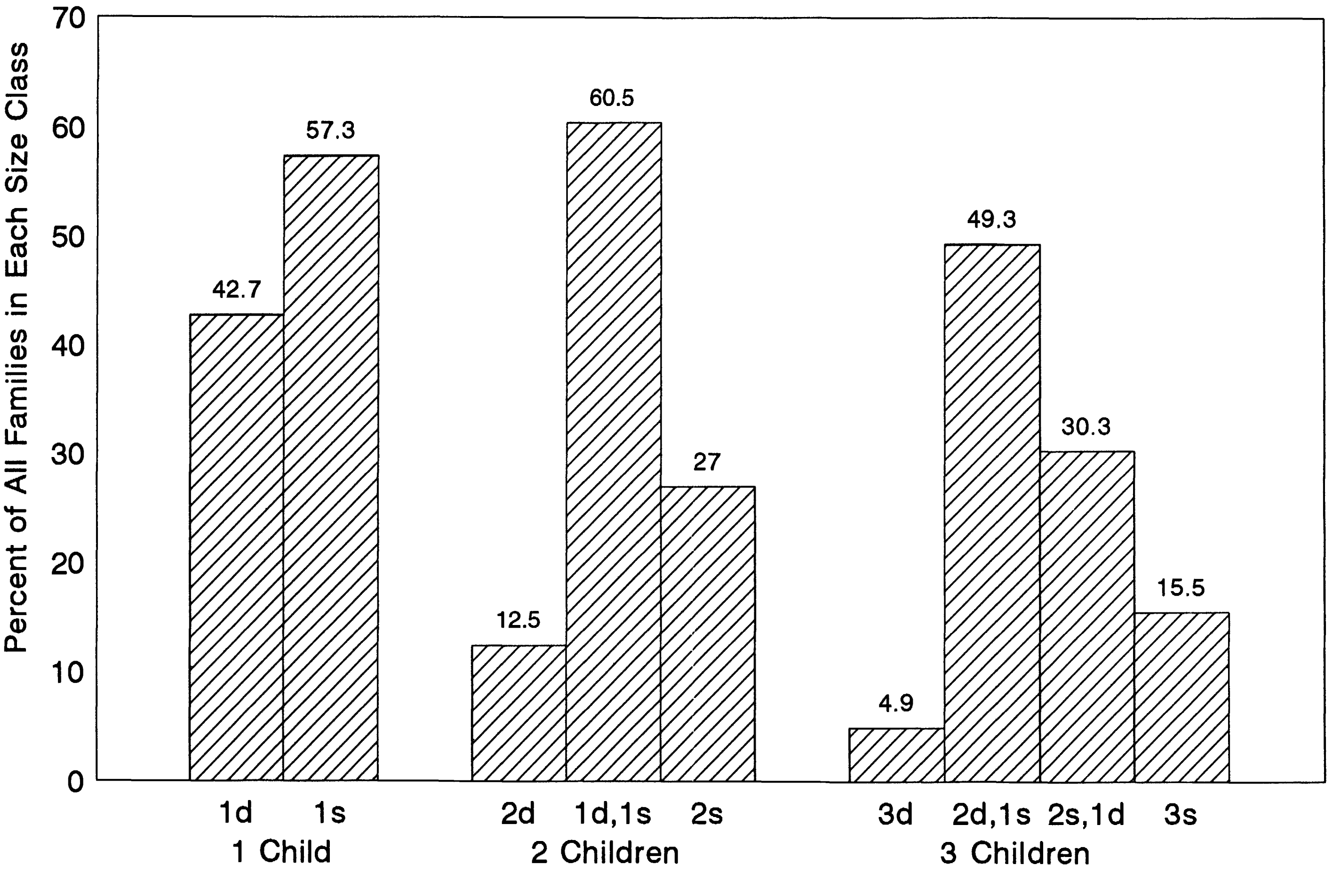

FIG. 1 Gender gap in families of different sizes, year-end 1983, in three Shaanxi Villages. *d* = daughters; *s* = son. Calculated from reproductive histories.

including unpopular ones such as the birth control policy. Research shows, however, that the extent to which these cadres actually do so varies according to the amount of pressure exerted on them from above (Unger 1989). In the early 1980s state pressure to achieve demographic targets was great, leaving village cadres few options but to press the villagers to comply. In the mid-1980s, however, the central government slightly relaxed its demands on the birth planning bureaucracy, creating room for bargaining and constructing more lenient, informal policies in localities throughout the country.

