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Birth Planning Between Plan And Market: The Impact Of Reform On China's One-Child Policy

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CONTENTS

	Page
Summary	252
I. Introduction	253
II. The Political Economy of Birth Planning Policy, 1984–1990	255
A. The Significance of Central Document 7 (1984)	255
1. Coercion	256
2. Allowances for second births	256
3. The primacy of rural reform	257
4. The relationship between modernization and fertility levels	257
B. Birth Planning Policy During the Seventh Five-Year Plan, 1986–1990	258
1. Policy relaxation and plan goals	258
2. Hardline offensive and open debate	259
III. Market Reform versus Birth Planning: Impediments to Rural Implementation	261
A. Peasant Mobility	262
B. Cadre-Peasant Relations	263
C. Fiscal Reform and Family Planning Funding	263
IV. Conclusion	267

SUMMARY

Since 1979, China has officially advocated a one-child policy. Motivated by fears that excess population growth would undermine its modernization efforts, this policy was rigorously pursued in the early 1980s. Mobilization techniques honed during the Maoist era were used to enforce rural compliance, but by 1984, campaign methods were in conflict with the goals of rural reform and the changing reality of rural life. That conflict, combined with growing fears of rural instability, led to a progressive relaxation of rural policy between 1984 and 1989. By 1989, a "one-son or two-child" policy was in effect in most areas; in other words, couples whose first child was a daughter gained the right to have a second child after an interval of several years.

Although this relaxation was designed to strike a balance between state birth plans and peasant child-bearing preferences, it contributed to a rise in birth rates above planned levels. By 1988, performance had deteriorated sufficiently to generate open criticism of senior officials who had approved the relaxation, but the policy remained unchanged. The State Family Planning Commis-

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sion maintained that the problem was not the policy itself, but poor enforcement. This remained official policy through the summer of 1990, despite a more strident tone in the aftermath of Tiananmen. However, a new campaign was launched to improve rural compliance, and some localities responded with new regulations or directives.

The prospects for improved rural compliance were not good, however. The one-child policy, and China's entire birth planning strategy, was premised on the existence of the structures and processes associated with a centrally planned economy. Although those structures were eroding in rural China in the early 1980s, mobilization campaigns kept birth rates in check. In the second half of the 1980s, mobilization was replaced by routine administrative enforcement, but the conditions which facilitated enforcement during the commune era no longer existed. First, peasants enjoyed a high degree of mobility, making it possible to avoid birth planning by leaving the village permanently or temporarily. Second, cadre-peasant relations had undergone a fundamental change. Cadres no longer monopolized the sources of power and authority in the village, and the peasants no longer feared them as in the past. As a result, they were susceptible to economic retaliation and physical violence from peasants seeking to protect their family's long-term interests. Third, fiscal reforms led to a reduction in funding for birth planning work, and forced the family planning bureaucracy, like other state organs, to seek ways of generating its own revenues. The result was perverse: the bureaucracy whose mission was to prevent excess births relied on fines collected from policy violators to cover its basic operating expenses. In other words, the bureaucracy had more than the usual incentive to turn in a mediocre performance. In addition, fiscal reforms at the township and village levels left village cadres responsible for collecting the fines, but often forced them to turn the monies over to higher levels of government. This reduced incentives for cadre compliance, and made it easier and less risky to falsify reports on local birth trends than to vigorously pursue the policy.

The consequence of these developments has been to relax, but not release, the grip of the state on rural child-bearing. As the conflict between the state-planned child-bearing and market reforms has grown, however, birth planning has encountered the same problems that have plagued the economy as a whole—incentive systems are skewed in such a way as to produce "undesirable" behavior and "irrational" decisions, corruption has flourished, and scarce resources have been wasted. Whereas future leadership or regime changes may lead to more fundamental economic or political reforms, relieving the contradictions between plan and market, even the most liberal population advisors advocate a two-child limit. Although the particulars of policy may change, China is unlikely to abandon the principle of state-regulated child-bearing for a long time to come.

I. Introduction

In 1979, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party was poised to embark on an ambitious program of reform and modern-

ization. Although the blueprint for reform remained tentative and incomplete, three elements stood out clearly, even at that early date. First, the climate of political vigilance and mobilization that had been fostered during the previous decade had to be relaxed. Second, the grip of the centralized economic planning apparatus had to be broken; market incentives were needed to supplement and rationalize the bureaucratic allocation process, and to stimulate economic growth. And third, because excessive population growth threatened to stall or negate economic progress, child-bearing had to be subjected to tight planning and control; only one child per couple could be allowed.

Although the relaxation of political and economic controls signalled a change in state policy, the decision to tighten child-bearing controls built on a longstanding policy record. In 1962, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party asserted the primacy of the state over individual child-bearing decisions and justified intervention on economic grounds.[1] They embraced the principle of "birth planning" (*jihua shengyu*) as well as birth control (*jiezhi shengyu*), and shortly thereafter began to draft short- and long-term targets for population growth.[2] Although generally translated as "family planning" or "planned parenthood," the Chinese concept of *jihua shengyu* is broader than the former terms. Like family planning, birth planning implies conscious household-level decision-making regarding the number and spacing of children, but it also refers to a process of comprehensive state planning and regulation of child-bearing trends. If human reproduction could be regulated in a predictable fashion, it was believed, state plans for economic growth, employment, social services, and food supplies (to cite only a few examples) would be easier to develop and implement.[3]

In practice, the regulation of child-bearing was pursued by subjecting population growth to the same principles of centralized administration that applied to material production. By the early 1970s, annual and five-year targets for population growth were disseminated from the center to the localities along with targets for steel and grain production; party committees and local governments were instructed to make birth planning work a part of their routine, and to create the appropriate mechanisms for bureaucratic oversight. State policy on child-bearing converged on a two-child ideal, and programs that supported pro-natalist tendencies were repealed.[4]

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[1] An abbreviated text of the 1962 directive, "Zhonggong zhongyang, guowuyuan guanyu renzhen tichang jihua shengyude zhishi" (Central Committee and State Council instructions on enthusiastically promoting planned birth), can be found in Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Population Research Center, *Zhongguo renkou nianjian, 1985* (1985 Population yearbook of China) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1986), p. 14.

