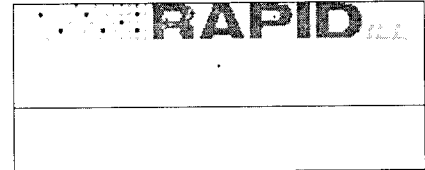


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GLOBALIZATION AND POPULATION GOVERNANCE IN CHINA

SUSAN GREENHALGH

China's 1983 sterilization campaign, launched four years after the historic Third Plenum set the nation on the path to modernization through globalization, stands as one of the most ethically troubling and intellectually challenging episodes in world population control history.¹ In the name of reaching urgent population control targets, the peasant masses were treated like mere objects of numerical control. The result was a harvest of numericized achievements – including an astonishing 58 million birth control surgeries – and a harvest of personal and communal sorrow, as baby girls' lives were snuffed out, women's bodies were damaged, and local party-peasant relations were frayed. China's leaders backed down from the campaign's control-the-numbers-regardless-of-the-cost approach, but the significance of that campaign, to this day a highly sensitive subject in China, goes far beyond that nation's borders, to touch on large – and largely unaddressed – questions about the invention and governance of populations in a globalizing world.

How did the 1983 campaign and the one-child policy it sought forcefully to impose on the Chinese masses originate? What larger dreams for a socialist nation newly entering the global capitalist economy brought it to life? What political rationalities made it not just thinkable, but even reasonable and desirable to its creators? What practices gave rise to the use of physical force – in Chinese, “coercion and commandism,” practices specifically forbidden by the codes of the good communist cadre – against fertile bodies? For a number of complicated reasons, both specialists on China and students of population have shunned these questions. In the United States, and elsewhere, thoughtful scholarly accounts of this and other coercive moments in China's now decades-old population project are largely absent. In their absence, public understandings of China's population control work have come to be

dominated by a powerful narrative of coercion created by a group of conservative politicians and like-minded intellectuals located outside the academy. Elaborated by grisly media images of family planning jails, forced abortions, and much more, this narrative views China's population project as the product of a cruel communist state willing to use force against what it deemed overly reproductive bodies to achieve its macroeconomic goals, regardless of the costs to individuals, families, and communities. In this story the high tide of 1983 is rooted firmly in communist coercion, a remnant of the not so distant past of Maoist "totalitarianism."

Coercion: this little word has done a lot of work. It has divided the political world into systems of coercion/freedom, socialism/capitalism, communism/democracy, and East/West, placing what not long ago was called "Red China" on the "bad" side of each of these and obscuring the blurrings, borrowings, and border crossings that mark the politics of an increasingly interconnected, post-cold war world. These oppositions miss important pieces of the ethical, economic, technocratic, and demographic assemblage that has come together around population policy in China over the past 25 years. With its orientalizing, Otherizing thrusts, the coercion narrative also keeps us from seeing the place of Western ideas and technologies, and of Chinese dreams of catching up with the West to become a global power, in that complex, continuously evolving assemblage around population. To understand the roots of the forceful logics and practices embedded in the Chinese program, we need to set aside these binaries and go to China to see what hopes, logics, and techniques animate actually existing population practice there.

To the makers of China's population policy, population control has not been about coercion; it has been about the nation's dreams of achieving wealth, power, and global position through selective absorption of Western science and technology. Could it be that the selective borrowing of Western science and technology played a role in the creation of the troubling 1983 campaign? I will argue just that. Indeed, I will show that sinified adaptations of particular Western sciences and technologies provided both the rationale for and the technical means behind the unusual ferociousness of the 1983 campaign. I will argue that the roots of the campaign's harmful practices lie in a yoking together of three fields of thought and practice – a particular version of Western population science, which created a "crisis" problematization; socialist state planning, which outlined the solution as a series of ever tougher targets; and party-led mobilization, which provided a set of tried-and-true techniques for fulfilling the planned targets on the ground. These three quite different fields of ideas and practices were tied together by numbers, a language each in its own way spoke. Radically simplifying and apparently precise, numbers enabled the three fields to link up and jointly construct a population control project so powerful that it aspired to – and for a while appeared to succeed in – planning the births of one billion Chinese. More than "communist coercion," it was these numbers and, even more so, the numerical logics that came with them, that led to the violences of 1983. Those numerical population control targets were so seductive and powerful because they were attached to deeply felt and widely shared yearnings, borne of 150 years of national humiliation, that China's historical greatness might be

restored. The hope was that, by combining economic growth with the accelerated modernization of a "backward" population, China might finally escape its wretched poverty and become a prosperous, modern, globally prominent nation.