Although the reproductive rules of thumb worked out in the Weinan villages were not written down anywhere—to do so would have been politically risky, exposing the pervasive, ongoing violation of formal policy—everyone concerned with childbearing seemed to know what they were. We pieced them together from conversations with birth planning workers and peasants and from individual cases that represented limiting situations. Although there is space here only to introduce a few of these cases, ethnographic and demographic evidence presented elsewhere (Greenhalgh 1993, 1994a) confirms the existence of such rules and charts the implicit and explicit negotiations that led to their formulation.

The informal policy on reproduction can be distilled into three sets of rules or understandings: those regarding the number of children, the sex of children, and the treatment of couples who had reached the ideal of two children and one son. The application of these rules on childbearing can best be seen by examining the more detailed and again, informal, behavioral guidelines for contraception, which was the major means of controlling fertility. These three rules and the associated contraceptive guidelines are as follows:

First, virtually all couples, regardless of their circumstances, were allowed to have two children. Formal policy notwithstanding, women with one child were encouraged but not required to have an IUD inserted, and women with one child who became pregnant out of plan were not required to undergo an abortion.[32]

The case of Zhu Xiuhua illustrates this rule.[33] In December 1980 Zhu had a son. Following township regulations, in May 1981 she had an IUD inserted. However, five months later she had her IUD removed, hoping to have a second child. The local birth planning worker allowed her to carry the pregnancy to term, and in October 1982 Zhu gave birth to another boy.

[32] All births were supposed to be planned, i.e., to take place only after a couple requested and received an official birth quota. Local cadres allocated birth quotas according to a priority system in which certain categories of couples (those with no children, e.g.) were given preference. The total number of quotas given out in a specific year depended on the number of births assigned to the locality by higher levels of the administrative system. All pregnancies occurring outside the plan were supposed to be aborted.

[33] All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Second, virtually all women were allowed to have a son. In contravention to the written regulations, which forbade third and higher-order childbearing, women with two daughters who became pregnant again were allowed to carry the pregnancy to term.

The case of the party secretary of one of the villages aptly illustrates this one-son-for-all rule. The secretary quietly allowed his daughter-in-law to have a third child because the first two were girls. This case bears special import, because party secretaries are the most powerful members of village society. It is what they do, not what the written regulations say, that sets the policy in the villages they head.

Third, these liberties were granted on the understanding that peasants who had reached the reproductive ideal would not seek to exceed it. Women with at least one son and one daughter were expected to undergo sterilization. They were strongly pressured to do so, however, only if they caused trouble for the cadres by attempting to have another child.

The application of this rule can be seen in the case of Cao Lihua. After bearing two daughters, Cao finally had a son in April 1983. However, wanting another child, she became pregnant again. Her pregnancy was discovered and aborted in August 1985, and in October of that year Cao was required to undergo sterilization.

In addition to these rules of thumb on number and sex of children and contraception, informal policymakers also waived the state's requirement that births be spaced four years apart and ignored children born but later adopted out when determining a couple's birth quota. These other guidelines will figure in the story told below.

Accommodating local values: Engendering formal policy

Although detailed micropolitical data are unavailable, evidence of other sorts suggests that patterns of peasant defiance and peasant-cadre negotiation such as those documented above were common throughout rural China.[34] Reading the political signals, in 1984 the central leadership conceded that the original, strict version of the one-child policy was unimplementable in the rural areas. Unwilling to abandon the policy, which was a crucial component of their larger economic development plan, leaders in Beijing sought ways to "perfect" the policy to make it work. In 1984 they issued a high-level directive authorizing the provinces—the administrative units with primary responsibility for fertility policy—to adapt the policy to local realities within their borders. Under the slogan "Open a small hole to close a big hole" (*Kai xiaokou du dakou*), provinces were permitted to increase the number of conditions

[34] Such a picture emerges from ethnographic information from villages in Fujian and Guangdong (Huang 1989; Potter and Potter 1990), demographic data on contraception and fertility in all the provinces and the country as a whole (Arnold and Liu 1986; Tuan 1992), and numerous accounts in the Chinese press (Wasserstrom 1984).

under which couples, especially rural couples, would be allowed to have second children. The aim was not to increase freedom of reproductive choice but to improve enforcement by bringing policy into line with practice.

In Shaanxi, provincial policymakers adapted formal policy to local conditions by incorporating informal policy of the sort adopted in Weinan into the written regulations. Since informal practice was male-biased, the process of "opening a small hole" resulted in the writing of gender inequality into provincial legislation. In a step that would prove fateful for the villagers in later years, provincial policymakers adapted formal policy to one of the peasants' desires—for a son—but not the other—for two children for all.[35]

The process of policy engenderment can be traced in the provincial birth planning regulations. Since the introduction of the one-child policy, Shaanxi Province has issued four major sets of regulations advocating one child for all couples, those of 1981, 1982, 1986, and 1991. (Another set of regulations issued in 1979 reflected the previous policy of recommending one but permitting two children.) Between successive sets of regulations, the number of conditions under which peasant couples were allowed to have a second child increased from five to seven to eleven, and then dropped to ten. In the Temporary Regulations of 1981 and 1982, conditions such as the disability of the first child, remarriage of the couple, or non-Han ethnicity enabled some couples to have second children; the gender of the first child was not a factor.