[2] As early as 1965, for example, Zhou Enlai set a goal of reducing the rate of population growth to one percent or lower before the end of the twentieth century. Zhou Enlai, "Nongcun weisheng gongzuo he jihua shengyu wenti" (Rural health work and family planning), in *Zhongguo renkou nianjian, 1985*, p. 15.

[3] See, for example, Mao Zedong's discussion of birth planning and economic planning in his speech, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People (Speaking Notes)," in Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek, and Eugene Wu, eds., *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward* (Cambridge, Ma: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1989), pp. 159–161.

[4] Li Honggui, "Zhongguode renkou zhengce," in *Zhongguo renkou nianjian, 1985*, pp. 217–218.

The one-child policy of the 1980s was the direct outgrowth of this historical approach to fertility reduction—an approach designed specifically for a centrally planned economy. Just as the policy was inaugurated in 1979, however, economic reforms began to chip away at the structures and processes associated with centralized economic planning, and the state relaxed its extreme political grip on private behavior. These changes were most evident in the countryside in the early 1980s, where agricultural decollectivization and decommunization gave the peasantry some measure of economic power and deflated cadre authority. The result was a rapid improvement in rural economic performance, but the enforcement of rural birth limits had never been more difficult.

To enforce a one-child policy during this period of political and economic transition, the state relied on campaign methods that had been a mainstay of the Maoist regime. The campaigns mobilized reluctant cadres to enforce the unpopular regulation, and outside work teams that were sent into villages brought tremendous pressures to bear on rural couples.[5] These pressures reached their peak in 1983, when a massive sterilization campaign targeted all couples under forty with two or more children. The result was a four-fold increase in the number of sterilizations and vasectomies in 1983, as compared with the preceding year, along with a marked increase in the number of IUD insertions and abortions.[6] Within a year, however, the intensity of the campaign had triggered a backlash, and central policy on rural child-bearing limits began to loosen.[7] Despite the search for a satisfactory balance between the competing imperatives of market-oriented reform and birth planning, however, the gap between official goals and rural performance widened steadily in the second half of the 1980s.

II. The Political Economy of Birth Planning Policy, 1984–1990

A. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CENTRAL DOCUMENT 7 (1984)

In the spring of 1984 a new central document on birth planning was issued by the Central Committee and State Council. Consisting of a report by the party group within the State Family Planning

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[5] Those pressures ranged from economic and political threats to physical coercion. See John S. Aird, "Coercion in Family Planning: Causes, Methods, and Consequences," in U.S. Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *China's Economy Looks Toward the Year 2000, Volume 1: the Four Modernizations* (Washington: U.S. GPO, 1986), pp. 184–221. Campaigns that were effective in the short-run, however, could not prevent young couples from eventually having a second child, or in some cases, a third.

[6] Karen Hardee-Cleaveland and Judith Banister, "Fertility Policy and Implementation in China, 1986–1988," in *Population and Development Review* 14, No. 2 (June 1988), p. 276; Robert Delfs, "The Fertility Factor, " *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 19, 1990, p. 19.

[7] Apparently, the backlash was experienced at the central level in part through a large volume of letters "inquiring" about the campaign or complaining about implementation methods. In a 1986 document on family planning (discussed below), one passage documents the improvement in cadre work methods by noting that the number of letters from the "masses" had declined by 75 percent between 1983, the peak year, and 1985. For the text of Central Document 13 (1986), entitled "Guanyu 'liuwu' qijian jihua shengyu gongzuo qingkuang he 'qiwu' qijian gongzuo yijiande baogao" (Report on the state of birth planning work during the sixth five-year plan period and opinions on work during the seventh five-year plan period), see Guojia jihua shengyu weiyuanhui xuanzhuan jiaoyu si, Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao jihua shengyu weiyuanhui, *Shiyizhou sanzhong quanhui yilai jihua shengyu zhongyao wenjian xuanbian* (Propaganda and Education Office of the State Family Planning Commission, Central Party School Family Planning Commission, *Selected Important Documents on Birth Planning since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee*), Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe (Central Party School Publishers), 1989, pp. 27–35.

Commission (SFPC) and a statement of concurrence by the Central Committee, the document made clear that strict birth limits would continue to be enforced. At the same time, however, the need for rural political stability was stressed; methods that provoked a serious peasant backlash and endangered their enthusiasm for reform were to be modified in a way that would make them "acceptable to the peasants." [8] More specifically, the document signalled a shift in policy in four important respects.

1. Coercion.

The SFPC report admitted that coercion was a serious problem in the implementation of birth planning work. In keeping with the tenor of the central-level party rectification campaign that had been launched in October 1983, the party group took the blame for problems with "coercion and commandism," admitting that they had not paid enough attention to their "work style" or adopted "remedial measures." [9] They also admitted that the demands made on localities in the implementation of the sterilization campaign in 1983 were too severe, and that the problems began at the top:

> In those places where coercion exists, and no immediate solution has been found, the main responsibility is ours. We believed that because birth planning work tasks are heavy, the appearance of coercion was unavoidable.[10]

With regard to future work, cadres were instructed to avoid rigid and uniform implementation, or "one cut of the knife" (*yidaoqie*). Births outside the plan were to be "resolutely checked," but handling the problem "simplistically" was deemed unacceptable. Sterilization was still to be "promoted" on the "principle of voluntarism," but lower levels were not to be pressured with unrealistically high targets. In short, cadres were exhorted to continue to take birth planning and birth targets seriously. At the same time, they were reminded that birth planning work consisted of more than the periodic use of administrative pressure and compulsion, and they were urged to invest in a more comprehensive approach to the problem.

2. Allowances for second births.

Central Document 7 also marked a turn in policy by increasing the proportion of households that would be allotted a second child. In 1982, the quota for second births had been limited to "under five percent" of all couples; in 1984, the quota was expanded to "about ten percent." [11] On its own, this small increase was little more than a cosmetic adjustment to the one-child limit, one much too small to address peasant grievances. The document went further, however. It stated that additional concessions would be made as the rate of forbidden "multiple births" (*duotai*) declined, a policy that became known as "opening a small hole to close a large hole"

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[8] Central Document 7 (1984) is entitled "Guanyu jihua shengyu gongzuo qingkuangde huibao" (Report on the situation in birth planning work). The text may be found in *Jihua shengyu zhongyao wenjian* (Selected important documents on birth planning), pp. 15–25.
[9] Ibid., pp. 18–23.
[10] Ibid., p. 22.
[11] Ibid., p. 20.