As Foucault² suggested, the management of population size and growth – the proliferation of life itself – is a powerful domain of governance in the modern world. In the past few years, students of modernity's making have begun to trace the emergence of the sciences and particular discourses of population.³ Yet governmental projects to limit life have received less attention.⁴ I begin by proposing some working concepts and methods that help render these sprawling enterprises accessible to research. I then turn to China to explore the transformations in population governance that attended that nation's entry into global circuits. With its enormous size, its controversial approach to population control, and its rapid post-1978 insertion into the global economy, China provides one of the world's most important and illuminating cases of population governance in a globalizing world. The next three sections examine the roles of population science, state planning, and party mobilization in the making and executing of the 1983 sterilization drive. A conclusion suggests what is at stake in unraveling the logics, aims, and practices that gave birth to this fearsome episode in the history of population governance. This chapter is based on nearly 20 years of research on Chinese population affairs, including rural fieldwork, documentary research on the history of Chinese population science and policy, and extensive interviews with Chinese scholars and policy-makers.

Follow the Numbers: Studying Population Governance

How might we study the governance of population size and growth? Conceptually, governmental projects of population control can be understood as one class of governmental project.⁵ Such projects involve constituting the object of governance (in this case, "the population"), establishing the problematization (including the problem, such as "overpopulation," together with its solution, often the family planning program), and then implementing that solution among selected target population(s). These phases – object constitution, problem and solution delineation, and implementation – can be thought of as making up the "life cycle" of the governmental population project.⁶ But with what methods might we study these phases? Rather than trying to study the full range of actors involved – a gigantic terrain that ranges from UN agencies to NGOs to state bureaucracies to individual health care providers – it might be more feasible and productive to find a strategy that hones in on the core intellectual and political techniques involved in regulating population growth. One such method is to follow the numbers.

Why numbers? As Nikolas Rose and others have argued, numbers have inordinate power within modern technologies of government.⁷ Numbers are so powerful because they are the language of science and science is the source of *truth* in modern society. Numbers have particular force in the science and governance of populations.

Because population is seen as a biological object, an aggregation of bodies that exists unproblematically in nature, counting or estimating the "vital" attributes of populations such as fertility and mortality, and then manipulating the numbers so as to chart their variations and distributions, are seen as the fundamental activities of the science of population. It is for good reason that demography is defined as the statistical study of population.

Numbers also form the crucial building blocks of governmental projects for population control. Figures not only constitute the domain of interest, population; they also define the problematizations adopted. Numbers also play important roles in implementation, serving as key measures of program success. In China, figures have gained many other powers as well, as we shall see shortly. Tracing the social and political lives of these numbers provides keen insight into the making and workings of population science and governance.

Lest I be misunderstood, the task of the student of population governance is not to *do* demography – to count births, bodies, and other phenomena. It is, rather, to study how others – in particular, population scientists, state planners, and government bureaucrats – do so. It is to follow the numbers wherever they take us, asking how they have been deployed, in what contexts, following what rationales, in pursuit of what strategic aims, by what techniques, and with what practical effects. We must pay particular attention to numerical inscriptions – those mundane tables, figures, charts, and equations – for it is here, in the making of these little pictures, that population scientists, planners, and governors do some of their most important yet least studied work.⁸ Far from being "dusty [and] replete with dried up old books," as Ian Hacking once described them,⁹ the numbers of population turn out to be a fascinating ethnographic domain.

Population Science: Defining the Problem – A Crisis of Human Numbers Keeping China "Backward"

At the historic Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee that met in December 1978, China's new leaders rewrote the script for the country's future, changing the nation's goals from socialist revolution and class struggle, Mao's failed program, to socialist modernization and personal enrichment, Deng's appealing dream for the future.¹⁰ China's new program of "reform and opening up" (*gaige kaifang*) was to be based on the selective absorption of Western science and technology. Indeed, science and technology was designated the first of China's four modernizations, the key to achieving the other three. Like most of the social sciences, population studies had been abolished in the 1950s. In 1979 a new field of population science was assembled from fields as diverse as the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities, with quantitative fields such as economics and statistics predominating. Drawing on two very different types of Western population sciences – demography on the one hand, and cybernetics and control theory on the other – the new experts used an array of numbers to define and vigorously expose the

urgency of "the population problem".¹¹ In delineating the population problem, they also constituted population as a bounded, numerically describable field: a space of investigation and administration, in short, a space of governance.¹² At the same time, they placed *the numerical logic of population science* – that is, a sinified version of a certain cluster of transnational population sciences – at the heart of China's population problem.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, China's newly minted population specialists mobilized a wide array of numbers, some from large-scale surveys, others pulled together from typical local studies, to delineate the population problem. The specialists defined two sets of problems, one surrounding the "abnormality" and thus "backwardness" of the population itself, the other concerning the effects of those irregularities on the nation's economy and thus the speed of its socialist modernization. Taken together, these two sets of quantitatively defined problems would establish China's backwardness in the global order and the immense difficulty the nation now faced in catching up with the advanced industrialized countries, a group to which it aspired to belong.

