

Governing China's Population

From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics

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CHAPTER

7

The Shifting Local Politics of Population

WHEN THE PRC'S POST-Mao leadership created its project to radically "modernize" the quantity and quality of China's 1 billion people, it undertook an enterprise of enormous scope and difficulty. The challenges of putting this project into effect have been monumental. Previous chapters probed these challenges from the vantage point of the regime, looking at problems of policy design as they have appeared to political and program leaders seeking to administer an unpopular program and achieve its targets against great odds. This chapter leaves the state apparatus and drops down into society to view the politics of enforcement from the vantage point of cadres and citizens in local communities trying to cope with the harsh reproductive demands emanating from above.

By now, even China's leaders openly acknowledge that the local politics of population, especially in the villages, has been grim and grievous. The Western media have told heartrending stories of fierce resistance and violent struggle, with grisly consequences for infant girls (e.g., Weisskopf 1985a, 1985b; WuDunn 1991a). The scholarly literature has portrayed rural population politics, and Chinese population politics more generally, as an unending struggle between a coercive state and a resistant society that continues to this day (e.g., Zhou 1996; White 2000b; Scharping 2003; also Aird 1990). Although this standard account of endless contestation captures important dimensions of the politics of population in some places and times (especially the rural areas during the long 1980s), it is a partial picture that neglects three important features of that politics. First, by focusing solely on the state's repressive project of drastically limiting population numbers, it has overlooked the second, more seductive project of enhancing the quality of the Chinese people. The politics of quality has been very different from the politics of quantity that has dominated our views of Chinese population affairs. In part

because of this omission, the standard account has also missed the important transformations that have taken place, especially since the early 1990s, as marketization has accelerated and quality has overtaken quantity as the major domain of population politics. Finally, seeing power only as a negative force, the conventional account overlooks the positivity or productivity of power, which has given rise to new or transformed sites of struggle and arenas of contestation.

This chapter traces broad trends in the community (or face-to-face) politics of quantity and quality, in both rural and urban settings, over the first twenty-five years of the reform period. Although some parts of this story have been told before, the parts have never been connected into a larger account of the transformations that have occurred over the reform years. The bigger story we tell involves the rapid governmentalization of population; a shift in mode of governance from state bureaucratic power to professional discipline to individual self-regulation and self-cultivation; and, finally, the emergence of diverse and mostly unpredicted effects.

Our story starts in the central state, with PRC leaders' own views of their agenda and of what was at stake in the creation and imposition of tough new norms on China's people. Central to those views was modern science, a core logic in regimes of modern power. As we saw in Chapter 2, science—or scientific claims—were key rationales in all the Leninist state-building projects undertaken by the PRC regime since the middle of the twentieth century. In the population arena, "modern science and technology" emerged as a forceful element of policymaking around 1979–1980, when the regime was initiating the construction of a powerful Soviet-style technocratic-bureaucratic state. Because this new and unusual "population science" so heavily shaped how the state's population project would interface with society, the roles of population science and of the larger "scientization" of politics and society in the reform era will be central themes in this and the following two chapters.

As noted earlier, the regime's post-Mao population project was part of a larger endeavor to rapidly modernize the country through selective absorption of Western science and technology. After the depredations of the Cultural Revolution, class struggle was dead, Marxian ideology moribund, the party's reputation nearly ruined. The modernizing Deng regime that came to power in 1978 sought to rebuild the regime's legitimacy by transforming the regime into a scientific modernizer that would draw on Western science and technology to lead the nation to the long-promised wealth, power, and global position. Population policy was a key site for the construction and later expansion of this new scientific authority rooted in nature, biology, and the body. Population was an opportune site for the development of the scientific state because the core constructs involved in its management lent themselves

well to definition in biological terms. Reworking a broad set of putatively "scientific" discourses on sexuality fashioned in the early twentieth century, the post-Mao state defined these constructs—population (the quantity issue), race (the quality question), and gender (the instrument of reproductive management)—in starkly biological terms (Evans 1997; Dikotter 1995, 1998). Population was represented as a biological process of reproduction of individual organisms aggregated into a larger population. Race, often conflated in the Chinese discourse with nation (*minzu*), was construed as a biological entity to be eugenically enhanced to promote fitness and competitiveness of the national "organism" in a social Darwinist world of interracial and international competition (Sigley 1996). Finally, gender difference was defined as biological difference in reproductive structure and function, with women being by nature the primary reproducers. The use of these biologized constructs allowed the state to represent these forces of great potential—and, in the post-Mao era, of great threat—as impersonal processes "in nature" that had to be "objectively" investigated and managed by the state "in the interests of the nation as a whole." Through the use of modern population science and reproductive technology, the regime would take charge of these domains, creating a population of optimal size and characteristics that would both facilitate and symbolize China's status as a rising global power. In the late 1970s, modern science thus displaced the older, socialist planning rationale (of "grasping production and reproduction together") that had guided birth planning in the late Maoist years but now lacked force.¹ The socialist planning rationale was not abandoned, for it helped secure the continued legitimacy of the regime, but it took a back seat to the logic of state science.

Though largely ignored in the Western literature, the development of modern population science was crucial to the formulation of China's reform-era population policy and the emergence of a second site of governmental power, the disciplinary institutions of the professions, which in the PRC were closely connected to the state. Drawing on two closely related natural sciences borrowed from the West, population cybernetics and the population ecology of the Club of Rome, in the crucial transition of 1979–1980 China's problem of population was defined as a dual crisis: too many Chinese of too backward a type (for more, see Greenhalgh 2003b).² The solution was for the state to construct and energetically promote new norms guiding the production and cultivation of modern persons. The ultimate aim was to transform China's backward masses into a scientifically normalized, modern society (for more, Bakken 2000). In promoting this larger agenda, the post-Mao regime sought first to limit the growth rate and size of the population (*shaosheng*) and then to enhance its physical and mental quality (*yousheng*). Mobilizing a variety of human and life sciences—demography, developmental psychology,

sexology, reproductive biology, and many more—to contribute to this new project on life, the state established putatively "scientific" norms of quantity and quality and then promoted them, initially by the time-honored campaign methods of the Maoist state, and then increasingly through the regulatory methods of the Dengist reform state (all detailed in Part 1) and the disciplinary techniques of the medical, educational, and other professions. The community politics of population focused on the negotiations and struggles that ensued as the state and the human disciplines tried to persuade, mobilize, or otherwise induce local society to adopt their norms.

The natural science that produced the new one-child norm defined social and cultural factors as irrelevant. Yet of course it was China's social structure and culture that gave local society the *community reproductive norms* that it would at times staunchly defend against the *scientific norms* of the state. The state labeled those social and cultural forces "feudal" and targeted them for eradication through "modernization." Yet they forced themselves in through the back door, impressing themselves first on informal community policies and then on formal national policy through the workings of the mass line. Social and cultural forces, in particular family socioeconomics and gender values, would come to play critical roles in the Chinese politics of population, leaving their imprint on the nature, intensity, and outcome of those negotiations and struggles. They will play a big part in the story told in this and the following chapter.

During the long 1980s (roughly 1979–1993, henceforth simply "the 1980s"), the dominant norm promoted by the state was one of quantity: one child for all. Because the state's quantity norm was set far below societal desires, the official norm was fundamentally negative, or repressive. For many years, and still today in many areas, efforts to instill that norm were fundamentally coercive, involving state use or threat of force (physical, legal, or otherwise) to impose the official norm on society. While this newly organized power over life was highly coercive, it was at the same time highly *productive* (in the sense explained in Chapter 2, the *Problématique*), giving rise to historically new (or revived and transformed) sites of struggle and arenas of contestation. In an era in which nature and science were the new grounds of authority, it was the biological reproducer, the reproductive-age woman, who became the object of state control. In this way, the bodies of women—in particular, married women of reproductive age (15–49)—became newly public sites of intense struggle over an array of reproductive issues that had long been matters of family politics but were now swept up into the maelstrom of state politics as well: contraception, the timing of reproductive events, and the number and sex of children. In China's son-loving culture, the struggles over the *number* of children soon became contests over the *gen-*

der of those offspring. In those contentions, infant bodies and even fetuses became a second newly salient site of fierce and sometimes deadly struggle.