(i.e., increasing allotments for a second birth in order to reduce the number of third or higher parity births).[12] This provision opened the door to further relaxations of the one-child limit after 1984, including experiments in some localities with a rural two-child policy.

3. The primacy of rural reform.

In a provision regarding economic penalties for policy violators, the document made clear that family planning was not to take precedence over the requirements for rural reform and development. It explicitly prohibited "infringing upon or destroying the masses' basic means of production or basic means of subsistence" in order to invoke penalties.[13] This new insistence that the implementation of family planning not interfere directly with peasant livelihood or economic production echoed the thrust of another policy document—Central Document 1 (1984). This document, one in a series of crucial agricultural reform documents in the early 1980s, included two elements that had a direct bearing on the implementation of birth planning in the countryside.[14] First, the document called for fifteen year leases on agricultural land; the long-term leases were designed to increase peasant security in their land-holding contracts and encourage investment in agricultural growth. From the perspective of family planning, however, long-term leases made it more difficult to reward one-child couples with extra land allotments. In areas where cadres continued to recognize the land-holding benefit in principle, they were reluctant to enforce it without explicit orders to do so.[15] In other areas, the emphasis on stability and agricultural growth forced changes in birth planning regulations that eliminated the landholding benefit.[16]

Second, to boost peasant enthusiasm and reduce their tax burden, the document called for a reform of township-level finances. Family planning was one of several "government-subsidized projects" specifically targeted for reform; the goal was to reduce excessive expenditures like those incurred in the 1983 sterilization campaign,[17] and to place more of the funding burden on local governments. This reform signalled localities that economic growth took precedence over other central directives. Family planning, however heavily it was stressed in Beijing, could not be allowed to absorb revenues that might otherwise be invested profitably.[18]

4. The relationship between modernization and fertility levels.

The document stressed the "modernization first" theme by inverting the standard argument on the relationship between economic development and birth planning. Over the previous five

[12] Ibid., p. 20.
[13] Ibid., p. 21.
[14] For the translated text of the document, see *China Quarterly* 101 (March 1985), pp. 132-142.
[15] Interview with former township-level birth planning official, July 1990.
[16] Susan Greenhalgh, *The Evolution of the One-Child Policy in Shaanxi Province, 1979-1988*, Working Paper No. 5 (New York: The Population Council, 1989), p. 37.
[17] In Wuhan municipality, for example, the 1983 annual budget for birth planning was 600,000 *yuan*, but one million *yuan* was spent on the sterilization campaign alone. Interview with municipal family planning officials, June 1984.
[18] The consequences of this reform are discussed fully in section III, part C, of this paper.

years, propaganda on the one-child policy had stressed that China's modernization effort was dependent on induced fertility control. Without strict birth limits, it was argued, China's development gains would be largely offset by increases in population. In Central Document 7, however, a more complex relationship was implied. The text stated that "high birth rates are a reflection of economic and cultural backwardness," and that "the reasons why the masses demand additional births are many-faceted." [19] This tentative acknowledgement that a decline in fertility levels in the countryside might *result* from the process of development, not *fuel* it, paved the way for a relaxation of rural birth limits during the second half of the 1980s.

B. BIRTH PLANNING POLICY DURING THE SEVENTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN, 1986–1990

1. Policy relaxation and plan goals.

Although the one-child limit was strictly implemented in urban areas throughout the 1980s, after 1984 the policy was progressively relaxed in rural areas. The allowance for a second birth in the countryside was increased from "about ten percent" of all single-child households in 1984 to twenty percent in 1985. In 1986, the first year of the Seventh Five-Year Plan (FYP) period, the quota was raised to fifty percent, and an important new category became eligible for a second child—single-daughter households (*dunu hu*).[20] Over the next few years, provinces were given substantial leeway to determine when and where to implement the provisions for allowing a second birth, including the newly added category. By 1988, fourteen provinces and autonomous regions had declared rural single-daughter households to be eligible for a second child, while six other provinces and municipalities did not.[21] In May 1988, however, the SFPC declared that it was national policy to grant a second child to single-daughter households; localities wishing to implement a more restrictive policy had to apply to the SFPC for approval.[22] By mid-1989, four policy categories had emerged: 1) a two-child policy, operative in six provinces and autonomous regions (Guangdong, Hainan, Yunnan, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang); 2) a "one-son or two-child" policy, operative in eighteen provinces, plus less developed areas in Jiangsu and Sichuan; 3) a policy of limited concessions for second births, operative in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and most rural areas in Jiangsu and Sichuan; 4) a policy

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[19] "Guanyu jihua shengyu gongzuo," p. 21.

[20] The new provision was a concession to peasant preferences for son, but those couples who gave birth to a second daughter were not allowed a third child. Hu Angang, "Zhongguo renkou shikongde yuanyin ji duice" (Reasons and Countermeasures for China's Runaway Population) *Liaowang Zhoubao haiwaiban* (Outlook overseas edition) 10 (March 6, 1989), pp. 17–18. A second source sets the 1986 quota for second births at sixty percent of rural single-child households. See Wang Yan, Liu Jinghuai, Zhao Derun, Ouyang Huijun, Fang Jinyu, "Renkou wenti yao zhuajin zai zhuajin" (Population problems must be grasped more and more firmly), *Liaowang* 28, July 13, 1987, p. 14.

[21] Hu, "Zhongguo renkou shikongde yuanyin," p. 51.