With their simplicity and apparent facticity (that is, their status as reflections of reality), the numbers provided a powerful means to communicate what specialists saw as the urgency of the population problem, and to tie the solution to the population question to the nation's deep desires to escape poverty and backwardness at long last. When China's numbers were compared with the numbers of more powerful nations, the numbers seemed to summarize all that was wrong with China, and all that needed to be done to make it right. The numbers thus expressed powerful yearnings that were widely shared. The numbers were particularly powerful because of the unquestioned assumption that any publicly presented numbers were by definition reliable and, perhaps more important, "scientific." In the reform era, science was seen as the antidote to the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and the sure route to a prosperous new future.¹³ It is difficult to overstate the importance of "science" – not only as a field of practices, but also as the idea, known as "scientism," that science is the prime source of truth and an all-powerful solution to China's problems – in the new national order.¹⁴ Anything represented as scientific was seen as powerful, modern, and progressive. These meanings and desires attached to science gave the numbers of the population scientists all the more power.

An "abnormal" population

Comparing China with the industrialized nations of the world, China's population specialists found their own population to be abnormal in four important ways.¹⁵ First, it was inordinately large. China's demographic excess was not only a terrible burden; it was also a sign of the nation's backwardness in a world in which the small, controlled, "quality" population was the very sign of the modern.¹⁶ With peasants making up 80 percent, the population was also too rural, a great burden on an aspiring industrial power. China's population was also excessively young, the product of the disastrous campaigns of the past. The huge demographic wave of young

people would soon marry and produce more babies, compounding the problem of excess numbers. Finally, the population was growing too rapidly, indeed, three times more rapidly than the populations of the standard or "normal" countries, such as France, West Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These "special characteristics" (*tedian*) marked features that separated China from its aspired peers. They would have to be altered for China to become modern. Following the logic of population science, normalization of the population would be a key aim of population governance.

A demographic-economic "crisis"

The abnormally rapid growth of China's already outsized population was a serious problem because it was eating up China's economic gains, ensuring China's continued backwardness in the global scheme of modernization. In the earliest formulations, China's problem was framed as one of imbalance in the planned socioeconomy, in which overly rapid population growth was delaying the four modernizations by impeding the development of capital accumulation, employment, and education. This problem was advanced by social scientists and it was rooted in Marxian theory. This more moderate construction of the problem was soon overtaken by another, more gripping framing, introduced by a handful of natural scientists and engineers. The natural scientists portrayed China's population problem as a veritable crisis, an explosion of numbers that would prevent China from catching up and becoming a modern, global power. Ordinary though the idea of a population crisis may seem to Western readers, in China of the late 1970s the image of China's population growth as a crisis was fresh and riveting. That construction of the problem was borrowed from Western science, in particular, from the Club of Rome, world-in-crisis cybernetic models popular in some quarters in the 1970s.¹⁷ Chinese scholars learned of these models from discussions with European scientists whom they met on delegation visits to the West in the late 1970s. Tables and graphs created by Chinese specialists compared China to Western powers, showing how China's overly rapid population growth had eroded the growth of the nation's per capita income and productivity, keeping China poor and backward, even as the West grew rich and advanced.¹⁸ The reader was invited to imagine China among the global powers and then to envision how drastically population growth would have to be curtailed for the crisis to be alleviated.

A global good citizen

So far, I have been elaborating a largely economic connection between China's globalization and the emergence of the problem of population. But there was another type of connection as well, one that had to do with China's desire for global respect, for membership in the global community of nations. In the late 1970s, China's population specialists began to portray China's population crisis as a major component of the "global population crisis." By controlling its own numbers, China would

contribute mightily to resolving the world's population crisis, earning China the status of a responsible member of the world community. In speeches in international meetings, top population officials announced that China would strive hard to control its own population growth in order to avoid adding pressure to world population problems.¹⁹ In these and other international forums, China's population leaders constructed China as a global good citizen that was doing its part to solve the world's population and thus development problems.

Reproduced endlessly and energetically, and in multiple contexts, the crisis problematization was to stick and become the official construction of the population problem for years to come. While it served the population experts well in conveying the urgency of their political project, the crisis representation treated large segments of the people who had been aggregated into a population as saboteurs of modernization and hence threats to the well-being of the nation. These representations would have dire effects when the crisis problem became joined to a strong solution.

State Planning: Mapping the Route to Demographic Modernity and Global Position

If the problem of population was an economically menacing explosion of human numbers, the solution was to drastically restrict those numbers to put the nation on the road to prosperity and global position. Clearly, the crisis problematization dictated an extreme solution. But how would such a solution be designed and carried out?