Because of the differing roles of children in city and village families, and because of widely varying enforcement environments, during the 1980s the politics of population numbers came to take different forms in urban and rural areas. In the urban areas, the state's continued control over the populace through the institutions of the workplace and neighborhood, coupled with lower childbearing preferences, limited popular resistance to the policy. There, in a classic example of the state's enforcement ideals—"propaganda and education as basic," "state guidance, mass voluntarism"—the politics of quantity took the form of the cadre production of "voluntarism," or politically conscious acceptance of state policy. With the exception of the politics of migrant fertility, which remains a serious challenge to the birth establishment to this day, the urban politics of population quantity was relatively smooth and stable over time.⁴ By the early 1990s, if not sooner, the notion of the one-child family had become a staple of urban reproductive culture.

In the rural areas, by contrast, the peasant family's greater need for children, combined with the weakening of community enforcement structures, led to intense opposition to the one-child rule from peasants and local cadres alike. The result was a highly confrontational and unstable politics of population numbers. In stark contrast to the cities, in the villages policy enforcers had to resort to coercive campaigns, the state's least-favored means of enforcement, to suppress dissent and gain compliance. The literature on rural population politics suggests unending conflict, but a closer look reveals a historically variable "mass line" dynamic. In this dynamic the bottom-up preferences of local society, in particular for a son, came to shape central policy, and then that modified, now gendered, policy was reimposed from the top down on local society. Through such a mass-line process, during the 1980s the masculinist values of the peasantry became firmly embedded in national policy.

The 1990s ushered in a new era in the rural politics of numbers. During that decade profound transformations in the economy and the increasingly market-oriented farmer family lowered fertility desires, leading to a gradual convergence of state and villager fertility norms. These changes in rural society worked in tandem with the "client-centered" reforms in the birth program (described in Chapter 5) to produce a significant easing of tensions over birth planning in the more developed rural areas. From all appearances, by the turn of the millennium rural society was on its way to successful reproductive modernization following a one-to-two-child norm. Yet beneath the surface calm, another political storm was brewing over the gender of the one or two children that would get to be born. The politics of gender had not so much

ceased as been pushed back into the period before birth. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the politics of quantity had produced a new site of reproductive struggle—the fetus—and a new politics of fetal gender and life.

While the birth commission continued to devote substantial attention to restricting quantity, in the 1990s and early 2000s the second issue, the enhancement of population "quality," has become increasingly central to the politics of population. The state's norms on population quality, far from suppressing desire, stimulated desire by tapping into widespread parental aspirations for the upward mobility (and future filiality) of their one (or two) children. If the one-child norm was repressive, the norm of the healthy, educated single child was highly seductive. In part because of the popular appeal of the quality norm, the politics of quality has followed a distinctive trajectory. Three specific trends can be discerned. First, with the shift to quality, the regulation of population has shifted from the state imposition of its norms on couples to parents willingly, even enthusiastically, embracing the ideals of health and education, and engaging in self-correction of their offspring to these popular norms. Indeed, the quality project has been a major site for the creation of the sorts of self-regulating, "autonomous," neoliberal subjects assumed by both the marketizing capitalist economy and the slimmed down neoliberalizing state described in Chapter 6. The "autonomy" of the self-regulating reproductive subject should not be thought of simply as the exercise of free will. That autonomy should be understood instead as a product of practices of government (deployed by the state bureaucracy, the professional disciplines, and the market) that have shaped individuals into the kinds of subjects who will exercise their freedom to upgrade their bodies and minds responsibly. Second, in the politics of quality, power has come to center on two new or reconfigured objects of societal investment and control: the "quality child" and the "good mother" responsible for cultivating that perfect youngster. Finally, the politics of quality has relocated power over population from the state birth planning bureaucracy to a much wider range of authorities, each striving to define the standards for child health and education and to get parents to adopt their standards and related practices and products.

With the shift to quality, therefore, the power to shape Chinese life has drifted away from the state into the hands of other social forces, most notably, as we will see, those associated with China's new consumer economy and culture. With this, a new set of logics—the logics of the capitalist market—has come to play a role in shaping the "quality" of the Chinese people. Clearly, in the arena of quality, the devolution in the locus of governance (from state bureaucracy to the professions, many state-affiliated, to individuals) has proceeded much faster and much further than in the arena of quantity. The politics of quality, like that of quantity, took root much earlier

in the cities, though by the 1990s concern with quality had become an increasingly prominent feature of rural life as well. The basic political dynamics of population quality appear to be quite similar in urban and rural areas.

Between the early 1980s and early 2000s, then, the community politics of population has been undergoing four major if still far from complete shifts: from quantity to quality; from state regulation to professional disciplinary regulation to societal self-regulation; from concentration of power in the state bureaucracy to its dispersal to other, including global and corporate, actors; and from bureaucratic logics to professional/scientific logics to market logics. In producing new or reorganized objects and arenas of struggle, the politics of population has also become more feminized, more corporeal, and, for a time, more differentiated along urban-rural lines. In chronicling these transformations and productivities, this chapter documents at the community level the broad transition from Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics charted in this book. It begins with the struggles over population numbers in the villages, then turns to the conflicts over quantity and quality in the cities.

Creating One-to-Two-Child Families in the Villages: The Long 1980s

When the state launched the one-child policy in 1979–1980, its overriding objective was to create one-child families in the countryside, where roughly 80 percent of the Chinese people lived. If that goal could be achieved, policymakers believed, the problem of population numbers would be largely solved. Yet the norm of one child for all, the product of a biological systems science that excluded culture and social structure, was profoundly out of touch with the realities of rural China. That norm made no room for the central role of children in the peasant household socioeconomy or the gendered nature of personhood in Chinese culture. The social, cultural, and economic untenability of that new norm, coupled with an enforcement environment weakened by the rural economic reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s, gave rise to a rapidly changing politics of population. Chapter 4 told the story of the oscillations of the long 1980s from the top down. Now we tell that story from the bottom up. As discussed in Part 1, the state sought to achieve its dominant norm of one child per family through the promotion of subsidiary norms, in particular, late marriage, late childbearing, and long child spacing. Yet the timing norms were distinctly secondary to the numerical norms. Throughout the 1980s and even the 1990s, enforcement efforts focused on achieving the one-child norm through the spread of long-term, “effective” contraception—sterilization or the IUD. Our focus then is on

the negotiations and struggles over the one-child norm and the contraceptive means by which program leaders hoped it would be reached.

PEASANT REPRODUCTIVE DESIRES: THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ROOTS OF SON HUNGER

Since the early 1980s, the childbearing preferences of China’s peasants have become the focus of intense state and scholarly concern. From large-scale surveys to microstudies, all observers of the rural scene in the 1980s found the same thing among the Han majority: a fervent desire for two children and a lingering preference for three. As important as the number was the gender: at least one of those children had to be a son (Davin 1985; Wolf 1985; Whyte and Gu 1987; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Zhang 2002; Scharping 2003).

