

Social Politics and Cultural Logics

THE MASSIVE PROJECT of state birth planning charted in the previous part sought to effect radical change in the most fundamental unit of Chinese society, the family. How did Chinese society react to this attempt to re-engineer the quantity and quality of its members? What political dynamics emerged as the state sought to impose its radical new plans of reproductive modernization on society? What were the broad social and political consequences of the politics of population as it played out on multiple levels? Part 2 answers these questions by placing the birth project in its broad social, cultural, and political context. In this brief introduction we map out the analytic terrain, highlighting the constructs we will use and indicating how they fit together and fill out the broader analytic frameworks employed in this book.

Rationalizations, Interventions, Contestations, and Consequences

In examining the social dynamics and effects of the regime's biopolitical project, the governmentality perspective is especially illuminating, for it enables us to see forms of power that conventional state-centric approaches miss. As emphasized in Chapter 2, the governmentality perspective broadens the range of governing authorities to include the state, the professions, market forces, and individuals, placing them in a field of biopolitics that involves diverse rationalizations, interventions, contestations, and consequences. Part 1 focused on the changing rationalizations and interventions of the regime. Part 2 fills in the other parts of the biopolitical field, focusing especially on the contestations and consequences unfolding within society.

Chapter 7 examines the local or community politics of policy enforcement. It begins by mapping out the scientific rationales behind the regime's

population project and the techniques of normalization by which policy-makers sought to create a globally competitive society standardized to the modern norms of low quantity and high quality. It then documents the negotiations and struggles that unfolded as the modern scientific norms of the state interacted with the traditional family and gender norms of rural Chinese society. The chapter uncovers a highly differentiated politics around population, which played out differently in the quantity and quality domains, in urban and rural locales, and in different historical eras. Complementing the previous part of the book, which traced the shift from Leninist to neoliberal modes of governance at the level of the regime, this chapter tracks that crucial transition at the level of society and its individual members. Finally, the chapter describes the new modes of subjectification by which birth planners sought to create new categories of persons, or subjects, essential to the success of the biopolitical project.

Chapters 8 and 9 turn to the broad effects of these interventions and contestations around population, focusing on effects of bureaucratic state power since around 1980 when the governmentalization of population has proceeded apace. The governmentality perspective suggests that the effects of biopolitical projects of population optimization will be mostly unpredicted, and in China, these two chapters show, they were. Chapter 8 traces the social and cultural effects, showing how the new modes of subjectification and other interventions not only remade Chinese society, but also reshaped the lives, bodies, and selves of virtually all children and all women of reproductive age. Chapter 8 underscores the powerful and insidious effects of biopower's rise on women. Chapter 9 charts the political consequences of the governmentalization of population for the party-state, state-society relations, and China's position in the global arena. Both chapters highlight the enormous productivity of this new power over life and the ambiguity of its effects, which in China stretched from the indubitably pernicious to the dubiously positive. By broadening the field of vital politics, the governmentality analytic allows us to see how virtually the whole society has come to be engaged in—and in the process remade by—this giant project of administering and fostering life. If the book's first part showed what is at stake for the regime in our choice of analytic perspective, the chapters in this part convey what is at stake for China's 1.3 billion people.

The Cultural Politics of Population

So far our analysis of population politics has emphasized the political-economic logics of the institutions of the regime. To understand the social consequences of the PRC's post-Mao population policies, however, we also

need to attend to the logics of Chinese society and culture. Illuminating the cultural dimension of Chinese population politics is also important because each biopolitical configuration is historically, culturally, and politically contingent. In Part I we brought out the political specificity of China's project on population. Here we suggest aspects of Chinese culture that gave the PRC's project on life its distinctly Chinese character. In this section we identify three senses in which culture, broadly defined, is used in the following chapters: as official and unofficial discourse, as lived practice, and as ethics. Far from static, these cultural reasonings were actively reworked in response to the development of the market, the in-rush of global capital, and changes in China's international relations.

OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL DISCOURSES ON POPULATION

The analysis of official ideology and discourse has long occupied an important place in the study of Chinese politics (e.g., Schurmann 1971; Schoenhals 1992; Dutton 1992; Apter and Saich 1994; Kluver 1996; Ji 2004). Discourse is fundamental to our analysis of population politics. We understand discourses not as linguistic systems, but as relatively bounded, historically specific bodies of knowledge that are productive—that is, that *do things* and have *material effects* (a point well brought out in Ferguson 1990). In other words, discourse does not simply reflect the world of politics, it also actively constitutes it. The first part of the book paid close attention to the discursive framings used by the state in formulating and implementing its population policies. In the chapters on consequences that follow, we explore the political role—and power—of three forms of discourse. Although they originate in different domains, these three modes of discourse are not distinct but rather cross-reference and sustain each other.

The first is *institutionalized population discourse*, that is, the framings, narratives, and representations produced by, and central to, the regime's population program. These framings reflect a changing mix of party-state, scientific, and "Chinese cultural" logics. Key elements of official population discourse include the putatively scientific framing of the population problem as a crisis of national modernization, the science-based norms of low quantity and high quality, and the official categories of the program, in particular, the central category planned/unplanned birth, which reflected the logics of the socialist state. These and other elements of official discourse had large and direct effects on population politics, for they were embedded in institutionalized policies and bureaucratic practices that were enforced on all citizens of reproductive age and backed by the coercive power of the regime.

A second form of official discourse is the set of *broad political and cultural discourses* that the birth program picked up and harnessed to facilitate enforcement. Many of these were rooted in China's unusual nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of struggles to modernize in response to changing international developments. Important examples include the larger, historically developed discourses on sexuality, which treated gender difference as a product of biology, reducing women to their reproductive bodies. Also consequential are the larger discourses on "the feudal peasant" and "the virtuous wife and good mother," which the program built on in creating its targets of reproductive surveillance and control. A final example is the party's longstanding narrative of "women's liberation under socialism." The birth program drew on this appealing narrative in rationalizing its work and propagandizing its benefits to women.

The third kind of discourse we will analyze is the *popular discourse* circulating in Chinese society, especially that concerning family, children, and gender. Popular discourses that featured importantly in population politics include peasant sayings about the value of children ("many children, much wealth" or, more recently, "many children, big burden") and parents' views about daughters ("goods on which one loses" or, these days, "those we cannot disappoint"). These understandings are especially interesting, because popular culture often reworks discourses propagated by the state, moving population thought and politics in new and surprising directions.

CULTURE AS LIVED PRACTICE

The post-Mao project on population combined Leninism and modern science into a powerful force for population change. Remarkably, both Deng-era strategies of societal transformation—Leninist political transformation and a "Stalinist" scientific social systems engineering—ignored the role of actually existing Chinese culture in the social dynamics of population. The Leninist project on population framed traditional reproductive culture and social structure in Marxist terms as "feudal remnants" to be eradicated, replaced by modern socialist views and arrangements. While the Marxist-Leninist approach acknowledged the importance of culture if only to transform it, the cybernetic models that underlay the one-child policy were culture-free or culture-blind, excluding social and cultural factors by definition. Treating population as a biological entity existing in nature, those engineering-based systems models treated people like inanimate objects, to be manipulated like grain or steel. Indeed, it was precisely by ignoring Chinese culture and social structure that the creators of the post-Mao policy managed to conceive of the culturally unimaginable and socially unrealizable goal of one child for all.

Yet the targets of these interlocked projects of societal modernization operated by cultural logics that could be ignored only at great peril. Two aspects of popular culture, and especially peasant culture, would prove crucial, a gender logic that accorded males more value than females and an economic logic of intergenerational exchange within the family. As we will see, when the party tried to enforce its culture-modernizing or culture-free policy on Chinese society, these logics asserted themselves with great vigor, impressing themselves on the politics, policy, and effects of the PRC's population project and producing a cultural dynamic that would, if not undermine the one-child project, at least significantly alter its course. We examine these processes in Chapter 7 and their effects in Chapter 8.