By 1986 gender had become a consideration for second childbearing, although policymakers apparently felt uncomfortable enough about it that they used a code word for the provision on gender in the written regulations. The final condition of the 1986 regulations stated that rural couples who find themselves "in real difficulties" (*shiji kunnan*) were allowed to have a second child in a planned fashion (i.e., after spacing four years and receiving an official birth quota). Although this last item was not further elaborated in the regulations themselves, its meaning was very clear to everyone involved in birth planning work. A document prepared for Greenhalgh and her Chinese colleagues by the Provincial Birth Planning Commission stated clearly that the 1986 provision for couples with "real difficulties" meant those with only a girl. By 1991 policymakers had shed their reticence about incorporating gender disparities into the regulations. According to the last condition of the 1991 regulations, "when both husband and wife have only one daughter and the family has real difficulties," they may have a second child in a planned fashion.

[35] A few provinces did modify their policies to allow all rural couples to have two children.

Shaanxi was not the only province that institutionalized—indeed, actually legalized—male bias in reproductive behavior. By 1989, eighteen provinces had formalized what came to be known as the "daughter-only" (*dunuhu*) policy (Zeng 1989; Feng and Hao 1992). That is, two-thirds of all provinces formally recognized the unequal value of daughters and sons and made the gender of the first child a legitimate basis for reproductive behavior. The legalization of gender inequality was in direct contravention to the Chinese Constitution, which holds men and women to be equal before the law.

Submitting to the political center

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the climate for reproductive politicking at the local level turned hostile. When state policymakers relaxed the pressure in 1984 and allowed localities to increase the number of conditions for second childbearing, they did not imagine that villages throughout the country would go further and allow two children for all. Unfortunately for all parties involved, the enforcement of such informal policies led to sharp increases in rural fertility.[36] Believing that too-rapid population growth would jeopardize achievement of crucial economic goals, in the late 1980s the political center began to turn up the pressure on the birth planning establishment to meet demographic targets. A central-level document issued in May 1991 reflects this toughened stance on birth control. The document affirmed the more liberal daughter-only policy but called for greatly enhanced efforts to implement that policy in the rural areas (Xinhua 1991).

Shaanxi responded to these new demands with considerable alacrity (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994). In 1991 policymakers issued a new set of provincial regulations to guide childbearing throughout the province. The aim was to unify policy provincewide, eliminating the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of local policies, both formal and informal, that had guided childbearing in the province during the mid-1980s.[37] Reiterating previous policy on childbearing, the regulations continued to encourage one child for all and prohibit third children. With regard to second children, as we have seen, they allowed two if the first was a girl but insisted that couples with a son stop at one.

In this new politicized climate, birth cadres in the Weinan villages had little choice but to abandon the informal policies of the mid-1980s.

[36] Western scholars, using sophisticated techniques, estimate that the total fertility rate rose from 2.27 in 1985 to 2.45 in 1987 (Feeney et al. 1989). Official Chinese data show a much sharper rise, from 2.20 to 2.59 countrywide and from 2.48 to 2.94 in the rural townships (*China Population Newsletter* 1989). It is these latter estimates, one can presume, that lay behind the program modifications of the late 1980s.

[37] Interview with officials at Shaanxi Provincial Birth Planning Commission, July 14, 1993.

Although they continued to sympathize with peasant desires for two children and a son, the villages' officials now faced intense pressure to promote the formal policy of the province instead. This pressure was no longer just political; economic pressures were also evident in new "cadre responsibility systems" that docked wages and blocked promotions of those failing to meet targets. In addition, the problems of enforcement they had faced in the mid-1980s had been solved by the creation of a battery of new, highly effective mechanisms specifically designed to work in the late-reform environment. Most of these enforcement instruments were designed by officials at higher levels of the political system and promoted for use throughout the province. Some of them, such as the new, party-controlled Birth Planning Association, were deliberately designed to bypass the local cadres, taking over some of the work they had been unable—or unwilling—to do. Other techniques of control involved linking compliance to access to crucial economic resources and new "service-oriented" administrative measures that were mandatory for all women of reproductive age. These measures, which are detailed elsewhere (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994), were apparently every bit as powerful as the collective-based mechanisms that had supported enforcement in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Finding their local bargains overridden and feeling strong pressure from above, village birth cadres had no choice but to submit to state authority. This meant going back on their earlier promises to the villagers. While couples whose first child was a girl were allowed to have a second, they were now required to wait the stipulated four years. (As noted above, spacing rules had always been on the books but were not enforced in the more lenient environment of the mid-1980s.) Couples with a son were expected to stop at one. Although the brevity of our 1993 field research limited the number of individual cases that we could collect, conversations with cadres and peasants alike made it clear that a tough policy was in force. One case must suffice to make the point. In mid-1993 Tian Fangfang, a shy mother of a three-year-old girl, was awaiting a quota to have a second child. Asked what she would do if her next child was another daughter, she said she would have no more children. Why? "Because the policy is so rigid" (*zhuade henjin*), she replied softly.