[22] Peng Peiyun, "Zai quanguo jihua shengyu weiyuanhui zhuren huiyi bimushide jianghua" (Speech at the close of the national meeting of directors of family planning commissions),in *Jihua shengyu zhongyao wenjian*, pp. 108–120; Zeng Yi, "Family Planning Program 'Tightening Up'?" *Population and Development Review* 2 (June 1989), p. 335.

of two or more births per couple, operative among minority nationalities.[23]

The relaxation and decentralization of birth planning policy after 1986 reflected a subtle shift in central priorities. In contrast to the Sixth FYP, emphasis on family planning was distinctly downgraded in the Seventh. In the Sixth FYP, birth planning and population growth were discussed in conjunction with raising incomes and living standards; their importance to the overall modernization process was heavily stressed. In the Seventh FYP and Zhao's explanatory work report, however, they are relegated to the category of "other social programmes," a catch-all category at the end of a list of economic priorities. Similarly, Zhao's speech to the 13th Party Congress in October 1987 grouped birth planning with environmental protection as a serious social issue—one that required political commitment but commanded few resources.[24] In addition, China's official population target for the year 2000 was revised; the original goal of holding population "under 1.2 billion" was changed to "about 1.2 billion," a change soon understood to mean 1.25 billion.[25]

Despite the more moderate tone, the goals set forth in the Seventh FYP remained extremely ambitious. The primary target was set forth in a new directive on family planning; Central Document 13 (1986) called for an average annual rate of population growth of "about 12.5 per thousand."[26] This translated into a total population target of 1.113 billion by 1990, and both targets were registered in the final draft of the Seventh FYP. By 1988, however, it became clear that the population would exceed the target by a substantial margin, and a different kind of backlash began to occur.

2. Hardline offensive and open debate.

As early as 1984, a heated debate over the one-child limit broke out among social scientists and policy advisers in China. Some experts urged a change in rural policy to allow two children per couple.[27] Others, however, voiced their opposition to any relaxation of the one-child limit; they believed that the combination of policy instability and rural concessions would encourage child-bearing

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[23] Zeng, ibid., p. 335.

[24] For the text of the Seventh Five-Year Plan and Zhao's report, see *Beijing Review* 16 (1986). For the reference to family planning in Zhao's speech at the 13th Party Congress, see Zhao Ziyang, "Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," *Beijing Review* (November 9–15, 1987): X.

[25] The relaxation of the 1.2 billion figure apparently originated in July 1984, when a report was submitted to the Central Committee entitled, "Some Questions On Population Control and Population Policy" (Renkou kongzhi yu renkou zhengce zhong ruogan wenti), in Ma Bin, *Lun Zhongguo renkou wenti* (Discussion of China's Population Problem), Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe (China international broadcast publishers) (Beijing: 1987), p. 2. Subsequently, Wang Wei, then head of the SFPC, used the new formulation of "about 1.2 billion" in a speech at the Central Party School in November 1985. See Wang Wei, "Zai 'Qiwu' qijian ba jihua shengyu gongzuo zhuade geng jin geng hao" (Grasp birth planning work more firmly and better during the seventh five-year plan period), in *Jihua shengyu zhongyao wenjian*, p. 68.

[26] For the text of Central Document 13, see *Jihua shengyu zhongyao wenjian xuanbian*, pp. 27–35.

[27] Peng Peiyun, "Zai quanguo jihua shengyu weiyuanhui," p. 113. Although this alternative has never been accepted by the Chinese government, its popularity among Chinese scholars was fueled by a 1985 article by John Bongaarts and Susan Greenhalgh entitled, "An Alternative to the One-Child Policy in China," *Population and Development Review* 11, No. 4 (December 1985), pp. 585–617. For a discussion of its influence and the diverse views held within the community of Chinese scholars, see Susan Greenhalgh, "Population Studies in China: Privileged Past, Anxious Future," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 24 (July 1990), pp. 357–384.

beyond the official limits.[28] When rising birth rates in 1986 and 1987 confirmed their worst fears, these critics were quick to respond. In a series of newspaper articles and other publications, they complained about the "human wave" that was "washing over China," and attributed it directly to the negligence of policymakers.[29] They argued that it was a serious mistake to loosen rural restrictions on a second birth, and complained that the interference of a few officials had led to the crisis. To stem the flood, at least one author openly advocated the use of coercion to overcome the resistance of the peasantry.[30]

These open criticisms prompted a rebuttal from Peng Peiyun, Wang Wei's successor as head of the SFPC. In 1988, she and other senior officials insisted that the policy relaxation had not been a mistake; instead, they argued that rising birth rates were a function of 1) an increase in the child-bearing age cohort, and 2) poor implementation of policy in some areas.[31] In taking this position, they were backed by the authority of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, which had met the previous March to discuss family planning. The Standing Committee members reaffirmed the existing policy on birth limits, arguing that the policy of allowing single-daughter households to have a second child 1) facilitated rural implementation, 2) prevented female infanticide, 3) generated a positive international reaction, and 4) contributed to the realization of population control targets by reducing the number of third births.[32]

This high-level commitment to the "existing policy" was reiterated in 1989 and 1990. To mark China's arrival at the 1.1 billion population mark in April 1989, a *Renmin Ribao* editorial stressed that the "key" to family planning work was to implement the "existing" policy "100 percent," implicitly rejecting calls for a tightening of policy.[33] Despite a reactionary speech by Jiang Zemin in October 1989, after the Tiananmen crackdown, this remained the basic policy line through the summer of 1990.[34] In February 1990, Jiang Zemin and Li Peng stressed the need to implement "existing policy" in a letter to the national meeting of family planning directors.[35] And in July 1990, Li Ruihuan reiterated the importance of "adhering to the established family planning policies."[36]

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[28] Wang Wei, "Zai 'qiwu' qijian," p. 69.

[29] Xie Zhenjiang, "There is No Route of Retreat," *Jingji Ribao*, January 24, 1989, p. 3, in *FBIS*, February 15, 1989, pp. 35–37; Liu Jingzhi, "Experts Concerned Are Not Optimistic About China's Population Situation, and Think That Interference by Officials is an Important Reason Why Birth Rate Has Risen Again," *Guangming Ribao*, March 6, 1988, p. 2, in *FBIS*, March 6, 1988, pp. 14–15.

[30] Xie, "No Route of Retreat," p. 37.

[31] *China Daily*, April 19, 1988, p. 1; see also Peng, "Zai quanguo jihua shengyu weiyuanhui," pp. 108–120.

[32] Peng, ibid., p. 112.

[33] *Renmin Ribao*, April 14, 1989, p. 1. See also, Peng Peiyun, "Controlling Population Enriches the Nation and Makes People Strong," *Liaowang* 1 (January 1, 1990), in *FBIS*, April 24, 1990, p. 53.