The solution adopted drew heavily on China's own post-1949 traditions of socialist state planning and party-led mobilization. These modes of governmental planning and practice had been used in previous population projects, especially in the highly successful later-longer-fewer project of the 1970s (promoting later marriage, longer child spacing, and fewer births). They were fully institutionalized. They worked remarkably well. They were the logical choice. Population thus became a hybrid domain of governance that wedded a rationality rooted in part in Western science to techniques of control that followed the logics of a socialist state and a long-Maoist Communist party. The three set of logics and practices – Western science, state planning, party mobilization – would combine to form a powerful nexus of reproductive control.

What tied them together, what enabled the makers of China's project of population governance to move with ease from problem to planned solution to implementation was the language of numbers. For despite their very different roots and aims, each of these fields of governmental practice spoke the language of numbers. Numbers enabled communication between the fields because they were radically simplifying, reducing complex phenomena to figures that seemed to map onto reality and nature in an unproblematic way. As the language of numbers facilitated the construction of a powerful project of population governance and reproductive control – one that combined the authority of science with the coercive power of

the party-state – the numbers themselves gained new and formidable powers over people's minds and women's bodies.

State birth planning

Since Mao enunciated the concept of "birth planning" (*jihua shengyu*) in 1956–7,²⁰ population control in the People's Republic of China has meant not the planning of family size and composition by individual couples, but the planning of births countrywide by the socialist state. The commitment to state birth planning was formalized in the early 1960s, but it was not until the early 1970s, after the chaos of the Cultural Revolution had subsided, that population planning was integrated into the larger, target-driven process of economic and social planning. Between 1972 and 1975, a population control target was introduced into the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1971–5), and in 1975 targets set at the political center were divided up and handed down to localities all over the country.²¹ From that point on, population control would be target-driven – in the plan and on the ground.

China's post-Mao drive to achieve modernization and global status was to lead not to the demise of state birth planning, but to its embrace with renewed vigor, at least for a time. Indeed, it was precisely the practice of socialist planning that was to give China the competitive edge in the world economy, enabling it to catch up with the West in an exceptionally short period of time.²² The continued creation and aggressive pursuit of population control targets served not only the practical end of enabling China to catch up, but it had strategic political aims as well. For the successful use of state planning would demonstrate the superiority of socialism, ensuring the survival of Chinese socialism in an increasingly capitalist world. Equally important, it would secure the legitimacy of the ruling Communist party by enabling it to make good on its promises to improve the material well-being of the Chinese people. Nothing short of China's national identity, its global survival, and the survival of its ruling party were at stake in the creation and later fulfillment of population targets. It is not surprising that those targets would take on such urgent importance.

The creation of the one big figure

Because population planning was to serve economic (and ultimately political) ends, population targets were constructed on the basis of economic targets. In the late 1970s, the top leadership set the year 2000 as the date for the achievement of a "comfortable standard of living" (*xiaokang shuiping*), defined quantitatively as U.S. \$800–1,000 per capita GNP. Since population was the crucial denominator in such per capita measures of economic modernization, population planning would take on immense importance. In a remarkably short time, this tiny little fraction – income over population – would acquire enormous political significance.

The task for population planners was to set interim population control targets that would allow the state to achieve the century-end's comfortable standard of living on which the people's welfare and the party's legitimacy now rested. The most

important figure was the total population size by which aggregate economic measures would be divided. Through a process that remains opaque, in early 1980 that crucial number, that millennial measure of demographic modernity, was set at 1.2 billion. Although that number apparently had no sound empirical basis and it was wildly unrealistic – that is, it was demographically unrealizable without the use of extreme methods – in September 1980 it became enshrined as the official population control target.²³ Bearing the imprimatur of the party's Central Committee, it was effectively set in political stone. Students of Western politics have written of "the power of the single figure" in political life.²⁴ In China in the early 1980s, that turn-of-the-century target played the same role. As the aspirations of the party and nation got expressed in – and reduced to – that figure, that single figure became the *raison d'être* of all political efforts to avert the population crisis, the number in whose name everything was done.

Scientific planning at the State Birth Planning Commission

With an arduous task ahead, in 1981 the state established the interministerial State Birth Planning Commission to lead and coordinate the work of birth planning committees all the way down the administrative hierarchy. The Commission's primary charge was to fulfill the population control targets established by the political center, in that way keeping the nation on the road to demographic modernity and global position. As indicated by its name, the Commission's major bureaucratic assignment was to plan the nation's births. This gigantically complex task involved two major subtasks: managing population planning and target setting, and overseeing enforcement and hence fulfillment of the targets.