Thus, through a complex, historically situated political process involving resistance, negotiation, accommodation, and submission, son preference moved from being a peasant value[38] (deeply embedded, of course, in social institutions) to becoming a component of informal reproductive

[38] Of course, patriarchal values were not the exclusive property of the peasantry but were shared by most groups in Chinese society.

policy in the villages, to being incorporated into the formal population policy of the province. Neither intended nor desired by any of the parties involved, the extension and formalization of gender bias was the only compromise that proved feasible when peasant patriarchal values clashed head-on with state demands for population control.

Distorting the demography of gender: Consequences for the young

The reproductive compromises reached by diverse groups of adults, each with its own pressing agenda, had devastating consequences for the next generation, especially the female portion of it. During the one-child policy period the demography of gender among the young became very unbalanced, as peasant women struggled to meet their most basic reproductive needs in a fluctuating policy environment that confronted them with a succession of political constraints. Distortions in the demography of gender were not confined to the sex ratio at birth, the subject that has gotten most attention. As we will see, patterns of adoption and breastfeeding also bore the imprint of political forces impressing patriarchal values into demographic behavior.

In the following sections we examine changes in the demography of gender over four policy periods: before 1970, that is, before a forceful birth control policy was in force, and three phases of the one-child policy period, 1979–83, 1984–87, and 1988–93. To keep an already complicated story from becoming more so, we omit discussion of the 1970s (more specifically, 1970–78), when the "later-longer-fewer" (*wanxishao*) policy was in effect.[39] During these years gender differentials in the demographic measures explored here were intermediate between those of the 1960s and 1980s.

Sex ratios at birth

Of all the demographic effects of these struggles over reproduction, the most consequential was the change in the number of boys and girls born. Trends in the sex ratio at birth in the three villages are shown in table 1. For all children combined, the sex ratio of reported births fluctuated sharply over time, measuring 105 (close to the biological norm) before 1970, rising to 121 during the strict early one-child period, falling to 109 during the phase of policy liberalization, and rising steeply to 153 during the recent period of strong enforcement. The data thus suggest a

[39] During the 1970s China's population control efforts were guided by the "later-longer-fewer" (*wanxishao*) policy, so named because it stressed later marriage, longer spacing between children, and fewer births.

TABLE 1 SEX RATIOS OF REPORTED BIRTHS BY PERIOD AND PARITY IN THREE SHAANXI VILLAGES

	Period Child Born			
Birth Order	**Before 1970**	**1979–83**	**1984–87**	**1988–93***
All birth orders	105 (1,525)	121 (301)	109 (389)	153 (299)
Parity 1	122 (348)	126 (163)	91 (174)	133 (189)
Parity 2	102 (309)	96 (90)	106 (181)	172 (98)
Parity 3+	100 (868)	167 (48)	386 (34)	1,100 (12)
Parities 1 and 2	112 (656)	114 (253)	98 (355)	145 (287)

Sources: Data for periods up to 1987 from reproductive histories. Data for 1988–93 provided by Xianyang City Birth Planning Association.
Note: The sex ratio is the number of sons born per 100 daughters born. Numbers in parentheses are sample sizes.
*Data cover first six months of 1993 only.

connection between intensity of policy enforcement and sex ratio at birth: the stronger the enforcement, the greater the dearth of daughters.

What underlies the extraordinarily high sex ratios of the 1980s and 1990s? The subject of the missing girls was an extremely sensitive one in Weinan, making it difficult for Greenhalgh and her field research collaborators to learn what was going on. Indeed, during the 1993 research, the township cadres who provided information on the number of births intentionally neglected to supply data on the sex of the children born. The figures presented in table 1 came from village officials, who apparently did not know that their superiors had wanted to keep the information confidential. (At the time we asked the village cadres for the information, we did not know of the intent to keep it secret either.) Not surprisingly, given the political risks of divulging such information, peasant informants in the villages were extremely reluctant to tell us what they or their neighbors were doing to produce so many sons. Indeed, both cadres and peasants successfully resisted our efforts to find out what was going on.