Under the banner of Marxist theory, the state viewed peasant fertility preferences that differed from “modern” state norms as remnants of traditional “feudal” culture that could and should be eradicated through ideological persuasion or, if that did not work, veiled force. That approach failed to grasp the fundamental dynamics underlying peasant fertility preferences, with tragic consequences. A closer look at village life reveals that behind those expressed desires for two or three children and one son lay two fundamental features of village life: the central role of children in peasant household social and economic life, a role rooted in an intergenerational exchange of vital resources, and the gendered character of personhood in Chinese, especially rural Chinese, society. These features of rural life were indeed traditional, but they were not remnants of an older way of life that had simply persisted “over 2,000 years of Chinese feudalism,” as the official discourse put it. Instead, they were reinvented traditions, traditions that had been actively reinvigorated by the political economy of Chinese socialism (Hobsbawm and Ranger eds. 1982; on the contemporary construction of “traditional” peasant family culture in the Maoist era, see Parish and Whyte 1978; Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; in the reform years, see Selden 1993; Greenhalgh and Li 1995).

Throughout China’s long agrarian history, the peasant family has been the central unit of social life, essential to the socioeconomic security and mobility of its members. The socialist revolution of the late twentieth century changed that only somewhat. Despite the collectivization of rural life and the socialist promise of welfare for all, Maoist policy privileged the cities in the distribution of resources, leaving the peasant family to continue playing central roles in the provision of old-age support and in production on private plots (Parish and Whyte 1978). The reforms of the early 1980s dismantled the collectives, privatized health care, and virtually abolished the minimal provision for old-age social security, making the family once again the core unit of production and welfare.

Children have long played crucial roles in the peasant family social and moral economy. Those roles were specified by an implicit intergenerational "contract," or set of social, economic, and moral exchanges between the generations. In these understandings, parents provided for the economic welfare of their children: support in childhood and adolescence; training for productive or reproductive work; dowries for daughters and property at the time of family division for sons. Children reciprocated by demonstrating filiality, contributing to the family economy and, for sons, supporting the parents in old age. As part of their filial duties, sons also had a moral obligation to pay respect to the ancestors and perpetuate the family line. Because of the patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal nature of the Chinese family, personhood in Chinese society has long been gendered in such a way that boys were the children who counted.⁵ Only a son could fulfill the duty to carry on the male-centered family line. Because sons would remain with their parents after marriage, parents invested more heavily in their upbringing and education with the expectation that they would support their parents well in old age. For girls, who would join their husbands' families at marriage, the intergenerational contract called for lower educational investments, for anything more would be "wasted" when they married out. Yet girls had important roles to play, especially in helping with housework and childcare. Girls were "small happinesses," as the documentary film with that title put it, but they were happinesses nonetheless.⁶

It was these cultural understandings and socioeconomic arrangements that lay behind the strong son preference expressed by Chinese villagers in the 1980s. In that decade, parents reported strong desires for sons to provide old-age support and, to a lesser extent, labor on the family farm and continuity of the family line (Cheng 1982; Wolf 1985; Whyte and Gu 1987). In some places, parents wanted sons to help defend the family against village bullies and other new predatory forces (Peng and Dai eds. 1996; Zhang 2002). Although son preference dominated villagers' reproductive desires in the 1980s, ethnographers also discovered a persistent if less intense desire for a daughter to help with housework and farmwork, especially in parents' later years (Zhao and Zhu 1983; Wolf 1985; Greenhalgh 1993; Zhang 2002). The Shaanxi villagers with whom Greenhalgh worked cherished the image of later life in which their married daughter comes home to do the cooking, wash the laundry, and keep them company with stories of village affairs. It was the daughter who would ease the pain of old age by providing emotional comfort and bodily care.

The values of children to parents also reflected the costs of raising them imposed by the "discipline" of a rapidly developing market. Unlike the 1970s, when the arrival of a new child was rewarded by the state with extra

rations and land (Parish and Whyte 1978), in the marketizing economy of the 1980s those incentives disappeared, while the costs of raising children climbed rapidly. Rural parents now faced rising costs not only of bare essentials, such as food and clothing, but also of schooling, health care, and weddings, whose costs had exploded in the reform years. The escalating costs of child care gave rise to a radically new discourse on children. Far from the longstanding view that "many children bring much wealth" (*duozi duofu*), children were now deemed heavy economic burdens (*fudan zhong*). As the 1980s wore on, desires for three children waned, giving way to a near-universal preference for two children—one son and one daughter (Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Zhang 2002).

Despite the diminishing of the family ideal, for village families much was at stake in ending up with two children, including at least one son. In the absence of public forms of social security and in a rapidly changing environment, sons were the vital and irreplaceable keys to economic security and, indeed, the very survival of the family. As a group of Anhui village women lamented, "There is no place in this world for those without sons. Even if it means death, we will keep trying for a son so that we may hold our heads high" (Weisskopf 1985b, A10). Their petition, evidently for reproductive relief, was published in the party organ *People's Daily*. These life-and-death stakes, coupled with the decimation of rural enforcement structures, set the stage for the confrontational politics of population that would unfold in the 1980s.

THE FORCEFUL IMPOSITION OF STATE NORMS (1979–1983)

In the late 1970s, when rural life was still organized in socialist collectives, birth planning was easy to enforce because brigade and team cadres controlled all the essentials of peasant life. As local cadres in Shaanxi explained, if couples failed to cooperate, officials could simply withhold, or threaten to withhold, essential goods, services, and income. Compliance would invariably follow (SG field research; also Parish and Whyte 1978; Nee 1981; Davin 1985).⁷ By the early 1980s, however, that system of near-total control had been decimated, undermined by the rural economic and political reforms of 1979–1984 (White 1991, 1992; Greenhalgh 1993). By eliminating collective accounting, boosting peasant incomes, permitting geographic mobility, and reducing the power and prestige of local officials, the reforms opened up a host of new spaces in which peasants could resist the stringent reproductive demands of the center (Zhang 1982; Saith 1984; Wong 1984; White 1987). Decollectivization also strengthened villagers' beliefs that the rights over not only land but also children belonged to them (Wren 1982). The rural reforms also realigned village cadres' interests and loyalties more closely with

local society. Decollectivization thus produced two deep-seated enforcement troubles for program managers at the political center: peasant opposition and peasant-cadre collusion.

In the early 1980s, when the state sought to impose its new one-child-for-all demand on the countryside, couples creatively exploited the new openings in the political environment to fiercely resist that demand. Resistance took a myriad forms, from forging documents to concealing pregnancies, bribing officials and doctors, refusing to pay fines, publicly cursing birth cadres, hiding with relatives, finding foster parents for unauthorized children, fleeing in advance of campaigns, migrating to carry a pregnancy to term and later, joining communities of "birth planning guerrillas" who had escaped to the geographic margins to have babies (e.g., Zhang 1982; Wasserstrom 1984; Zhongguo Tongxun She 1989a; Tyler 1995; Zhou 1996; Ku 2003). In many areas, individual acts of defiance were supported by a larger culture of resistance in which whole villages would keep mum about the presence of a pregnant woman who had sought refuge there during a harsh campaign (Ku 2003). Among China's huge "floating population" of rural-to-urban migrants were not a few who moved in order to give birth to more children. Unrestricted by urban work units or residence officials, peasant communities in the cities sometimes served as "safe havens" where couples could have births without fear of being fined—to the great frustration of local birth planning officials. All these resistances bore the deep imprint of that urgent need for a son. Indeed, one of the most robust findings of the large literature on peasant childbearing is that those with a son largely complied with the birth policy, while those without resisted with a ferocity and sometimes savagery that no leader in Beijing seems to have anticipated.⁸

With successful enforcement defined as fulfillment of targets for births and birth control procedures, women's bodies became the central arena of reproductive struggle. Although women's bodies had been the targets of state efforts in the past, the early 1980s marked the first time the female reproductive body became the site of political struggle on a massive, society-wide scale.⁹ Given the stakes involved for rural couples and the central state, the struggle would sometimes be ferocious. Assigned tough targets, village-level cadres focused their energies on the corporeal tasks that would prevent more babies from being born: aborting unauthorized pregnancies, getting women with one child to undergo IUD insertion, and sterilizing one member of couples (invariably the wife) with two or more children. Women resisted these pressures at the corporeal level—illegally removing their IUDs, undergoing fake sterilizations, and so on—giving rise to a new politics of the body that would have serious consequences for their health. Often the women themselves were the main agents in these negotiations. In a story that un-

folded in countless villages across the country, a woman would negotiate with her friends and neighbors to conceal an unauthorized pregnancy, only to have it discovered late in the gestational term, a discovery invariably followed by late-term abortion. The bodily struggles sometimes involved husbands as well. In one case in Guangdong's Longchuan County, a woman whose husband tried to remove her IUD hemorrhaged so badly that she had to be rushed to the hospital. Local officials gave wide publicity to this incident to discourage others from trying the same thing (Wren 1982).