[34] According to a report in by Tammy Tan in the *Hongkong Standard*, (October 16, 1989, p. 6), Peng Peiyun read a speech by Jiang at a national symposium in Hangzhou. In it, he reportedly attributed Western criticism of China's birth planning policy to the belief of international businessmen that a larger population would mean higher profits. *FBIS*, October 20, 1989, p. 26–27.

[35] *Zhongguo renkou bao*, February 16, 1990, p. 1.

[36] He was speaking to a forum of advanced family planning workers. *Xinhua*, July 4, 1990, in *FBIS*, July 27, 1990, pp. 14–16.

Nevertheless, anxieties about population growth became more pronounced in 1989 and 1990. They were fueled by the results of a 1988 sample survey that revealed a 1987 population growth rate of 16.16 per thousand, nearly two percentage points higher than the officially reported rate of 14.39 per thousand.[37] This figure raised doubts about China's ability to meet the targets set forth in the Seventh FYP, as well as the long-range target of about 1.25 billion. As a result, in late 1988 the target was revised upward to 1.27 billion. By early 1990, however, even this figure appeared optimistic; China's total population at the end of 1989 exceeded the Seventh FYP target figure for 1990, adding fuel to the hardline argument for tighter child-bearing limits.[38] Rather than change official policy, however, a new campaign was launched to improve performance under the existing policy. Some provinces issued new regulations or special directives, and expert advisors proposed new measures to improve rural performance.[39] The question, however, was whether any set of measures would significantly improve rural enforcement.

II. Market Reform versus Birth Planning: Impediments to Rural Implementation

When the one-child policy was announced by state officials in 1979, it was premised on three assumptions. The first assumption was that governmental regulation of child-bearing decisions was a necessary and valid exercise of state power. Second, it assumed that birth planning would be subsumed within the process of centralized economic planning; population figures and birth targets could be disaggregated and assigned to localities in the same way that economic targets were assigned. Third, it assumed that an effective system of social and political control was in place—one that restricted population movement, facilitated ideological indoctrination, and imposed behavioral norms. A decade later, the state continued to assert the right to set strict child-bearing limits, but the context for implementation had undergone dramatic change, especially in the countryside. The political and economic controls associated with centralized economic planning were significantly weakened, while partial market reforms created irrational reward structures that worked against the state's anti-natal goals. In that context, the gap between state birth plans and grassroots performance began to widen.[40]

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[37] *Renmin Ribao*, October 28, 1988, p. 3. The survey was conducted jointly by the SFPC, the State Statistical Bureau, the State Planning Commission, the Ministry of Finance, and the Public Security Bureau.

[38] Shih Chun-yu, "NPC Deputies Say the Population Problem is Serious," *Ta Kung Bao*, April 3, 1990, p. 2, in *FBIS*, April 9, 1990, p. 34.

[39] Henan province approved a law on family planning in April 1990. *Henan ribao*, May 10, 1990, p. 9, in *FBIS*, June 1, 1990, pp.36–42. Fujian province issued a party and government directive to shore up implementation of the existing regulations. *Fujian ribao*, March 25, 1990, p. 4, in *FBIS*, May 11, 1990, pp. 42–45. On new measures for enforcement, see *Zhongguo tongxun she*, July 21, 1990, in *FBIS*, July 23, 1990, p. 31.

[40] The declining reliability of the statistical reporting system made it difficult to estimate the precise extent of the problem. The national census that was conducted on July 1, 1990, may help to clarify China's demographic standing as it moves into the last decade of the twentieth century. The census results were not available at the time this article was written, however.

A. PEASANT MOBILITY

During the Maoist era, a tight network of controls over mobility and food supply kept peasant laborers tied closely to the villages. The lack of mobility facilitated close surveillance of child-bearing age couples, and pressures to conform were extremely difficult to resist. To encourage the development and commercialization of the rural economy, restrictions on peasant movement were progressively relaxed during the 1980s. Large numbers began to move into urban areas as private entrepreneurs or temporary workers; others simply moved out of their native villages to nearby towns and small cities. By 1990, it was estimated that this "floating population" numbered more than 20 million.[41]

The increase in peasant mobility vastly complicated the job of enforcing even a two-child limit. Once rural couples moved beyond the jurisdiction of their native village or township, local authorities had neither the ability or the incentive to monitor pregnancy and child-bearing. In towns and cities where migrant laborers congregated, however, local family planning organs were also unable to control their behavior. In some areas, the bureaucracy simply did not have the personnel or economic means to deal with the logistical problems posed by a scattered migrant population; in others their work was thwarted by powerful employers anxious to retain cheap peasant labor. The result was the growth of an "excess birth guerrilla corps" that produced a large "illegal" population.[42]

To counter this problem, the state proposed to substitute indirect regulation for direct administrative control. Beginning in 1987, local branches of the state bureaucracy for commerce and industry were instructed to withhold work permits from individuals who violated the birth limitation policy. Peasants were required to present proof of compliance, and local bureaus were forbidden to issue work papers without this evidence.[43] These procedures were easily skirted, however. Local commerce and industry officials had no interest in becoming adjunct family planning officials, and as the number of migrants increased, fewer and fewer bothered to register locally or acquire the obligatory work permit.[44] By 1990, certain localities had gained a reputation for being safe havens from family planning enforcement.[45]

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[41] *Xinhua*, June 15, 1990, in *FBIS*, June 18, 1990, p. 37; Zhang Mengyi, "A New Mode of Population Shift and Mobility in China," *Liaowang Overseas Edition* 2 (January 8, 1990), pp. 16–17, in *FBIS*, February 9, 1990, pp. 18–20.

[42] Guo Xiao, "The 'Population Explosion' is Drawing Near," *Jingji ribao* (Economic daily), January 10, 1989, in *FBIS*, February 3, 1989, p. 51; Fan Xiangguo and Huang Yuan, "Zhongguo 'hei renkou'" (China's illegal population), *Xin guancha* (New Observer) 4 (February 25, 1989, pp. 28–32; Report, "Couples with more than One Child Seek Shelter Along Borders of Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Guizhou," *Zhongguo tongxun she* (January 20, 1989), in *JPRS-CAR* 89-014, February 15, 1989, pp. 44–45.

[43] De Ming, "China's Population Situation Remains Grim," *Liaowang Overseas Edition* 17 (April 1988), pp. 9–10, in *FBIS*, May 11, 1988, p. 28.