Despite the extreme sensitivity of the issue, in 1993 we tried to get a sense of what was happening to the missing girls. We probed for each of the four possibilities offered by the literature on China as a whole: sex-selective abortion of female fetuses, underreporting of girls, informal forms of adoption, and infanticide and/or abandonment of infant girls.

Unlike some other parts of the country, where the use of ultrasound for prenatal sex determination followed by abortion of females is apparently an open secret (Kristof 1993), in the Xi'an area the practice is concealed deep within the sociopolitical fabric. Individual peasants, asked if they knew of a way to tell the sex of an unborn child, reacted with surprise, saying they knew of no such method and pointing out that

that sort of technique, if available, would attract a great deal of interest. Village cadres were more elusive, refusing, quite understandably, to answer our intrusive questions. The officials of one village said they did not know whether residents of their village were using ultrasound for sex determination, something we found difficult to believe. Given this dearth of information, the only conclusion we can draw about sex-selective abortion is that suggested by a municipal birth planning official: that it occurs, but to an unknown extent.

Probes about underreporting of female births met with strong denial from the cadres. The birth cadre of the largest village, a longstanding friend of the researchers, insisted vehemently that the data were absolutely correct and had not been tampered with. Asked why, if that was true, the sex ratio was so high, she replied with audible anguish, "I just don't know!" Given her response, as well as the high degree of social control and surveillance that makes secrets impossible to keep in Chinese villages, we believe that underenumeration of children born and raised in the village was minimal. In other words, we believe that underreporting of a sort the village cadres might find out about is likely to be small in scope.

Concealment of other sorts, however, may well be going on. For example, the villagers may have been using informal types of adoption in which infant girls were not reported to the officials and were "loaned" to relatives or friends elsewhere for a few years, then brought back to the village after the threat of severe sanctions receded. Cautious inquiries into the questions of infanticide and abandonment met with hostility and silence. With the exception of underreporting, therefore, we have no grounds for ruling out any of the possible explanations for the missing girls. We hope for the best but, knowing of the crowded orphanages and babies abandoned in the streets in some other parts of the country, fear the worst.

While we do not know what combination of practices was used to distort the sex ratios in the villages, by looking at the differentials in sex ratio by parity, or birth order, we can discover which children were discriminated against. Returning to table 1, we find that for children born before 1970, the sex ratio is high for the first child, then falls to normal for other children. The high sex ratio among first-borns probably reflects a combination of differential care of first children—that is, passive neglect of unhealthy first daughters—and selective memory about girls allowed to die so long ago.

Trends during the one-child policy period reflect the fluctuating politics surrounding the birth control program. (We assume that selective memory did not affect the data for these more recent years.) The sex ratio for first and second births together (presented in the bottom row) fell from 114 in the initial period of strong enforcement to 98 in the mid-1980s, when informal policy was liberalized to accommodate peasant

desires for two children and a son, before rising to 145 in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the state overrode local policy in order to drastically reduce the birth rate.

Trends in the sex ratio of third and higher births show clearly the growing pressure to eliminate such births. From 100 in the years before 1970, the sex ratio for higher-order births climbed to 167 in the early 1980s, 386 in the mid-1980s, and 1,100 in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This latter figure should be interpreted with great caution, for it is based on only twelve births. Nevertheless, the trend is unmistakable: over time third-born girls simply vanished from the demographic scene.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that little girls fared best during the mid-1980s, when the relatively lenient, informal two-child-one-son policy was in effect. They fared worst during the late 1980s and early 1990s; although a daughter-only policy was in effect at that time, intense pressures from above apparently led couples to fear that they would be allowed only one child, inducing them to take drastic steps to ensure that that one was a son.

Adoption

Village couples not only gave birth to fewer daughters but they also gave away more of the daughters they bore. Changes in adoption practices are shown in table 2. The data presented here include all formal adoptions reported by the village women during the 1988 field research. (Unfortunately, it was not possible to collect comparable information on adoption or breast-feeding, discussed below, in 1993.) Thus, these data exclude the more informal types of adoption described above.

Before the imposition of a forceful birth control policy in the early 1970s, a small but significant proportion of village children—5 percent of sons and 4 percent of daughters—were adopted in and out of their families.[40] In general, young children were adopted out when there were already too many of their gender in the family. Males were most often adopted in by couples who had no sons. Females were adopted for a number of reasons, including to serve as little daughters-in-law (*tongyangxi*) for their adoptive brothers (for more see Wolf and Huang 1980) and to act as talismans, protection against the early death of later children.