To overcome such difficulties and "reach breakthroughs in population control," in 1983 national political and program leaders launched the first of what would be many nationwide crackdowns on births (Chapter 4). In this Maoist mobilization, local cadres were assigned impossible targets and quickly authorized to use any means necessary, including force and late-term abortions, to achieve them (Qian 1989, 132). The campaign was particularly vicious in Guangdong. In the best of the province's localities, targets were reached by ideological mobilization that could involve ten to twenty visits to the homes of recalcitrant couples by teams of officials (Wren 1982). In the worst of places, such as Dongguan County, where officials were instructed that "all actions that control population are correct," pregnant women were treated like the enemy. According to a Hong Kong reporter, big-bellied women were put in cowpens, handcuffed, and escorted to operating areas by armed personnel (Lo 1981). Another reporter observed women locked in detention cells or hauled before mass rallies and harangued into agreeing to abortions (Wren 1982). When officials in some places insisted on aborting and even sterilizing women with no sons, peasant couples, fearing the end of their families, responded by physically attacking the birth cadres. In one grisly case, a Guangdong peasant with two children pulled out his wife's IUD and got her pregnant. When the commune party secretary pressured the woman to get an abortion, her husband hacked him to death with a meat cleaver. The husband was executed (Weisskopf 1985a). Peasants desperate for another chance for a son also abandoned their baby girls, leaving them in cardboard boxes for others to find or, when a final solution seemed preferable, suffocating them or throwing their bodies into village wells (Yan 1983; Croll 2000). The situation was so serious that *People's Daily*, seeking to stop the violence, warned in early 1983 that "at present, the phenomena of butchering, drowning, and leaving to die female infants . . . have been very serious" (Li and Zhang 1983). With such grim developments, the infant body too became a new site of political struggle. In this first phase of the one-child policy, the state imposition of its putatively scientific but culturally blind norm produced a politics of population that turned out to be gendered, corporeal, and even deadly.

THE PEASANTIZATION OF STATE NORMS (1984–1988)

Facing damaged party-mass relations and fearing serious instability in the countryside, in early 1984 the party Center effectively acceded to peasant demands and authorized the addition of more exceptions to the one-child rule, while encouraging less harsh and coercive methods of birth work (Chapter 4). The relaxation at the Center allowed the emergence of a more negotiational style of politics at the village level. With a mandate from the center to loosen up and few tools with which to enforce a tough policy, in any case, local cadres around the country struck reproductive bargains with village couples, resulting in the evolution of new, more lenient, informal community policies. Because villagers' demands for children included the demand for a son, those local policies were invariably male-gendered. In three closely observed Shaanxi villages, for example, all couples were allowed to have two children, including one son, in exchange for women's agreement not to press for more. Women who followed the local rules were exempted from the harsh contraceptive requirements of the center, an exemption that disappeared once they "caused trouble" by getting pregnant outside the plan (SG fieldwork). Similar kinds of cadre-peasant negotiations occurred elsewhere as well (Huang 1998; Potter and Potter 1990; Wasserstrom 1984).

Seeking to "perfect" the formal policy to improve compliance, policy-makers in the provinces reacted to these local policy innovations and political pressures by formally expanding the conditions for second children to include the gender of the first. The result was an engenderment of formal policy, in which the majority of provinces and, in 1988, the political center modified the formal reproductive norms so that rural couples whose first child was a girl could have a second (Chapter 4; Zeng 1989). To legitimate that policy change, son preference was reformulated in official population discourse. No longer a "feudal remnant" to be eradicated, now, under the Dengist banner of "proceeding from reality," son preference became part of "peasant reality," to be accommodated until development took care of the problem (Greenhalgh 2001b). Through this mass-line process, the deadly politics of population had allowed peasants to press their most urgent reproductive need—for a son—on the state, leading to a peasantization of national population policy. Far from a minor rule change, the official adoption of this slightly relaxed "daughter-only" (*dunuhu*) policy, which remains the official policy in the early 2000s, would have broad political consequences. The new policy not only differentiated between urban and rural, creating different rules for each, it also distinguished between male and female, giving formal, indeed, legal recognition to the unequal value of sons and daughters.

THE FORCEFUL REIMPOSITION OF STATE NORMS (1989–1993)

Unfortunately, the relaxation of policy and enforcement in the mid-1980s, combined with shifts in age structure that brought huge numbers of women into childbearing age, led fertility to climb sharply in the late 1980s, prompting a tough re-enforcement of birth planning and reimposition of the now "stabilized" one-to-two-child policy in the early 1990s. Despite the slightly looser state fertility norm, strong pressure from the top, coupled with the adoption of uncompromising new enforcement measures, directed this time primarily at cadres, led to a severe tightening of central state control and intense pressures on local enforcers to demonstrate compliance (Chapter 4).

Local studies portray the early 1990s as a tense and terrible time in the history of birth planning. In Shandong and Henan, a rural sociologist saw campaign posters that virtually incited the use of force with such mottos as: "Treat birth planning [offenders] as landlords were treated during the Land Reform" and "Deng Xiaoping says that any method that reduces fertility is a good method" (SG 16Dec03 BJ). In the best of places, where state control over local society was tight and fertility low, the innovations of the early 1990s left villagers and local cadres caught in a tight net of control, able to respond only by silently acquiescing to state demands (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994). In other places, where control from above was weak and fertility high, local cadres launched the requisite campaigns but engaged in widespread collusion with peasants to resist state authority and cheat their superiors with false numbers (Zhang 2002). In yet other places, where state authority was uncertain and fertility high, local officials instituted brutally coercive campaigns—involving beating husbands, confiscating property, and demolishing houses—that drove people to violent extremes. In one Henan village, a peasant whose neighbor had informed local officials about his wife's fourth pregnancy crippled the neighbor's wife and young child before beating the man to death (WuDunn 1991c; also WuDunn 1991d). In a Yunnan township, a compulsory sterilization campaign provoked collective protests that injured bodies, upended lives, and destroyed local government institutions (Mueggler 2001).

Whether real or partly doctored from below, the statistics from the early 1990s showed that fertility fell markedly, suggesting that national program leaders had found a winning formula at last. The campaigns of the early 1990s marked the beginning of the end of the decade-long era of strong-armed state imposition of its norms and violent confrontation over rural childbearing. By 1993 measured fertility had fallen to about 1.8, and program leaders, victorious in the battle over numbers, began to shift gears.

Village Transformations: The 1990s and Early 2000s

Despite an unbending policy and the inescapability of birth planning, in the late 1990s and early 2000s both local officials and ordinary peasants in some closely studied villages have reported that tensions over birth planning have eased. A closer look at the rural politics of population reveals two changes that have softened the public conflicts over births. First, rural couples have found a cleaner, more "modern" way to stay within state limits on child numbers while achieving their gender preferences. Second, popular desires for children have declined, the end product of the decimation of the patriarchal peasant family brought on by a half century of socialist construction and marketizing reform. Although it is impossible to know how general these changes are—certainly, conflicts persist in some areas—they deserve close attention because they may well be harbingers of the future.

