

Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, eds., Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics

**Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, ISBN
9780804748797**

Fan Wu

Received: 31 December 2009 / Accepted: 31 December 2009 / Published online: 3 December 2010
© National Science Council, Taiwan 2010

China's population policy has been the focus of international attention. The existence of a strict birth planning policy in the world's most populous country is enough to arouse great interest. Why did the Chinese government formulate such a stringent policy? Why has this policy lasted so long? What is the source of its success—at least in rapidly reducing fertility levels and controlling population growth? In addition to its impact on demographic processes, what has it brought to China's economy, society, and politics? Both Chinese and foreign scholars are trying to answer these questions.

The authors of *Governing China's Population* present a comprehensive analysis of population policy since 1949, relying on theories and methods from political science and anthropology, especially the biopower theory of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. This is by far the most thorough and systematic analysis of the topic approached from a political science perspective. Like other studies, it focuses on China's family planning policy, but it goes beyond other works by addressing other aspects of population policy, in particular the question of population quality, and by tracing policies from the founding of the People's Republic of China.

By combining political science's institutional analysis, an essentially anthropological perspective on society, and a commitment to viewing demographic policies as the exercise of what Foucault called biopower, the authors construct a robust analytical framework. They divide the evolution of Chinese population policy into four major stages, defined by the leaders who presided over major shifts. Mao Zedong led the way from a flexible set of guidelines to a rigid set of laws; Deng Xiaoping reaffirmed and reinforced Mao's policy; Jiang Zemin began a progressively deepening reform of birth planning; and Hu Jintao oversaw comprehensive reforms. Then, the authors connected those shifts to larger political changes, casting Maoism as revolutionary mobilization,

F. Wu (✉)

Department of Social Work & Social Policy, Nankai University, 94 Weijin Rd., Tianjin 300071,
People's Republic of China
e-mail: laurelwu76@yahoo.com.cn

Stalinism as bureaucratic professionalism, and reformism as socialist marketization. The description of China's population policy is consistently objective and accurate, and nonspecialist readers can rely on the "political roadmap" provided to understand population politics. Changes in population policy may provide clues on the evolution of China's power structure. The authors then offer a comprehensive analysis of the social and political consequences of official population policy.

Lacking from this study is an analysis of the evolution of the structural relationship between state power and biopower—itself the engine for changes in population policy. And besides state power and biopower, there is another important dimension of power—individual power of people in population politics. Even within the structure of biopower, the relations between state power and individual power are intertwined. Changes in the power structure should be evaluated in a more profound social context: all the changes emerging during the reform of the market economy system empowered the people, including from social reforms to the emergence and spread of democracy and a concern about human rights, about education and human capital, about the large-scale rural–urban migration and mobility of the population, employment, the internet, and so on. The empowerment of people not only enhances the micro-power of the individual and changes the power structure—it also improves the quality of state power. This is reflected in the Chinese Communist Party's decision to endorse a "human-centered" rather than a "material-centered" approach.

As China moves through the twenty-first century, it faces a new set of problems related to demography. Can it solve such problems—rapid population aging and the serious imbalance in sex ratio at birth—without draconian measures? Will the solutions advance China's social development and political reforms? As policy makers approach such questions, we will need the help of tools fashioned by leading academics such as Winckler and Greenhalgh to interpret their decisions.