These practices changed after the introduction of the one-child policy. With strict limits on the number of children allowed, sons became too precious to give away, and the villagers stopped adopting them out altogether. Girls, by contrast, became more dispensable. Facing stringent restrictions on the total number of children allowed and strongly desiring

[40] The figures on the prevalence of adoption in the villages roughly parallel estimates for the country as a whole. See Johansson and Nygren 1991, 45.

Table 2 Adoption by Gender in Three Shaanxi Villages

	Period Child Born					
	Before 1970		1979–83		1984–87	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Children adopted out:						
Female	10	1.3	4	2.9	7	3.8
Male	27	3.5	0	.0	0	.0
Children adopted in:						
Female	18	2.4	2	1.5	2	1.1
Male	11	1.4	0	.0	0	.0
All children adopted out and in:						
Female	28	3.8	6	4.4	9	4.8
Male	38	4.9	0	.0	0	.0
Total number of children:						
Female	744	...	136	...	186	...
Male	782	...	165	...	203	...

Source: Reproductive histories.
Note: Includes only permanent adoptions. For discussion of other forms, see text.

a son, couples with two or three daughters adopted the younger one out in hopes of being allowed another try for a son. (This practice was explicitly forbidden by formal policy but permitted informally.) The proportion of daughters adopted out rose from 1.3 percent before 1970 to 2.9 percent in 1979–83 to 3.8 percent in 1984–87. Although couples were generally allowed to have a son in the mid-1980s, some couples apparently still felt it necessary to get rid of a daughter. These couples may have foreseen a crash birth control campaign and rushed to adopt out one of their girls before being forced to undergo sterilization. In this way a practice that historically involved children of both sexes came to be a girl-only strategy used by couples apparently desperate to have a son.[41]

The decision to adopt out a daughter was not lightly made. It was especially difficult because the child in question was one of only two or three the parents would ever have, making her, if not quite as precious as a son, precious nonetheless. The case of Li Hua illustrates the anguish many parents probably felt about giving away their daughters. In spring of 1993 Li and her husband had two children, both girls, aged 8 and 3. A few months earlier Li's brother-in-law and his wife had their second

[41] The feminization of adoption was a nationwide phenomenon. In China as a whole, during 1980 1.8 girls were given away in adoption for every 1.0 boys who were adopted out. By 1987 that figure had risen to 3.7; see Johansson and Nygren 1991, 44.

TABLE 3 DURATION OF BREAST-FEEDING BY GENDER (F and M) and PARITY OF CHILD IN THREE SHAANXI VILLAGES

	Period Child Born								
	Before 1970			1979–83			1984–87		
	F	M	F-M	F	M	F-M	F	M	F-M
Parity 1	21.2	21.0	+.2	16.4	16.9	–.5	13.9	14.7	–.8
Parity 2	21.1	23.7	–2.6	24.5	24.2	+.3	17.6	21.3	–3.7
Parity 3+	25.0	25.0	.0	21.6	29.0	–7.4	18.0*	20.4	–2.4
All parities	23.3	23.5	–.2	19.2	21.0	–1.8	15.6	18.4	–2.8

Source: Reproductive histories.
Note: Duration expressed in months. For sample sizes, see table 1.
*Based on two valid cases.

child. Like the first, the child was a boy. The brother-in-law, badly wanting a daughter instead of a son, suggested that they swap their younger children. Li and her husband agonized over the decision for a long time. Despite the many problems they were certain to encounter throughout life—lack of labor, old-age support, and a culturally appropriate heir, among other things—in the end they decided they just could not give up their daughter. Their reason was simple: "She is ours."

Breast-feeding

Not only were fewer girls born and raised but girls who were brought up by their birth parents were given less of their mother's milk than their brothers (see table 3). In the years before births became subject to state planning, the total number of months that sons and daughters were breast-fed was about the same, roughly twenty-three (see bottom line of table). During the one-child policy period, however, a gender disparity emerged and grew in size. Reflecting the changing value of sons and daughters as the politics of resistance gave way to the politics of negotiation, the gender gap moved from 1.8 months to the boys' advantage in 1979–83 to 2.8 months in the boys' favor in 1983–87.

During the one-child policy period, a distinct differential by birth order emerged. For children born before 1970, birth order made no difference in the gender gap in breast-feeding. By the early 1980s birth order had begun to be a factor. While the difference between boys and girls was very small at the first and second parities, at the third parity boys enjoyed a 7.4-month advantage. This differential by birth order continued into the mid-1980s, when a differential appeared between first and second births as well: at first parity boys enjoyed 0.8 month more of breast-feeding; at second parity that advantage was 3.7 months. Unfor-

tunately, the extremely small number of third-order girls born during these years makes it impossible to draw conclusions about the gender gap among higher-order children.