ENGINEERING GENDERED FAMILIES

The gendered state norm that was forcefully reimposed in the early 1990s did not solve the gender problem. In a rural society in which most couples wanted one son and one daughter, the new policy instead created new gender problems, with formidable consequences. The new, nationally uniform policy was more restrictive than the local policies that had preceded it, requiring villagers with a son to stop childbearing and allowing those with a daughter to have only one more even if it too was a girl. The new policy was enforced by tight administrative means—frequent gynecological exams for women, steep fines for couples, mandatory sterilization for those with two children, tough responsibility systems for cadres—that left local society few options but to comply. Rural couples coped with the new, rigidified policy by intensifying the engineering of their families. With coercive campaigns fading and women's health slowly gaining more program attention, in the 1990s the core struggles over reproduction shifted to the bodies of infant girls and, even more so, of fetuses.

As noted above, the first wave of such gender struggles had centered on infant girls. From the early 1980s, peasant couples had reluctantly begun disposing of their second and third daughters in a desperate attempt to get a son. Although outright infanticide seems to have declined during the 1980s (Croll 2000), Kay Johnson's important research on infant abandonment shows that that practice persisted and even flourished, especially during the forceful campaigns of the early 1980s and late 1980s to early 1990s. In Hubei and Hunan, where the "custom of throwing away [girl] babies" was especially entrenched, those campaigns led to the disposal of vast numbers of infants (Johnson 2004: 10; also Johansson and Nygren 1991; WuDunn 1991b). The abandoned chil-

ren have been overwhelmingly healthy girls with no brothers, or with one or two sisters, indicating parents' efforts to work the rules to end up with a son.¹⁰ In notes pinned to tiny bodies, villagers have excoriated the regime's birth policy for forcing them to resort to this extreme measure in order to get a son. In the tougher enforcement environment of the 1990s parents began abandoning their infant daughters for a new reason: to avoid newly steep fines (Johnson 2004; also AP 1999). In the 1990s and early 2000s, the decline in the number of girls born has also created a growing black market in newborn female bodies. Poor farmers desperate for a son or unable to afford the crippling fines for excess childbearing have sold their daughters to traffickers, who have marketed them to a society newly hungry for girls—to fill the longings of the childless, to make "complete families" of one boy and one girl, and to serve as child brides for poor village men (Rosenthal 2003). Local cadres, sympathetic to the villagers' plight and financially penalized for exceeding birth targets, have looked the other way.

By the 1990s, if not earlier, a second wave of struggles, this one centered on the unformed body of the fetus, began to overwhelm the first. From the mid-1980s, the spread of ultrasound-B machines into every corner of rural China introduced a new and improved way to ease the conflict between state and family fertility norms. For growing numbers of Chinese couples, prenatal sex determination followed by sex-selective abortion has become an attractive, indeed, a "modern" high-tech alternative to the crude and morally fraught disposal of already-living infants (Kristof 1993b). A path-breaking study by the Chinese scholar Chu Junhong (2001) suggests that, in parts of central China—and probably elsewhere as well—by the turn of the millennium feticide had become an everyday part of the culture of family formation. Over half the 820 women interviewed had used it on their most recent pregnancy, with as many as two-fifths scanning their first pregnancy and two-thirds scanning their last pregnancy. Almost 75 percent of women whose first child was a girl checked the sex of their second fetus, and virtually all (92 percent) aborted the second female fetus. While families ended up with the children they wanted, the sex ratio at birth soared—to 126 boys per 100 girls, even higher than the national average for rural areas of 120 (in 1999).

A MARKETIZATION OF VILLAGE FAMILY NORMS

Beginning in the 1980s and accelerating through the 1990s and early 2000s, the insistent promotion of birth planning, combined with far-reaching transformations in the economy and family, have been fostering profound changes in cultural desires for children in China's villages. Already in the mid-1980s, farm couples were expressing strong preferences for small families of one son and one daughter. With growing marketization and urban migration, how-

TABLE 3
Childbearing preferences, 2001

Ideal number of children	China (%)	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
0	1.1	0.4	3.2
1	35.8	30.1	52.4
2	57.2	62.1	43.1
3+	5.9	7.5	1.4
Mean	1.70	1.79	1.43

PERCENTAGE NAMING ONE CHILD AS IDEAL, BY AGE			
Age	China	Rural	Urban
15-19	50.1	47.0	60.1
20-24	51.9	48.7	61.4
25-29	41.7	35.4	60.8
30-34	33.1	27.0	51.2
35-39	29.8	23.2	48.7
40-44	29.1	20.2	50.0
45-49	24.7	19.8	40.3
All groups	35.8	30.1	52.4

SOURCE: 2001 Reproductive Health Survey, based on responses from 39,140 women aged 15-49 to question about ideal family size. Data made available by Zhang Guangyu.

ever, villagers' desires for children continued to shrink and sharpen. In 2001, a national survey suggests, the rural ideal was 1.79 children, well below the ideal of the 1980s (see Table 3).¹¹ Although these data should be viewed with some caution, provincial data reveal a similar trend. In rural Jilin, for example, the ideal dropped from 2.5 children in 1986 to 1.6 in 1995 (Feng and Zheng 2002). Despite some difficulties interpreting answers to questions about family ideals in the context of a strong family size policy, both the consistency of the finding across surveys conducted around the same time and the size of the changes over time suggest that a real decline in family size preferences has been underway since the early 1990s, evident in all but the poorest areas of the country (Feng and Zheng 2002). Ethnographic data support and fill out this picture. Village ethnographies suggest that during the 1990s rural couples grew wary of having three children or two sons but more eager to raise a daughter (Judd 1994; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Peng and Dai 1996; Zhang 2002). By the late 1990s and early 2000s, some young newlyweds were opting to stop at one, even if that one was a girl (Xie, Gu, and Hardee 2000; Zhang 2003; Yan 2003). In areas of Jiangsu and Hubei, the majority of young couples who qualified for a second birth because their first was a girl returned their quotas (PDSC 2003c; Zhang Hong, personal communication, 19 July

2003). While daughter desire is growing in some areas, in parts of south and central China (such as Anhui, Guangdong, Guizhou, and Jiangxi), son preference remains intense (Feng and Zheng 2002; Ku 2003; Murphy 2003; SG 11, 12Dec03 BJ). One Fujianese peasant may have captured the prevailing sentiment in such places when he declared: "There are just two important things in life now, making money and having sons!" (Kristof 1993b, 3). Perhaps the most dramatic change is the growing willingness among the young to raise only one child. In the 2001 survey, an amazing 49 percent of rural women aged 20 to 24 indicated that a one-child family was their ideal (see Table 3). This is a huge and potentially very significant change.

