

Peter Bloom
School of Ideology and Discourse Analysis
Department of Government
University of Essex
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Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics

Susan Greenhalgh, Edwin A. Winckler; Stanford, California: Stanford University Press; 2005; 420 pages; \$26.95 ppbk; ISBN 0-804-74879-9

The rise of China as a global power has brought increased interest and scrutiny to its reform politics. One of the most discussed and arguably least understood of these is its reproductive policies. Greenhalgh and Winckler's book is thus a welcome addition to Chinese scholarship. It offers a rigorous, informative and insightful perspective - illuminating equally its origins and ongoing consequences for the Chinese populace. Especially impressive is the multi-level perspective and interdisciplinary approach it brings to the subject - adeptly integrating a traditional political science analysis with a critical lens to provide a comprehensive picture of this phenomenon. However, despite its considerable strengths the book nonetheless suffers from an overly normative focus in its second part, leaving its critical investigation ultimately both theoretically and empirically lacking, thus detracting from this otherwise excellent work.

The book is divided into four sections: an introduction, a historical policy overview, a critical and cultural critique, and a conclusion. The introduction, comprising two chapters, presents the authors' problematisation of China's birthing policies as well as their broad theoretical perspective. They do well in these chapters to lay out the overall importance of the CCP's continuing "population politics" and the need for both mainstream and critical approaches for its study. To this effect they argue that the government's transition from direct control of reproduction under Deng to its present largely indirect governance linked to the introduction of a "socialist market" under Hu requires equally a macro-level examination of elite policy coupled with a Foucaultian based investigation of the ways this has shaped Chinese identity and social relations.

Part 1, written by Winckler, offers a historical overview of the CCP's official birth policy beginning with Mao and extending to the present administration of Hu Jintao. Spanning the entire revolutionary era, it traces the evolution of these policies from Mao's vacillating pro and anti-natal attitudes, to Deng's often extreme commitment to stemming population growth, to Jiang's gradual move toward incentive based measures, and finally to Hu's completion of these reforms with a reliance on a fully market-oriented approach of indirect regulation. In doing so Winckler brilliantly illuminates the shifting rationales underpinning these policies as well as the internal tensions constantly plaguing their formation and implementation.

Part 2, written by Greenhalgh, complements the previous analysis with a critical Foucaultian approach exploring the effect of these policies at the meso (institutional) and micro (personal) levels and their influence on popular attitudes and Chinese identity in the reform era. It does so in three chapters examining in order the formative affect of these measures on Chinese conceptions of self, the "human costs" of these programs, and their impact on the country's domestic politics and global standing. Greenhalgh clearly illustrates the profound role of the government's reproductive programs on Chinese society from its influencing of gender values to its hidden destruction of women's lives, to its positive and negative bearing on China's international reputation. Moreover, she deftly charts the government's transition from a "hard birth policy" under Deng to its current "market approach" with the CCP's broader governing shift from direct coercion to attempts to instil self-discipline among the populace.

The conclusion summarises the book's far-reaching arguments - principally its claim that the transformation of birthing policy from Mao onward reflects the Party's change from its initial policy of "revolutionary mobilization" to Deng and a lesser extent Jiang's "bureaucratic professionalism" to finally the Hu administration's "socialist market". Further it stakes out the success and failure of these

programs, praising in particular the decrease in birth rates and regime's increased capacity to address the population's health issues while criticizing its toll on woman's lives for the sake of progress. It ends with a discussion of the CCP's continuing emphasis on the Foucaultian term "biopolitics".

The strengths of this book are many. It provides perhaps the clearest and most comprehensive account of the CCP's reproductive agenda. Its historical section is particularly strong in this regard, simultaneously providing an in depth portrayal of elite policy formation and the general ideas and values driving these decisions. Also excellent is the critical discussion of how these measures shaped Chinese identity, social values, and the exercise of power. More generally, it is a valuable analysis of the influence marketisation has had for state-society relations, highlighting how regulation resides increasingly in rendering official goals as "seductive" and therefore a matter of personal ideological conformity (self-discipline) rather than direct government intervention.

However, it is not without its flaws. Primary among these is the replacement of critical engagement with normative critique in the final two chapters of Part 2. While the costs of these programs should not be ignored, it adds little to the overall analysis. Especially problematic is the failure to engage with a number of empirical and theoretical issues relating to the subject. Empirically, whereas the first part reveals the discursive forces shaping government decisions, the latter examination seems to treat elites as an autonomous body imposing its will on a victimised populace. Missing is a critical account of how the government itself was disciplined to act in certain ways at different times of its rule. Similarly, considering the author's emphasis on Foucaultian "governmentalisation" (the incorporation and reconfiguration of a previous dominant discourse into its successor) there is a surprising lack of attention to how present measures have had to adapt and integrate themselves with those of the past. For instance in Chapter 9 the author mentions how the state has been strengthened by these policies without addressing how this is linked to a continuing discourse of state-led progress salient through the revolutionary era.

These empirical problems speak to larger theoretical issues. While Greenhalgh repeatedly stresses the "seductive" character of these policies she does not engage even minimally with theories directly addressing the affective, psychological, element of ideological interpellation such as Lacanian notions of fantasy or recent post-structuralist work on desire. Even disregarding this theoretical inattention the author does not properly account for the diverse desires gripping, "seducing", officials at all levels of government. Finally, there appears an overly strong normative promotion in Part 2 of marketisation. The counter-posing of the advantages of indirect governance to its previous reliance on coercion may be merited but it detracts from the work's critical intentions, playing into an official narrative of reforms which may not only be unjustified (given the Party's still strong role) but also underestimating the insidious nature of new social pressures to discipline oneself to dominant norms and expectations.

In conclusion, this book is an essential read for all those interested in Chinese reproductive policies. It is equally accessible and comprehensive. While far from perfect it is nonetheless an important contribution to its field.