To keep population, then estimated at 1 billion, within 1.2 billion by 2000, the planners' major job was to calculate the interim targets for the intervening five-year and one-year plans. These interim targets would serve as a map to demographic modernity, a plot of the route that must be followed for the nation to achieve its demographic and, in turn, economic goals. In the early 1980s, the most pressing task was to figure out the goals for the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1981–5), which was just then unfolding. One of the first activities of the new Commission was to conduct a nationwide One-per-Thousand Fertility Survey to coincide with the 1982 Census, the first modern census ever conducted in China – complete with U.N. support, computers, and much more. (Other censuses had been conducted in 1953 and 1964, but they were relatively simple and technically unsophisticated.) The Fertility Survey was launched as part of a larger effort to "strengthen scientific management" of birth planning work.²⁵ Although China's newly emerging population scientists and state statisticians could not question the party's goal of 1.2 billion, they could, and were expected to, use their skills to specify the best way to achieve it. That was what was known as scientific management. What the work involved was manipulating more, and more reliable, numbers than had been available earlier, using newly available computers to process and store data, employing more sophisticated data-analytic techniques as the basis for formulating population plans and making population

projections, and so on. (Many of these computers and techniques were introduced with the assistance of foreign organizations, themselves with investments in the process. I explore those international linkages elsewhere.) Calling these new practices scientific management connected them to a much broader national effort to use modern science to modernize the country. One can imagine the hopes invested in the work.

The magnitude of the problem that population planners faced became clear in the fall of 1982, when the initial results of the census and survey became available. Analyzed by statisticians at the Commission, the survey showed that between 1983 and 2000, 200 million women would reach the age of marriage and thus childbearing. (Planners assumed, reasonably, that most couples would have their first child immediately after marriage.) "Even if women's fertility is kept at 2 births each," the analysts wrote, "the net population at the end of the century will reach 1.290 billion," 90 million more than the target.²⁶ The Census itself apparently implied even grimmer prospects. Commenting on its results, Qian Xinzhong, the new Minister-in-Charge of the Commission, warned that if each rural couple had two children, the total population would reach 1.317 billion by the end of the century.²⁷ How, then, could the target be reached?

To answer that question, the statisticians performed some projections that allowed them to plot the downward path that the nation's fertility rate must follow over the next 18 years in order to keep the population within its assigned target. The results of their work are shown in Table 19.1. The very mundanity, the ordinariness, of this table belies its significance. For the little numbers in this table would have formidable material effects.

The results suggested that, in order to attain the crucial 1.2 billion target, the total fertility rate (TFR) – the average number of children per woman – would have to drop from 2.6 in 1981–2 to 1.7 in 1985 to 1.5 in 1990, and then remain at that level until 2000. Such extraordinary fertility declines have rarely been achieved anywhere. They were especially unrealistic for China, where children had enormous cultural, social, and economic value. That such fertility reduction targets were even imagined suggests the power of the numericizing and crisis logics at work, for their imagining required the construction of the objects of control as little more than numbers. These imaginings required the subordination of concerns for a host of complicating factors – from problems of enforcement, to cultural desires for children, to the health and safety of the bodies that would be operated on – to reach the planned target.

The analysts concluded that "The crucial factor lies in the period of the Sixth Five-Year Plan, for unless early achievements are made, fertility will have to be pushed below 1.5, which is very difficult".²⁸ The task the birth planners faced, then, was to lower the TFR from 2.6 to 1.7 in the three years 1983–5. Despite the Herculean nature of the task, the Commission's analysts suggested that it could be done "with some effort" by lowering the TFR by 0.3 births each year. (Of course, in this political system, the planners did not have the option of saying that the target could not be reached.) Scientific management had combined with socialist target setting to create a task of enormous difficulty.

Table 19.1 Population projections from 1983 to 2000

Year	Total population	Total fertility rate	Natural growth rate (per 1,000)
1983	1,027,690,000	2.30	13.00
1984	1,040,840,000	2.00	11.54
1985	1,050,710,000	1.70	10.25
1986	1,061,400,000	1.67	10.79
1987	1,072,020,000	1.65	9.63
1988	1,083,510,000	1.60	10.37
1989	1,095,490,000	1.55	11.02
1990	1,107,520,000	1.50	11.02
1991	1,119,080,000	1.50	11.00
1992	1,130,030,000	1.50	9.48
1993	1,140,320,000	1.50	9.41
1994	1,150,380,000	1.50	9.11
1995	1,159,880,000	1.50	8.70
1996	1,169,090,000	1.50	8.20
1997	1,177,180,000	1.50	7.38
1998	1,184,310,000	1.50	6.49
1999	1,190,520,000	1.50	5.65
2000	1,195,920,000	1.50	4.87

Source: Xiao Zhenyu and Chen Shengli, "Current Birth Planning Work Viewed from the Results of the National Fertility Sample Survey" (in Chinese), *Renkou Yanjiu* 2, 1983, pp. 20-23.