[44] Those who did were more likely to have used corruption and bribery to acquire the necessary certificates. Pei Gang, "Thoughts on the Present Disarray in Matters of Population Reproduction and Suggested Improvements," *Renkou yu jingji* (Population and economics) 5 (October 25, 1990), pp. 6–10, in *JPRS-CAR* 90-010, February 7, 1990, p. 65.

[45] Report, "Couples with more than One Child Seek Shelter," pp. 44–45.

B. CADRE-PEASANT RELATIONS

A second dilemma for rural enforcement was the changing political climate within the villages. In some localities, powerful village leaders were still able to rule with an iron fist; in others, however, political and economic reforms forced village leaders to be far more circumspect in the exercise of power.

Unlike the commune era, village leaders no longer had a complete monopoly over economic resources or opportunities; neither could they count on an unlimited tenure in office. As a result, policies that provoked peasant opposition (e.g., enforcing birth limits or extracting state and local taxes) were handled with caution, and for good reason. Peasant retaliation or aggressive resistance was a real possibility, and "incidents of revenge" ranged from destruction of cadre property to physical attack.[46] Moreover, village leaders were far more vulnerable to peasant retaliation than were their township superiors; they rarely moved on to higher-level posts outside the village, and they no longer had guaranteed tenure in office. As a result, they and their families had to live with the legacy of their political tenure, in a post-reform social environment where household size and community status were closely linked. Families who saw child-bearing as their best long-term guarantee of strength, respect and stature (and their best defense against weakness, bullying and abuse by powerful families), believed that birth limits represented a profound threat to their existence within the village. Some were prepared to take any steps necessary, including the use of force, to protect that future, and cadres were hesitant to stand in their way.[47]

C. FISCAL REFORM AND FAMILY PLANNING FUNDING

Though rarely discussed in the context of China's family planning efforts, fiscal reforms implemented since 1984 have had a tremendous impact on the program. The fiscal reforms encouraged financial neglect of family planning at the village and township levels, and contributed to a chronic shortage of funding for family planning work.

Until 1984, the costs of contraceptives and all family planning-related medical procedures (IUD insertions, abortions, sterilizations, etc.) were covered within the central state budget. All other expenses (e.g., costs of preparing and disseminating propaganda materials, work subsidies for village cadres and activists involved in mobilization campaigns) were absorbed by local governments or rural villages, whether or not they exceeded budgeted expenditures. In 1984, however, Beijing mandated a reorganization of township-level finances; family planning was one of several categories of local expenses targeted for reduction and rationalization.[48]

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[46] Su Suining, "There are Many Causes of strained Relations Between Cadres and Masses in Rural Areas," *Nongmin ribao* (Peasant daily), September 26, 1988, p. 1, in *FBIS*, October 7, 1988, p. 13; Fan and Huang, "Zhongguo 'hei' renkou," p. 71.

[47] Yang, "Woguo nongcun jihua shengyu gongzuo zhong xuyao yanjiu jiejuede jige wenti" (Several issues in need of resolution in our country's rural birth planning work), *Renkou yanjiu* (Population research) 6 (1989),pp. 62–64; Pei, "Thoughts on the Present Disarray," p. 65.

[48] See footnote 14.

The impetus for fiscal reform was two-fold. First, central authorities sought to reduce the level of "peasant burdens" (*nongmin fudan*), i.e., the sum of all direct and indirect forms of taxation. Still uncertain in late 1983 how rapidly agricultural performance would improve, they feared that licit and illicit extractions by local cadres could stifle peasant entrepreneurship and impede the reform process.[49] Second, the reform of local government expenditures was part of a larger effort to reduce central-level budgetary commitments and decentralize fiscal authority. By 1984, new revenue-sharing arrangements had been negotiated with individual provinces. As a result, provincial governments gained control over the structure of local spending, and the right to determine their own fiscal arrangements with local governments under their jurisdiction.[50] In turn, counties eventually gained the right to set fiscal arrangements with township governments, placing all levels of government on "harder" budgetary constraints.[51]

This comprehensive reform of the fiscal system had far-reaching implications for the overall pattern of government spending and investment, and for specific budgetary categories like family planning. As governments gained greater control over their budgetary revenues, governmental bureaus and commercial enterprises were pressured to balance their budgets and generate their own sources of revenue for reinvestment or expansion. As more responsibilities were transferred from the central budget to local authorities, therefore, the solvency of local governments came to depend on their entrepreneurial abilities. Government activities that did not generate a profit were often neglected, while profit-making ventures attracted more investment.[52] Agencies that could not compete on the market were starved for funds, and came under increased pressure to find their own sources of revenue simply to maintain their existing operations.[53]

In that climate, the family planning bureaucracy found itself strapped for funds during the Seventh FYP, just as the pressures of an increasing child-bearing age cohort demanded increased investment. In late 1986, SFPC director Wang Wei complained that funding for family planning had dropped off after 1983; he criticized

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[49] On the problem of "peasant burdens," see Tyrene White, "Below Bureaucracy: The Burden of Being a Village Under the Local State," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, Illinois, April 6–8, 1990.

[50] James Tong, "Fiscal Reform, Elite Turnover and Central-Provincial Relations in Post-Mao China," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 22 (July 1989), pp. 13–14.

[51] The arrangements that provincial governments and prefectural governments, between prefectures and counties, and between counties and townships, can and do vary from one locality and the next. This had created an exceedingly complex set of financial arrangements at the local levels. See, for example, "Hebei sheng renmin zhengfu guanyu gaijin caizheng guanli tizhide jixiang guiding" (Some regulations of the Hebei provincial government concerning improving the financial management system), *Hebei jingji tongji nianjian, 1987* (Hebei economic statistical yearbook, 1987), p. 488; Zhonggong hebei shengwei yanjiushi nongcunchu, "Fangshou rang xiang zhengfu dang jiali cai" (Let go and allow township governments to set up their own finances), *Nongcun gongzuo tongxun* (Rural work bulletin) 6 (1986), pp. 32–33. On the distinction between "hard" and "soft" budget constraints, see Janos Kornai, *Contradictions and Dilemmas: Studies on the Socialist Economy and Society* (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1986).