The significance of this gender gap in breast-feeding lies not in the health or mortality consequences for the daughters who got less; child survival is much more sensitive to the timing of breast milk supplementation than to the total duration of breast-feeding. The differential is significant, rather, because it is indicative of a larger pattern of discrimination against baby girls that continues into childhood and beyond. Other data gathered in the villages suggest that these early demographic inequalities laid the groundwork for a girlhood of disparities in cultural attention, social investment, and economic opportunity.

The creation of gender gaps in reproductive practice

What is striking about the village data when they are read together is that in all three areas of reproductive life, gender gaps appeared where they had not existed in previous decades. Of course, throughout Chinese history gender has been a major axis of social differentiation. The degree of inequality, however, has varied across time, place, and type of social behavior. In the Shaanxi villages, gender disparities in the behaviors explored here were very modest at midcentury. That changed with the advent of forceful birth control policies. For all children together, the sex ratio at birth, which fell at a biologically normal level of 105 in the decades before 1970, soared to 153 by 1988–93. Under the one-child policy, adoption was transformed from a two-gender practice to a girl-only practice, as boys came to be considered too precious to give away. Breast-feeding, which had favored neither sex, became increasingly advantageous to boys. Thus, during the 1980s and 1990s gender was created—or, from a longer historical perspective, perhaps re-created—as an active force in demographic life.[42]

Not all girls were equally disadvantaged. To the contrary, because of the parity-specific demands of the birth policy and the cultural demands for at least one son, later-born girls suffered the most. Adoption, for example, was confined to girls unfortunate enough to be born later in the reproductive period. During the most intense periods of policy enforcement, girls falling near the end of the sibling string were breast-fed a much shorter period of time than their brothers. Sex ratios at birth, while mildly disadvantageous to girls in the lower birth orders, were extremely disadvantageous for third and higher-order daughters. Indeed, the sex

[42] The process actually began to occur during the 1970s, when the first strong birth planning policy, the later-longer-fewer policy, was put into effect. We will explore the impact of that policy on gender differentials in early childhood in a future publication.

ratios suggest that, as time went by, third-born daughters virtually disappeared from village homes.

While it is clear that the engendering of reproductive policy had deleterious consequences for little girls, just how harmful these were depended on the strength of state pressure on the villages to drastically limit births. When pressure from above was reduced in the mid-1980s, creating space for both the negotiation and the enforcement of an informal two-child-one-son policy, the sex ratio at birth improved dramatically (although adoption and breast-feeding continued to become less favorable to girls). However, when state pressure became intense in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the formal policy permitting two children only for families with a girl was reimposed, the sex ratio deteriorated to its worst level ever.

Conclusion

The case of the missing Chinese girls makes plain the need for a feminist demography of reproduction. While conventional demography has performed a valuable service in documenting the growing discrimination against little girls, because of its reliance on aggregate demographic data and dependence on the Chinese government, its explanations of this trend have been limited and its politics circumscribed. Feminists can and should respond in a different way.

Drawing on a much richer, although smaller-scale, body of data, in this article we have sought to develop a feminist understanding of transformations in the demography of gender among the youngest Chinese. Our explanation is feminist because we are motivated by feminist concerns and recognize the fundamentally political and public rather than "natural" and private nature of reproductive processes. We have argued that this trend is part of a larger social phenomenon in China—the engendering of population policy and practice—that is rooted in a complex interweaving of traditional culture with contemporary politics. Drawing on local-level ethnographic and demographic data, we have shown how the engenderment of reproductive practice in the study villages arose out of a complex, historically situated politics involving peasant couples and state officials at multiple levels of the administrative hierarchy. Male bias in reproductive behavior evolved over time, changing character and intensity as resistance gave way to negotiation, negotiation to accommodation, and accommodation to submission.

While existing explanations underscore the importance of peasant culture, the role of the party-state was equally fundamental. Far from being a helpless observer as "feudal culture" worked its evil, the state was in fact a central actor in this drama. Faced with intense pressure from

peasants resisting the policy, state officials at the point of implementation and, later, officials in charge of policy formulation were forced to accommodate peasant demands and rewrite the policy to allow most rural couples to have a son. As patriarchal values made their way from the bottom to the top of the system and then, most recently, from the top back down to the bottom, the party-state became complicit in supporting male bias in reproductive practice. Because it saw population growth as a critical drag on economic development and because it had declared the achievement of economic progress as the basis of its own right to rule, the party-state reluctantly supported patriarchy despite the ideological and practical contradictions that support entangled it in. Like the Maoist party-state before it—indeed, like socialist states in many other times and places—the Dengist regime set its promises to women aside and sacrificed the goal of gender equality for the achievement of what it deemed the higher goods of economic progress for the country and political legitimacy for the regime.[43]