Party Mobilization: Fulfilling the Target – A Frenzy of Numbers

To reach the ambitious century-end targets, the Commission was instructed to enforce a policy encouraging one child per couple. While implementing such drastic restrictions was possible, if difficult, in the cities, it would be almost impossible in the countryside, where children played a multiplicity of crucial social and economic roles. Yet the countryside was the crux of the problem, the source of China's many demographic woes. The countryside was deemed the most "backward" area, with the most backward fertility culture and the highest fertility rates. Enforcement problems in the countryside were further compounded in 1982, when decollectivization was completed countrywide. The introduction of rural responsibility systems led to an increase in the desire for children, especially sons, and an increase in peasants' ability to resist cadre efforts to restrict births.

Despite repeated warnings and urgings, births rose throughout 1982. Top party leaders responded by increasing the pressure on the birth planning bureaucracy to stanch the rising tide of humanity. In September 1982 the 12th Party Congress designated birth planning and, by implication, the one-child policy, a "basic state policy" (*jiben guocce*) – that is, a top-priority policy that concerned the fundamental interests of the state – and reemphasized the century-end goal of 1.2 billion.²⁹

To achieve these difficult goals, the two highest authorities in the land, the party's Central Committee and the governmental State Council, made the decision to launch a nationwide mobilizational campaign. Although the use of campaigns had been repudiated in the early reform years – campaigns, which involved intense mobilization of the masses to achieve specific party targets, were based on Maoist mobilizational logics, the antithesis of the scientific strategies that the Dengist party sought to promote – the campaign was the only technique in the party's toolkit capable of achieving such difficult targets in so short a time.³⁰ Moreover, since the introduction of "patriotic health campaigns" in the early 1950s, campaigns had been the primary means of enforcing public health policies in general and birth planning policies in particular. Both local cadres and the rural masses had grown accustomed to them. Especially when the political center threw its weight behind them, campaigns could work, at least in the short run, to achieve targets.

In December 1982, the Central Committee's Propaganda Department, along with eight other units, jointly issued a circular on carrying out national birth planning "propaganda month" activities from New Year's Day to Spring Festival (the Chinese New Year) of 1983.³¹ Although publicly described as a propaganda month, the campaign's goal was to ensure the achievement of the year 2000 population control target by controlling the momentum of next year's population growth and, more generally, making numerical breakthroughs in reaching targets. Those targets would be fulfilled by focusing on the rural areas and strictly enforcing the one-child policy – in Qian Xinzhong's instructions, "forcefully raising the one-child rate" while "controlling second births as strictly as possible".³² Based on the Maoist logic of voluntarism – the notion that people would "self-consciously" and "voluntarily" accept party policy once sufficiently educated about its advantages or, barring that, were "mobilized" (on which, more below) to accept it – the campaign sought to utilize all sorts of party forces to intensely propagandize the birth policy and then, once people were persuaded or mobilized, carry out "technical measures" so that the numerical targets could be achieved.

What distinguished this birth control campaign from previous ones, what made it more new and modern and promising, was the application of modern science and technology in the two major domains of practice, propaganda and education and the technical measures designed to ensure fulfillment of the targets – that is, birth control devices and surgeries. The hope was that modern science would combine with the party's longstanding and excellent tradition of voluntarism to ensure successful fulfillment of the targets.

Scientific propaganda and education: a pedagogy of numbers

As in all campaigns, in the 1983 drive, cadres' major means of enforcement was to conduct "deep and meticulous education and propaganda" to change fertility culture and persuade people of the correctness of party policy. The 1983 drive was seen as superior to past mobilizations because the content of the propaganda was scientific. In the past, commentators noted, birth planning cadres simply lectured or

harangued the peasants "in a rather arbitrary and unimaginative way," producing formalistic (forced or nonexistent) results.³³ Now cadres would persuade the masses with the numbers of science, bringing them to consciousness about the necessity of birth planning and making the acceptance of one-child families a "self-conscious deed".³⁴

Following the decision of the 12th Party Congress, the basic emphasis of the propaganda was to be birth planning's new status as basic state policy. To explain to the masses why birth planning and the one-child policy must be a basic state policy, campaign strategists promoted the technique of "calculating and comparing." In this technique, the masses, guided by newly numerically savvy cadres, were invited to calculate the economic costs of excessive population growth – to the nation, village, and family – and to compare the prosperity of villages and families that had many offspring with those that had few.³⁵ In this way, state birth planners sought to enlist the active support of the peasant masses by creating a nation of calculating, science-minded citizens. Masses who were able to figure out for themselves the steep costs they would incur by having many children, the reasoning went, would limit their births and follow the population plan with understanding, self-consciousness, and voluntarism.