Behind these transformations in reproductive culture lay decades of insistent propaganda and practice that assigned the right to decide the number of children to the state. Young couples marrying from the mid-1990s on had grown up with birth planning as part of the ambient political culture. The whole apparatus of state birth planning—from the crisis rationale to the restrictive rules to the strong carrots and sticks—had become part of the implicit assumptions and explicit calculations they brought to the issue of family formation (for some evidence, see Kristof 1990; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Zhang 2002; Yan 2003). The state's long-term efforts to instill new norms played an important, if hard to measure, role in changing the culture of family formation.¹²

Just as culturally transformative, however, were the profound changes in family life brought about by China's deepening marketization and the spread of urban consumer culture accompanying it. To rural people throughout the country, the issue that loomed largest was that of child economics—the escalating costs and vanishing benefits of children (e.g., Yan 2003). In addition to the rising costs noted earlier and the indirect costs incurred from the loss of a busy mother's income, rural parents now had to budget for a new category of "incidental expenses" (*linghuaqian*) defined as necessary to enhance the bodies and minds of their youngsters: nutritional supplements, purchased snacks, educational toys, extra lessons, and more. Reflecting the heavy costs of childrearing, as well as the steep fines meted out to "excess" childbearers, families with several children were among the poorest in their villages, living proof that the old saying about many sons bringing much wealth made sense no more. Instead, more sons brought more worries (*duozi duochou*). Meanwhile, the youngest generation, having grown up in a media-saturated culture and in many cases having experienced city life firsthand, were living in imagined worlds that were urban rather than rural. Carrying modern urban culture, these returned migrants, now roughly one-third of all rural-to-urban migrants, are major forces for reproductive change in the villages (Murphy 2002). More interested in personal happiness than in family obliga-

tion, in the 1990s and early 2000s this more individualistic younger generation was pursuing dreams of a consumer-oriented urban lifestyle, complete with fancy clothes, modern appliances, popular youth culture products, nice homes, and nonfarm jobs. Several children were not part of this dream of a newly privatized family life (Murphy 2002; Xie, Gu, and Hardee 2000; PDSC 2003b, 2003e; on the rise of the private family, see Yan 2003). Nor even, it seems, was a son: Chinese social scientists report that young upwardly mobile rural couples are now growing less concerned about their child's gender than about its prospects for social mobility (SG 23Dec03 BJ).

Even as the costs of rearing children were rising, the economic and emotional advantages of having several were shrinking. Although children continued to contribute to the family economy, changes in the rural economy (declining plot sizes, a growing labor surplus) coupled with declining parental control over young people's incomes (a result in part of earlier family division and urban migration of youth) greatly reduced that contribution (Yan 2003; SG 23Dec03 BJ). For parents, however, the biggest and most frightening concern was the growing unwillingness of sons to honor their most fundamental obligation: to support them in old age (Yan 2003; Zhang 2004).

Behind that widespread decline in filiality lay the erosion of the male-centered intergenerational contract, the foundation and cement of Chinese peasant family life. Indeed, the values of children, and hence the desires for them, have dwindled precisely because the patriarchal family itself has been increasingly undermined by decades of socialist construction and marketizing reform. The socialization of the means of production during the collective era had already weakened the reciprocal bond between parents and sons by depriving parents of their major economic contribution to their sons, the family's landed estate. Marketizing reform greatly accelerated the process by handing resources and power to the young, including to young daughters-in-law, who succeeded in precipitating ever-earlier family division (Selden 1993; Judd 1994; Yan 2003; Wang 2004). In the 1980s the newly emerging unfiliality of sons was evident in bitter and very public family disputes between married brothers over which had to support the elderly parents (Greenhalgh 1994b; Zhang Hong 2001). In some areas, the 1990s brought the veritable collapse of the tradition of filial piety and the refusal of even only sons to respect their time-honored obligations. As time passed, growing numbers of rural parents found themselves virtually abandoned by their sons and fearful for their futures in an environment with neither social security nor health insurance (Yan 2003; Zhang Hong 2004; Pang, de Braun, and Rozelle 2004). Increasingly in the 2000s, the rural elderly are preferring to eke out a meager living on their own rather than suffer the conflict and abuse that often comes with co-residence with sons. Unable to afford medical care, when

serious illness strikes, growing numbers are taking their own lives, contributing to a rising trend of elder suicide in the villages.

The growing unfiliality of sons, however, had one positive outcome: a newfound appreciation for the value of daughters. Already in the 1980s parents were expressing definite desires for daughters, seeing them as more emotionally caring than sons and gaining value in the labor market of the reform economy. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, village parents in some places were actively cultivating their daughters as emotional and even economic caregivers in old age (Murphy 2002; Zhang 2003; Yan 2003; also Miller 2004). Although still incipient, in at least some areas the desire for a daughter may be slowly becoming a preference for a daughter.

After years of violent struggle, in which peasants successfully impressed their son preferences into state fertility norms, the period of rapid marketization that began around 1993–1994 has seen a remarkable, if still partial, convergence in norms, in which couples in some areas have begun to embrace the official one-to-two-child norm as their own. Virtually unremarked in the Western literature on China's population politics, these changes in peasant fertility culture are politically significant. Together with other changes in the political and legal culture, including the spread of the notion of an individual's right to be free from official abuse, they have quietly enabled the routinizing reforms introduced to date. These cultural changes are also promoting a less conflictual politics of population in many villages today. In some localities, ethnographers and journalists report, birth planning is becoming more genuinely voluntary, and people's wishes are shaping their contraceptive and fertility practices in ways not seen since the 1960s (Chang 2001; Zhang 2002; PDSC 2003e; Yan 2003; Merli, Qian, and Smith 2004).¹³ In those areas, the production of one high-quality child has become little short of a "popular social vogue" (PDSC 2003e, 20).

After 20 years of ferocious struggle over the planning of births, both China's rural people and observers of Chinese population politics can breathe a sigh of relief. Yet welcome though these changes are, they deserve at most ambivalent celebration, for the easing of tensions among the living has been achieved at the cost of spreading violence against the not-yet-born and a growing masculinization of Chinese society. We return to these consequences of the rural politics of population numbers in the next chapter.

Creating One-Child Families in the Cities: The 1980s

The conditions of urban life gave rise to a much less confrontational politics of population numbers. In the cities the combination of low childbearing desires and urbanites' structural dependence on their workplaces enabled birth

cadres to enforce the one-child policy in the way long considered ideal by program leaders: with propaganda and education as the mainstay. A close look at the micropolitics of policy enforcement reveals urban birth work to be a classic case of the political production of "voluntarism" (Vogel 1967). Through tight institutional control over the essentials of life and intense ideological indoctrination in the necessity of individual sacrifice in the face of national crisis, urban birth cadres succeeded in producing both reproductively disciplined female bodies and what women themselves described as "voluntary" (*ziyuan*) compliance with the one-child policy. This politically "conscientious" (*zijue*) voluntarism was not voluntarism in the sense of free choice. In the Chinese enforcement repertoire, however, it was the best of outcomes, the antithesis of the coerced compliance the party had to settle for in the villages.

URBAN REPRODUCTIVE DESIRES

Like their rural counterparts, in the 1980s the majority of urbanites considered the two-child family to be ideal, though city residents expressed no interest in having three children (Whyte and Gu 1987; Scharping 2003; Feng and Zheng 2002). Son preference, while still conspicuous, was also weaker in the cities. Indeed, among some groups, the 1980s saw the beginning of not merely an acceptance of but even a genuine preference for daughters, who were seen as emotionally closer to their parents and thus more likely to provide personal care in old age (Wolf 1985; Milwertz 1997).

These lower childbearing desires were rooted in a different constellation of child costs and benefits in the urban areas. Whereas in the villages sons were vital sources of labor and old-age security, in the cities parents supported themselves through wage-labor jobs that also provided pensions, the economic foundation of a secure old age. While the social and economic values of children were lower, the direct and indirect (or time) costs of raising children were much steeper in the cities.¹⁴ Those costs rose rapidly in the 1980s, as prices of basic necessities climbed, the state and work unit cut back on social supports, and cultural expectations about the ingredients of proper childrearing grew ever more demanding. By the end of the decade, growing numbers of women were saying that they had the time, money, and energy to raise but one child (Milwertz 1997, 127; also Gates 1993). In the cities, the desire to have more than one child remained deep, but the realities of urban life limited the number of children parents were able to raise well and made sons less vital to family welfare and survival. These features of urban family life would make it easier to enforce the one-child norm.