NEW TERRAINS OF SINO-BIOETHICS

Westerners have long deemed China's post-Mao population policies ethically troubling. Surprising though it may sound to outsiders, ethical concerns were also central to the makers of China's one-child policy. They saw in population control an opportunity to present China as a global good citizen, a nation that would contribute to the world's welfare by controlling the growth of the world's largest population, and do so not through coercion, but through the socialist means of propaganda and education. The ethical question turned out to be more complicated than expected, however. Far from enhancing the ethical reputation of the PRC regime, the one-child project raised questions around the world about the use of coerced abortion and sterilization. Moreover, it imposed terrible moral quandaries on China's rural people: Is infant abandonment morally tolerable? When does late-term abortion become infanticide? Should women bear full responsibility for health-impairing contraceptive surgery? Although fear of state sanctions generally kept people from articulating these concerns at the level of public discourse, they certainly weighed such matters in private, filtering them through local understandings of right and wrong. This new bioethical field, which is part of the new configuration of power around population, has shaped the politics of population at community, national, and international levels. We examine it in Chapters 8 and 9.

Methods and Materials

The scholarly literature on the social politics and sociopolitical effects of the PRC's population project is growing, but it remains highly fragmented—by discipline (anthropology, political science, women's studies, or social demography), by location (urban or rural), by time period (most studies deal with the mid-1980s, early 1990s, or late 1990s), and by dimension of population

politics (quantity control or quality enhancement, the latter much less studied). Thus, we have one set of studies of the politics of birth planning in China's villages and another group of studies of those dynamics in the cities, but the crucial similarities and differences between urban and rural birth planning remain unexplored. Similarly, the issues of quantity and quality have been treated in entirely different literatures, obscuring the intimate connections between the two projects. Despite widespread and warranted concern about the harmful effects of the birth policy, our knowledge of the damaging (and positive) effects is remarkably limited. Existing research has focused on the immediate demographic and social effects, leaving the broader social and political consequences uncharted. In the following chapters, we read in and across these diverse literatures, bringing them together with other materials in an effort to produce an overall assessment of the broad significance of the state's population project for Chinese politics writ small and large.

Because these effects have grown with the growing ambition of the state's projects on population, we focus here on the reform years, roughly the quarter-century from 1980 to the early 2000s, when birth planning was virtually synonymous with the one-child policy. Much of our discussion will deal with the Deng era of "hard" birth planning, the late 1970s to early 1990s, whose contentious politics and troubling effects provide an important part of the rationale for the Comprehensive Reform described in the preceding chapter. With the availability of a handful of ethnographies, many news items, and extensive interviews dealing with the early 2000s, we are also able to include in our analysis some of the striking social and political changes that are occurring in today's era of birth reform.

These chapters tell the story of the sprawling consequences of the one-child policy—some intended, many more unintended—from multiple vantage points outside the state population establishment. To get the broadest possible view of the difference birth planning has made, we draw on a wide array of materials, from our own field research and interviews conducted over many years to ethnographies of birth planning in particular localities, large-scale social, demographic, and health surveys, and accounts from the media. Although they deal with single villages or work units at particular times, the in-depth case studies of anthropologists illuminate the underlying political-economic and sociocultural dynamics involved, enabling us to identify larger trends in population politics that are likely to be more general. Given the limitations of our materials, we cannot document the diversity in local population politics, though the evidence suggests it was substantial (Kaufman et al. 1989; Short and Zhai 1998; Short, Ma, and Yu 2000). Instead, we attempt to identify a dominant pattern from which communities have deviated depending on local conditions. The insights of Chinese

scholars and officials, especially those gathered through informal conversations, shed light on broader dynamics and sensitive developments that cannot easily be conveyed in print. The press reports provide compelling, “raw” accounts, often of the traumas and tragedies of individuals targeted for reproductive modernization during major campaigns for which there were no scholarly witnesses.

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