Although inducing fertility decline was the explicit goal, the technique of calculate-and-compare had broader effects as well. By taking the numbers that had shaped central reasoning down to the local level and instilling a numericizing reasoning in cadres and ordinary folk at the grassroots, this technique worked to create a hierarchical network of numbers tying center to locality, leader to led, and governor to governed. Even if people were not persuaded that many children led to poverty (indeed, a venerable Chinese saying had it that "many children bring much happiness"), the technique would spread a numericizing logic, for it would get people to think about childbearing (and much more) in numerical and economic terms. People who thought numerically would be caught ever more tightly in the state's web.

Scientific surgery: using modern reproductive technology to fulfill the targets

Once the masses had the scientific facts at their fingertips and were mobilized to act, medical workers would then implement the technical measures that would ensure fulfillment of the campaign's targets. Minister Qian and the campaign's organizers were enthusiastic about the potential of new developments in contraceptive technology worldwide to guarantee the fulfillment of China's population targets.³⁶ Qian instructed that, "based on the principle of voluntarism," all women with one child would be required to have an IUD inserted, while one member of all couples with two or more would have to undergo sterilization.³⁷ All unauthorized pregnancies would be terminated by "remedial measures."

The technical centerpiece of the campaign, however, was sterilization. For China's villages, Qian wrote, sterilization was "a biological and scientific requirement" that, despite obstacles, could be promoted by allowing "scientific principles" to

enter the masses' understanding.³⁸ Qian noted sterilization's many advantages. First, a high sterilization rate was a sign of the modern – in the U.S.A., he noted, it was the most popular contraceptive method, whereas in China the IUD was still the most common method. Second, sterilization would protect women's health and reduce their suffering by preventing contraceptive failure and thus the necessity of abortion. Yet the main benefit Qian stressed was in controlling the numbers: because sterilization represented a permanent solution, it would contribute mightily to the achievement of population control targets.³⁹ Qian was aware of the problems cadres would encounter trying to promote sterilization in the villages. Women were afraid of the operation. The quality of the surgery was often poor. Yet these human and health concerns were muted by the overriding necessity of reaching urgent population control targets. The association of sterilization with modern reproductive science may have made those practical concerns less salient as well.

A target obsession

While modern science was to enhance the effectiveness of certain measures, the actual conduct of the campaign was based on longstanding party practice.⁴⁰ As instructed by Minister Qian,⁴¹ localities formed temporary propaganda-month work organizations, which in turn formed special propaganda work teams to conduct painstaking and meticulous propaganda. Masses who could not be persuaded were mobilized – that is, subjected to more and more social and political pressure until they finally agreed to comply. Special urban-based technical work teams then fanned out into the villages, where they lived and worked day and night until their work was done. The focal point of all activities was the achievement of numerical targets. Targets that were expressed in terms of population size and growth rates at higher levels were converted at the local level into surgical targets and attached to different categories of people. The number of sterilizations, abortions, and other procedures completed thus became the key measure of political performance at the grassroots level.

Because many localities failed to meet their targets during the official propaganda month, the campaign was extended into the spring months and beyond. To "push the work further," in May 1983 the SBPC held an on-the-spot national birth planning work conference in Shandong's Rongcheng County.⁴² In his speech, Minister Qian noted with satisfaction that birth planning work had entered a new stage. His main emphasis, however, was on the difficulty of reaching the Sixth Five-Year Plan target of a population growth rate of 13 per 1,000. Even as he advocated shifting to less harsh methods, Qian said that shock activities were still needed several times a year and that late-term abortions, though regrettable, were necessary to fulfill the plan.⁴³ Qian's speech was filled with urgings to do things voluntarily and to protect women's health, but from beginning to end, his emphasis was on cadres' duties to fulfill the numerical targets. The message was, no matter what the cost – in voluntarism or surgical quality – in 1983 the population growth target must be achieved.

This added pressure produced a target obsession and numbers mania, a mentality in which population meant numbers – with no regard for the bodies or subjectivities of those targeted for sterilization, IUD insertion, and abortion. Just two weeks after the new boost given to birth planning in Shandong, nearby Liaoning Province announced a campaign to “raise birth planning work to a new level.” The Liaoning campaign illustrates the heights to which the numbers frenzy went. In an article in the *Liaoning Daily*, provincial birth planners announced their success so far:

Since the launching of a planned birth propaganda month at the beginning of this year, an unprecedentedly fine situation has taken place... Statistics for the first quarter show... the single pregnancy rate was 94.1 percent... As of the end of March, more than 216,000 male and female ligation operations [that is, sterilizations] had been performed. This was 40,000 more than the total number of ligations performed during all of 1981 and 1982.⁴⁴

When the numbers of surgeries were reported in great detail, what was not counted was the number of accidents or complications that resulted from conducting so many procedures in so short a time. How the province would conduct the campaign must be left for future publication. What I want to emphasize here is how, through the simplifying discourse of numbers, individual surgicalized bodies were tied to provincial narratives, which were connected to national narratives that both envisioned China as a world power and sought to jumpstart its move in that direction through measures that treated people as numbers and little else.