[52] On the role of township governments in developing profit-making township enterprises, see Jean C. Oi, "Economic Management and Rural Government: Bureaucratic Entrepreneurship in Local Economies," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, Illinois, April 6–8, 1990.

[53] Christine Wong, "Tax Reform and Central-Local Fiscal Interaction in China," paper presented at the East Asia Colloquia Series, Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University, July 1990; White, "Below Bureaucracy."

"some provinces" for drastically reducing their allocation for family planning, and called on them to give priority to family planning in future budgets.[54] By 1988, delegates to the annual meeting of family planning commission directors were pressing central leaders for increased funding and personnel. Premier Li Peng's response, however, was to remind them of the "financial difficulties" with the central budget and request that local governments carry even more of the financial burden for family planning.[55] This left family planning officials to complain publicly about the lack of support at all levels of government. One provincial FPC director was quoted as saying: "During the past few years, we spent half our time lobbying government leaders at all levels. They should take the lead in family planning, but we end up having to push them into action." [56]

The lack of funds to maintain and develop the family planning bureaucracy had serious and paradoxical consequences for rural enforcement. First, family planning work was slowed in some areas due to lack of funding for medical support. In areas where the family planning organization sought to establish medical facilities independent of local hospitals, no funds were available to expand meager facilities.[57] In other areas, local governments did not reimburse hospitals for the cost of sterilization surgeries or other procedures; as a result, the hospitals refused to accept additional family planning patients until the debt was paid.[58] One report claimed that "many" provincial governments owed public health departments "up to 10 million yuan" in tubal ligation surgery fees. To place this sum in relative perspective, one family planning director pointed out that 100 million *yuan* had been spent to renovate the hotel where a family planning meeting had been held. He added, "How come funds just dry up when it comes to family planning?" [59]

Second, the family planning bureaucracy came to rely upon the extraction of fines from policy violators in order to cover ordinary operating costs; *to pursue its bureaucratic mission of preventing excess births, the bureaucracy needed the monies collected as a result of excess births.* In one Sichuan county, for example, the gap between budgeted allocations and actual expenditures during the 1979–1987 period was 606,000 *yuan* annually. To cover the deficit, the county relied on the collection of excess birth fees, making it bureaucratically imperative that couples violate the birth limitation policy.[60] Conversely, counties that were very successful in pre-

[54] Wang Wei, "Jihua shengyu gongzuo qingkuang" (Situation in family planning work), *Jihua shengyu zhongyao wenjian*, p. 100.

[55] Li Peng, "Zai tingchu quanguo jihua shengyu weiyuanhui zhuren huiyi huibao shide jianghua" (Talk while listening to the report of the national meeting of directors of family planning commissions), *Jihua shengyu zhongyao wenjian*, p. 62.

[56] Zhu Li, "Family Planning to Emphasize Economic as Well as Administrative Methods," *Jingji Cankao* (Economic Reference), March 10, 1989, p. 4, in *JPRS* 89-047, May 17, 1989, p. 39.

[57] Cheng Linli and Wu Yousheng, "Jiceng jihua shengyu gongzuode fancha xiaoyi yu sikao" (Contrasting effects of basic-level family planning work and reflections), *Renkou yanjiu* 6 (1989), p. 53.

[58] Cheng and Wu, "Jiceng jihua shengyu," p. 53.

[59] Zhu, "Family Planning," p. 39.

[60] Cheng and Wu, "Jiceng jihua shengyu," pp. 53–54.

venting excess births soon recognized the benefit of turning in a more mediocre performance.[61]

Despite the economic incentive to allow excess child-bearing, however, mobilizational pressures to comply with the one-or-two child limit did not cease. Instead, campaigns—presumably the antithesis of routine bureaucratic process—became an essential component of routine bureaucratic process, and targets for fine collections were issued alongside targets for births, sterilizations, and abortions.[62] In one prefecture, campaigns of this type were held three times a year on a regular basis. The collection of fines was one of six key targets issued to each locality.[63] The collection of fines by no means guaranteed that the money would be used to reward one-child couples or provide better family planning services, however. Township and village leaders sometimes took advantage of murky accounting procedures at the grassroots to divert the funds to other projects.[64]

Third, fiscal reforms and fiscal austerity contributed indirectly to the deteriorating quality of China's population statistics. Despite the pressures on grassroots cadres to collect fines, monies raised at the village level were often turned over to higher levels of government. In one Sichuan county, for example, township governments received 70 percent of all monies collected as fines, the district (*qu*) received 5 percent, the county received 20 percent, and the prefecture received 5 percent.[65] Elsewhere, villages were allowed to retain a portion of the fees, but sometimes as little as 20 percent.[66] This arrangement denied village cadres the fruits of their own labors, and reinforced their distaste for family planning work.[67] Since village leaders were required to undertake the difficult and dangerous job of extracting the levies, but not necessarily allowed to retain them, they had no incentive to accurately report local birth trends.[68]

By the end of the decade, the erosion of the statistical reporting system was one of the most serious issues on the family planning agenda. The statistical "leakage" (*shuifen*), or exaggeration, begins at the village level, where grassroots reports lay the foundation for nationwide compilations of population trends.[69] Since those reports can only be verified by village cadres who are intimately familiar with village households, the reporting system has always been susceptible to fraud and human error. Since 1985, however, the costs of accurate reporting have grown, while the risks of falsification have declined. As a result, fraud and misreporting have spread to all levels of the system, and political leaders enjoying recognition for their "advanced" family planning work have no incentive to question positive reports from subordinates who are anxious to

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[61] Cheng yicai, "Chaosheng zinufei guanli tanwei" (Inquiry into the management of excess birth fines) *Renkou yanjiu* (Population research) 4 (1990), p. 61.

[62] Elsewhere, I have called this phenomenon "institutionalized mobilization." See "Postrevolutionary Mobilization in China: The One-Child Policy Reconsidered," *World Politics* (October 1990).

[63] Interview with former township-level family planning cadre, July 1990.

[64] Chen, "Chaosheng zinufei," pp. 61–62.

[65] Cheng and Wu, "Jiceng jihua shengyu," pp. 53–54.

[66] Chen, "Chaosheng zinufei," p. 61.

[67] Ibid., p. 61.

[68] Ibid., p. 61.