A feminist demography of reproduction involves not only a remaking of demographic thought but also a critique of existing policy and practice. While we have tried hard to achieve a full and balanced understanding of the actions taken by the Chinese state in light of its goals for economic development and the constraints it faced, from a feminist perspective its policies on reproduction can only be judged harshly. From the vantage point of the mid-1990s, the original one-child policy, although formally gender-neutral, appears to have been callously sexist in its willful neglect of well-known prejudices against girls and their likely life-and-death consequences when the number of children allowed was drastically restricted.[44] In the late 1980s, when top policymakers turned up the heat again, they could have had no doubt whatsoever about the repercussions for China's littlest girls.

Although Chinese policymakers have expressed concern about these developments, their policy solutions—banning the use of ultrasound equipment for prenatal sex determination and promising policy relaxation in the future—are far from adequate. An immediate liberalization of the one-child policy, coupled with a vigorous condemnation of discrimination against baby girls, would seem to be necessary and urgent first steps in stopping the practices that lead to their disappearance. A relaxation of policy would not eliminate gender biases, but it can be expected to reduce them measurably. Such steps would, of course, require a reordering of political priorities in which the pace of fertility reduction

[43] On the relations of the Maoist party-state to women, see Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1985. The fate of women in other socialist states is explored by Lapidus 1978; Wolchik 1989.

[44] We are grateful to Kay Johnson for discussion on these points.

is slowed to eliminate gross abuses directed at girls (and adult women). Given the extraordinarily low level of fertility China has already achieved and the party's long-standing ideological commitment to gender equality, one would think that this trade-off might be acceptable to the country's leaders. Further significant reduction of gender bias in demographic behavior is a long-term task that is likely to require remaking the institutions of social, economic, and political life to refigure females as more valuable members of society.

The China material shows how a feminist demography can deepen our understanding of reproduction by broadening the empirical scope of feminist research. Reflecting the suspicion with which many feminists regard quantitative data and methods, students of the consequences of reproductive politics have neglected demographic data, instead focusing on social and cultural evidence. Yet the data themselves are not inherently objectifying; when appropriated for feminist purposes, demographic data and measures can usefully inform feminist scholarship by revealing patterns of gender relations and practices not observable through qualitative research (cf. Jayaratne and Stewart 1991). Indeed, it may be that the more politicized the arena of reproduction, the more crucial demographic evidence becomes, for where reproduction is heavily contested, people work hard to hide their secrets, not only from other members of their society but from social scientists as well. In China the discrimination and violence directed against little girls were thickly cloaked until large-scale demographic evidence brought them to light.[45] The demography of gender can thus enrich the analysis of reproductive politics by uncovering some of the hidden life-affecting consequences of these politics and by providing a sense of how common such consequences are in the society as a whole.

While we have been concerned here with the gender effects of the politics surrounding the one-child policy, we cannot leave this subject without noting that the consequences extend far beyond gender relations to touch every area of life. Enforcement of this policy has been a wrenching experience for Chinese society. It has shrunk the basic unit of social life; allowed the state to penetrate one of the few private spaces left by Chinese collectivism; pitted husband against wife, neighbor against neighbor, city against countryside; and raised terribly painful ethical dilemmas that can be dimly perceived through the haze of silence and shame that surrounds the issue of the missing girls in China's villages.

[45] From the early 1980s local newspapers have occasionally published egregious cases of violence against women and girls as warnings that such behavior would be condemned. Such cases, however, were dismissed as local anomalies. Only when demographic evidence of the huge number of missing girls came to light did the scale of the gender violence become known.

Consequences such as these demand a place on the future agenda of a politics of reproduction.

Finally, we must ask about the future prospects of the girls born under the one-child reproductive regime. The literature on reproductive politics highlights the contradictory effects these politics have on gender hierarchies. For China's little girls, the effects are supremely ironic. For just as their numbers are declining and demographic discrimination against them is worsening, their cultural worth is rising in the eyes of parents who have been abandoned by unfilial sons. While this more accepting view of daughters is encouraging, one must remember that it failed to protect them from even greater discrimination when state pressure to limit births grew intense. To those who imagine that the lot of girls will improve as they become scarcer, we can only say that this outcome cannot be taken for granted, for the impact of demographic factors such as relative numbers is powerfully conditioned by the political, cultural, and economic context in which they operate. The case of India, where women's numbers are below par and falling, provides little reason for comfort (Basu 1993). In any case, the hope for an eventual, demographically induced evening of gender relations should not divert attention from the injuries of gender that are being inflicted today.

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