The Attainment of Demographic Modernity and the Emergence of “Reproductive Health”

The 1983 campaign was extraordinary successful. During that year, over 58 million birth control operations were conducted, including 16 million female sterilizations and 14 million abortions.⁴⁵ That was two to three times the number of such operations conducted in any year since 1972, when such numbers were first collected. In 1983 and 1984, fertility fell to the lowest ever: the TFR was roughly 2.1, near the demographically ideal replacement level.

Meantime, however, party leaders in Beijing were getting word from the countryside about the violence against cadres, killings of baby girls, deaths of women from botched IUD removals, and other costs that had been incurred by the emphasis on controlling the numbers above all. The party had broken its own rules and engaged in “coercion and commandism” against the masses. The result was poor party-mass relations in the countryside – and political peril for the party. In December 1983, Qian was removed from his post. Four months later, an internal document prepared by the Commission’s party committee revealed what had happened and took responsibility for the lapse in political judgment. With the numbers now under control, in early 1984 the leadership softened the policy and relaxed its implementation. Despite the

mid-1980s relaxation, however, the nexus of urgent logics and forceful practices that emerged in the early 1980s continued to guide China's population control work through the early 1990s, when fertility fell to just under two children per woman and remained at that level.⁴⁶

The achievement of this key measure of demographic modernity in the early 1990s gave China's population policy-makers the political space to experiment with new approaches to the state planning of births. Since the mid-1990s, a new assemblage has begun to emerge, which engages with the global in new ways. One piece of the original assemblage that persists is the nation's dream of becoming a global economic power. Today, of course, this dream is fast becoming a reality. It is sobering to realize that, by drastically reducing the "capita" in the per capita equations by which economic progress is measured, reproductive coercion played a crucial role in China's emergence as a global economic power. The new assemblage that is now coming together presents an unusual mixture of old and new, local and global.⁴⁷ The most striking change is the downplaying of the population crisis narrative in favor of (again, a Chinese version of) the new international concern with women's reproductive health, rights, and empowerment, a focus worked out at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo.⁴⁸ China has adopted its own version of this problematization that focuses on health and largely omits empowerment, and is now dismantling important parts of its target-oriented, numbers-control program, substituting programs to enhance women's health. The other parts of the original triad are also being transformed. Helped by declining child preferences, the state planning of births is shifting from mandatory to indicative and targets are increasingly being managed at higher administrative levels rather than being handed down to villages and individuals. In the area of enforcement, mobilizational campaigns and other directly coercive practices have been phased out, replaced by greater reliance on strong legal and economic measures. Although the notion of population numbers as a potential crisis continues to lurk in the background of party documents, as long as the birth rate remains low, the kinds of coercive practices seen in earlier decades should continue to fade away.

What is at Stake

Much is at stake in how we view this grim episode in China's population control history. On the surface, the 1983 campaign would seem to be an egregious example of communist coercion in practice. Yet a look at the underlying dynamics suggests that, far from the simple product of a coercive party-state, the 1983 campaign was tied to China's entry into global capitalist and scientific circuits. Behind that campaign lay a (sinified version of a) Western scientific rationale, and the nation's dreams of becoming a global economic power and ethical member of the world community of nations. The old binaries embedded in the coercion narrative – socialism/capitalism, coercion/freedom, East/West – not only obscure these strange but powerful couplings; they also stake out a claim to Western moral superiority that is problematic at best.

Although population control projects have received little attention from critical students of modernity and globalization, the Chinese case makes clear the importance of population and its control in the making of the modern world. State birth planning was crucial to the achievement of Chinese socialist modernity and to China's growing connectedness to and prominence in the world. Over the past quarter century, the emergence of population as a domain of thought and practice has been enormously productive, creating new objects and domains of administration, new forms of governance, new pedagogies of the nation, new types of docile bodies, new ethical conundrums, and even new meanings of the human. Population deserves more attention.

Building on research in science studies and governmentality studies, I have drawn out the crucial work played by numbers in the making of China's population governance project. In the hands of Chinese scientists, planners, and policy implementers, numbers proved exceptionally versatile and supple, connecting different fields of thought and practice into a gigantic network of control that tied governed to governor, locality to center, the nation to the world. Quiet and unassuming though they are, these little fractions, projections, and figures provide a productive point of entry into the politics of population governance in today's globalizing world.

Notes

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