[69] *Renmin ribao*, October 24, 1988, p. 3.

please.[70] Similarly, enthusiastic family planning cadres who uncover statistical errors feel strong pressures to cover them up. As one former cadre put it, an honest report from one township would accomplish nothing but the destruction of one's own career, since higher-level political leaders would be embarrassed and angered by the revelation.[71]

The joint survey conducted in 1988 under the auspices of the SFPC revealed just how serious the statistical problems had become by that time. As shown in Table 1, the survey revealed that the majority of all provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions had birth rates at least 30 percent higher than originally reported for 1987. Despite demands for a more rigorous reporting system, however, in early 1990, SFPC director Peng Peiyun stated that there was a thirty percent gap between household registration figures and actual population size, and that the discrepancy was increasing, not decreasing.[72] This did not bode well for the upcoming national census in July 1990. As preparations got underway in the late spring, therefore, cadres were issued a carrot-and-stick ultimatum: if the census report was accurate, there would be no recriminations, even if the figures implied previous statistical fraud; if the census report was tampered with or poorly prepared, however, the repercussions would be severe.[73] How cadres responded to these warnings in not yet clear, but it is reasonable to assume that they were skeptical of Beijing's amnesty offer.[74]

TABLE 1. Percentage Differences in 1987 Birth Rates, Statistical Reports versus Survey Results

Number of Provinces *	Percentage Difference
4	under 10%
3	10–20%
6	20–30%
10	30–40%
6	40–50%

* Includes province-level municipalities and autonomous regions.
Source: *Renmin ribao*, October 24, 1988, p. 3.

IV. Conclusion

Although Beijing continues to exert formidable pressures on child-bearing age couples, the state's ability to enforce rural childbearing limits has eroded since 1984. China's birth planning strategy was originally tailored to the political and economic processes associated with a command economy. For birth planning to be effective, fertility and population targets had to be disseminated along with material production targets, and local cadres had to be

[70] Yang, "Woguo nongcun jihua shengyu gongzuo," p. 64.
[71] Interview with former township-level family planning cadre, July 1990.
[72] *Xinhua*, December 13, 1989, in *FBIS*, January 5, 1990, p. 5.
[73] Beijing Domestic Service, March 21, 1990, in *FBIS*, April 17, 1990, pp. 24–25.
[74] Based on one report from Liaoning, that skepticism was probably well-founded. Just after the census was completed, a provincial radio report revealed that significant statistical errors had been uncovered in some localities, and that some "advanced" units did not deserve the title. See Liaoning Provincial Service, July 14, 1990, in *FBIS*, July 17, 1990, p. 45.

held strictly accountable for performance shortfalls. As the process of reform has reduced the number of assigned planning targets, relaxed the pressures to meet others, and generally loosened political constraints on local cadre behavior, the very structure that made it possible to enforce birth quotas has been undermined. That is not to say that local agents of the state are unable to enforce local birth limits when they make a concerted effort to do so, or when they are mobilized from above. Both central and local governments remain capable of bringing formidable powers to bear on individual couples. Nevertheless, market forces set loose since 1985 have fundamentally altered the incentive structures on which rural enforcement depended. Individual provinces and local governments weigh central pressures against local priorities, and discover that the appearance of concern over population growth can substitute for financial investments. Beijing can afford to speak as if all projects are equally important, but local leaders understand that they will be rewarded first and foremost for improved economic indicators; low birth rates will earn them applause, but no political or economic clout.[75] Similarly, grassroots cadres weigh the direct and indirect costs of rigorous enforcement against the risks of neglect; they often conclude that it is more rational and less risky to implement the letter of the law, i.e., collect fines for "illegal" births, and/or falsify statistical reports, than to confront fellow villagers. And finally, many couples have concluded that the rewards for having only one child pale in comparison to the tangible and intangible benefits of having two or more, even if the cost is migration to another locality or boarding one's children with cooperative relatives.

In short, partial market reforms have had the same effect in the realm of birth planning that they have had in the economic realm—creating skewed incentive systems that reward "undesirable" behaviors and decisions, encourage corruption, and waste scarce resources. Unlike the economic realm, however, these problems have generated little attention outside China, since they have helped to undercut the very concept of centrally planned, state-regulated child-bearing, a concept that many find repugnant or immoral. While this outcome may well be applauded and encouraged, it is nevertheless worth noting that it has come at a cost. Millions of children now live with a new kind of class stigma; they are "black" (*hei*, as in black market) or "illegal" children with uncertain status and few prospects. If they are female, they are less likely to be educated, whether legal or illegal. Studies by Chinese scholars show that female education is the single most important predictor of fertility; the failure to educate these children, therefore, increases the likelihood that China's compulsory program will be extended to a new generation. And finally, if declining investment in birth planning allowed some couples to avoid compulsory birth limits, it has also hindered the development of family planning services that many couples want—a ready supply of reliable

[75] Pei, "Thoughts on the Present Disarray," p. 64; Lu Xueyi and Zhang Houyi, "Peasant Diversification, Problems, Remedies," *Nongye jingji wenti* (Problems of Agricultural Economics) 1 (January 1990), pp. 16–21, in *JPRS-CAR* 90-040, May 29, 1990, p. 65. This tendency toward neglect is by no means universal. Certain provinces, like Sichuan and Jiangsu, have been exceptionally attentive to birth planning work. Elsewhere, individual leaders have been motivated by personal conviction, not pressure from their superiors, to focus on birth limitation.

and convenient contraceptives, high-quality medical services, and improved maternal and infant care.

It is true, of course, that China's birth planning program can be blamed for these side-effects. Without it, one might argue, there would be no "illegal" children, and funds invested in the mission of administering birth limits could be deflected to education, health care, and non-compulsory family planning services. Unlike the economic and political sectors, however, where influential constituencies support greater market reform and democratization, even the most tolerant advisors to the SFPC advocate a two-child limit. With the specter of a population in excess of 1.5 billion by the middle of the next century (even if current policies remain in force), reform advocates are cautious about liberalization of birth limits. More far-reaching economic or political reforms are therefore unlikely to result in the abandonment of state-regulated childbearing. At best, they may produce a more moderate, comprehensive and genuinely service-oriented approach to family planning—one that hopes for voluntary compliance but settles for less.