THE PRODUCTION OF DISCIPLINED BODIES AND REPRODUCTIVE "VOLUNTARISM"

Enforcement was also eased by the tight networks of control through which the regime managed the urban population. Even after the introduction of a private sector, the great majority of urban people remained employed in state-controlled organizations (Tang and Parish 2000). Couples' structural dependence on their workplaces, which provided not only jobs but also housing, health care, pensions, and other essentials, made active resistance to the one-child rule, if not impossible, then prohibitively costly, for violation of the policy might well bring loss of job and all that went with it. These mechanisms of control permitted birth cadres to enforce the policy through institutionally and ideologically produced "voluntarism," the Maoist ideal. Producing reproductive voluntarism involved the creation of disciplined bodies and accepting minds.

Tight institutional controls enabled birth cadres in the workplace and neighborhood to cooperate in the creation of maternal bodies highly disciplined according to the contraceptive and fertility norms of state policy. At their workplaces, women were subject to tight surveillance and control of their reproductive lives, with everything from their premarital health to their marital status, monthly periods, contraceptive practices, and pregnancies subject to close monitoring and mandatory management (e.g., Rofel 1999). Supplementing the vertical control of the workplace was the daily, horizontal surveillance achieved by the street or residential neighborhood, whose "granny police" of voluntary enforcers kept an eagle eye out for anomalous behaviors and tracked down the noncompliant (Burns 1985; WuDunn 1991c). Together the two formed a tight network of reproductive surveillance and control. Symbolic protests against the relentless control were possible—a woman might, for example, refuse to fill out the proper forms, skip mandated gynecological exams, or even manufacture a physiological excuse for not using an IUD. But there were few avenues for real escape (Croll 1985; Milwertz 1997; Rofel 1999).

Despite the gap between the popular two-child ideal and the state's one-child norm, Cecelia Milwertz's in-depth research in Beijing and Shenyang suggests that, after an initial period of hostility to the new norm, over the 1980s women came to the politically "conscientious acceptance" (*zijue jieshou*) of the state planning of one-child families (Milwertz 1997; on the early 1980s, see Croll 1985; Wolf 1985). Women's tolerant attitude toward cadres' micromanagement of their bodies stemmed in part from their acceptance of the official line that China faced a crisis of human numbers that was sabotaging its development, necessitating a policy of one child for all

(Milwertz 1997; Nie 1999, 131–139). Individuals must voluntarily submit to “the requirement of the nation,” the women Milwertz studied felt, because the needs of the nation overrode their own. Despite the deep intrusions birth cadres made in their bodies and lives, women did not find those interventions offensive because they felt that the cadres were only doing the job assigned by their superiors, and they were exercising control in “concerned” (*guanxin*) and “caring” (*zhaogu*) ways. Caring policy enforcement was enforcement that took account of the needs and interests of the women—within the limits set by the policy. In a classic example of politically produced “voluntarism,” the women Milwertz studied felt that their cooperation with the intrusive demands of the birth cadres was quite voluntary.

The urban and rural politics of population numbers that unfolded during the 1980s thus differed in systematic ways. Both forms of politics were corporeal and gendered, centering intensely on the control of the female reproductive body. However, in the cities, because meaningful resistance was virtually impossible, enforcement could rely on ideology rather than coercion. Although urban women were subject to structural or institutional coercion applied persistently over their reproductive lives, they escaped the violent crackdowns imposed on the peasantry. The urban politics of population also had a different temporality. Unlike rural policy enforcement, which grew severe and lax with cycles of coercion and resistance, the urban pattern of meticulous control and “voluntary” compliance was more stable. These two patterns of politics also produced differences in birth policy—a one-to-two-child (or daughter-only) policy in the villages and an ungendered one-child-for-all rule in the cities. Although these locational differences were sharp during the long 1980s, since the mid-1990s a combination of forces—massive rural-to-urban migration, the spread of urban consumer culture, the decline in rural childbearing desires, and important shifts in the birth program itself—has led to some blurring of the rural-urban distinction.

Producing the “Quality” Singleton in the Cities: The 1990s and Early 2000s

From the beginning, the state’s effort to restrict population numbers was intimately linked to another initiative, that of guaranteeing the “quality” of the next generation. Launched in the late 1970s, the eugenics campaign—*yousheng youyu*, literally superior birth and childrearing—embraced a broad and eclectic array of scientific research programs, state policies, and social activities promoting top-quality health care and education for the young (Champagne 1992; Bakken 2000). (The slogan now has a third component, *youjiao*, for superior education.) Genetic improvement of future generations

was certainly part of this. Yet far from mere genetic engineering, the PRC approach to producing quality citizens was based on the philosophy that people are formed by a wide range of genetic, environmental, and educational factors, most of which can be shaped so that that human potential is molded to meet national needs (Champagne 1992, 135–136). For the birth planning establishment, promoting the quality child simultaneously justified its widely unpopular big push for low quantity, and legitimated its claim to be a scientific modernizer capable of transforming China’s people into a modern populace equipped to compete in the more global marketplace of the future. As a popular text on the education of the single child has put it, under conditions of economic and political competition in the twenty-first century, China’s entry into the world requires a large pool of superior talents (*youxiu rencai*) with world-class educations based on modern science and technology and up to international standards (Wu ed. 2003, 86–88). The emphasis on quality also put a benign face on the one-child policy, presenting the party-state as a caring parent whose heart lay first and foremost with the young. State concerns both tapped into and further provoked parents’ anxieties about whether their one (or, in the villages, two) offspring would not only survive but also grow into healthy, well-educated, competitive young adults able to succeed in a rapidly changing society and provide for them in old age.

Because the one-child family spread more rapidly in the cities, and because the scientific and political resources for population upgrading were concentrated in the urban areas, the quality project developed earlier in the cities than in the villages. In the urban areas, state and parental investments in the bodies and minds of the young began to grow rapidly in the 1980s, when the single child became the “sun” around which all planets revolved (Wren 1982). Investments in the young exploded in the 1990s, when China’s consumer economy intensified and the quest for the perfect child became a veritable national obsession (WuDunn 1991a; Tyler 1996; Anagnost 1997b). Growing preferences for one-child families contributed to the intensified focus on creating perfect offspring. During the 1990s, the majority of urban women came to view one child as the ideal number. In 2001, 52.4 percent of all urban women and 61.1 percent of those in their twenties named the one-child family the ideal (Table 3). Most urbanites expressed no preference regarding the gender of their child. Indeed, in some studies, more respondents preferred daughters than sons (Feng and Zheng 2002). In the early 2000s, childbearing norms seem to have fallen even further. Young couples wanting no children (dubbed DINKS, for double income no kids) were a growing social presence, exceeding 10 percent of all reproductive-age couples in major cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing (*China Today* 2003). Quite a few urbanites who had

had one child in the 1980s said they would have remained childless had they known how much raising just one would cost (Fong 2004, 74–75).

By contrast, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the rural population was more likely to be labeled “low in quality” and targeted for heavy-handed eugenic improvement and numerical control through the sterilization of those designated “unfit” and “drains on society” for “genetic” reasons (Chapter 4, Pearson 1995; Johnson 1997; Dikotter 1998).¹⁵ Although the eugenic impulse has remained strong, the prevention of “defective” births has absorbed much less energy than the promotion of “quality” births. By the 1990s, state and parental efforts to upgrade child quality through the enrichment of child nutrition and education had become increasingly prominent features of village life as well (see, esp., Jing 2000b; Murphy 2004; see also Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994; Zhang 2003).

Judged by the amount of energy and other resources expended by a broad range of social forces, in the post-Deng era quality appears to be replacing quantity as the central arena of population politics. This shift marks a profound transformation in the nature of population power and politics in China. At the most general level, this was a metamorphosis from Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics. This reordering has involved three crucial developments. First, the shift to quality has introduced a new type of norm and, in turn, a new form of population regulation. The quantity norm has been fundamentally repressive, requiring continued, often coercive, regulatory efforts by the state to ensure enforcement. The quality norm, however, is seductive, coinciding with already sky-high popular aspirations for the next generation. State regulation has been accompanied by growing self-regulation emphasizing individual imperatives for parents to raise their children according to the new norms. Second, the shift to quality has given rise to two newly defined and central objects of societal investment and control: the “good mother,” who disciplines her body and embraces scientific mothering practices, and the “quality child,” who fosters his own bodily and mental capacities. These are neoliberal subjects par excellence.

Third, the emphasis on quality has brought an expansion in the number and range of authorities promulgating child ideals and, in turn, the rapid development of professional/disciplinary power over population and the emergence of the market as a major force disciplining individual desire. The birth commission and its science advisors have been virtually the sole authorities on population quantity. The authorities on child health and education are many and diverse, however, ranging from traditional Chinese medical and religious authorities to other agencies of the state (especially the medical and educational bureaucracies), to international organizations (such as WHO and agencies of the U.N.), to Chinese and transnational corporations. Each seeks to

define the norms guiding health and education and to convince parents (and children themselves) to adopt their norms and related practices and products. As population quality is becoming the object of attention of growing numbers of social forces, the state's birth planning establishment is losing the power to directly shape the norms and practices guiding the cultivation of Chinese life to other entities, including, importantly, capitalist corporations. The growing role of transnational corporations, and of market logics of consumer desire and global fantasy more generally, is part of a larger globalization—and neoliberalization—of Chinese population politics charted in this book. This section illustrates some of these broad shifts, focusing on urban areas, where the politics of population quality is more developed and more systematically studied. It traces three aspects or phases of this politics: the production of a newly important subject, the “good mother;” the creation of scientific mothering practices and the disciplined maternal body; and the production of the ultimate goal, the disciplined “quality child.”

PRODUCING THE “GOOD (SELF-SACRIFICING, SCIENTIFIC) MOTHER”

At the outset of the reform era, a broad array of social and cultural forces worked to define the quality project as a woman's—that is, a mother's—project. Together these forces created a newly salient subject, the “good mother,” and defined her as one who would sacrifice her own interests for her child and use scientific methods to raise a “quality” youngster. The first agent shaping this maternal subject was the state bureaucracy. From the initiation of the one-child policy, the birth program targeted mothers as the key creators of the superior child. Focusing initially on newlyweds, birth planning workers and other agents of the state actively promoted “eugenic” (healthy) births to encourage adherence to the one-child rule (Evans 1997). Through premarital and prenatal testing, medical workers sought to prevent genetically problematic marriages and eliminate “poor quality” embryos, ensuring the genetic soundness of every child (Song 1985). The eugenic campaign gained momentum in the mid-1980s, when the educational efforts were broadened to include the health and education of the only child. In mandatory parenting classes, in propaganda disseminated through the media, and in contests on child-rearing knowledge, the birth program instructed mothers in scientific methods of bodily improvement (feeding, illness prevention, and so on) and intelligence enhancement, all directed at developing the child into a well-bodied, well-educated talent for the nation. These efforts were supported by a burgeoning and avidly consumed popular literature of books, magazines, and newspapers instructing parents, and especially mothers, on techniques for the production of “superior” children (Champagne 1992).¹⁶

Broader currents in the culture and economy actively supported the state's efforts to turn mothers into dedicated and skilled nurturers of their single children. The early 1980s was a time of renewed political and cultural emphasis on women's domestic roles—and corresponding deemphasis on their work roles (Robinson 1985; Jacka 1990). The state's efforts to upgrade population both benefited from these new notions of femininity and, in turn, contributed to them. In the Maoist years, state propaganda had stressed gender equality, promoting the ideal of the "iron girl" (*tie guniang*) who could compete successfully in the public sphere long dominated by men, while continuing to shoulder primary responsibility for domestic work. As part of the broader scientization and biologization of politics and society, in the early reform years the emphasis on gender similarity and equality gave way to a stress on gender difference and inequality located in the body (Woo 1994; Evans 1997; Yang 1999a, 1999b). Differences in reproductive physiology were now said to dictate a new division of labor, grounded in "nature," in which women's roles and identities were based largely on their activities in the domestic domain. In the early 1980s, when a tight labor market led to widespread calls for women to "return to the kitchen," the traditional notion of the "virtuous wife and good mother" (*xianqi liangmu*) was officially revived and reinforced to encourage women to take those domestic roles seriously (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Weeks 1989; Rosen 1991; Hooper 1998). Being a virtuous wife and good mother took on new meanings in the reform era, however. Instead of being blindly obedient to her husband, the modern woman was expected to become an active and skillful manager of family life—and cocreator, with the state, of the perfect single child.

With modern parenting defined as scientific parenting—where "scientific" denoted authoritative more than based on scientific research (Champagne 1992, 41–43)—and parenting largely a maternal affair, the mothering of a single child expanded into a demanding and complicated, yet important endeavor. Warning anxious new parents to rely on modern expertise rather than traditional wisdom purveyed by "backward" grandparents, the pedagogical materials divided child intelligence into some ten-odd specific abilities, listed parenting activities that promoted each, and presented developmental milestones and tests that parents could use to determine where their child ranked on the scale from "backward" to "prodigy." With every parent urged to create a genius, and those who shirked their duties labeled "sick in thought" (*sixiang bing*), the pressures on parents were intense (Champagne 1992). By the early 2000s, if not before, parents were expected to teach their youngsters not only arithmetic, Chinese characters, the arts, and emotional intelligence, but also English, a crucial skill for the twenty-first century. Popular books introduced children and their parents to such Western favorites as

the songs "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" and "London Bridge Is Falling Down" and the fairy tales "Snow White" and "Cinderella" (Qu ed. 2001). With all these responsibilities on their shoulders, it is not surprising that, during the 1980s and 1990s, mothers of single children reported devoting more time, energy, and money to perfecting their one child than their own mothers had spent nurturing several youngsters (Milwertz 1997).

Despite the heavy demands of this new, intensive form of mothering and despite a recent history of apparently close identification with work outside the home, many women actively embraced their new roles as family nurturers who sacrificed their own needs for the sake of their children. They did so not only because the economy now devalued their paid labor while the culture tied women's worth to those reproductive and caregiving roles; the new emphases on mothering also dovetailed with their own intensified needs to ensure support from a child in old age. Although most city couples could expect pensions, those pensions were often inadequate (Unger 1993). Pensions for women were especially limited. Pension or not, a child was irreplaceable as a source of emotional support and, even more so, practical help, especially when illness or physical disability set in (Ikels 1996; Milwertz 1997). Sociological research shows that well into the reform era, adult children in urban areas provided extensive assistance to their elderly parents. While both sons and daughters supplied monetary support, daughters were more filial in providing daily assistance and personal care (Whyte and Xu 2003). Far from reducing the need for a child in old age, changes brought about by the reforms—in particular, wage reform, mandatory retirement, the reduction in pensions and state subsidies for health care, and the growing geographical mobility of children—worked to reinforce the importance of family support for the elderly (Ikels 1993; Whyte ed. 2003; Fong 2004). Moreover, with only one child, it became an urgent matter to ensure that the child would be willing to honor his or her filial obligations. Following the logic of the intergenerational contract, mothers dealt with these heightened anxieties by investing ever more heavily in their only child. Their aim was to cultivate gratitude and indebtedness in their child, so that the child would reciprocate with financial support, health care subsidies, and nursing care later on.¹⁷ Anxious mothers went so far as to pay for pianos and piano lessons for their youngsters, not because they hoped the child would become a good pianist but to nurture in the child a sense of heavy obligation that would be fulfilled in later years (Milwertz 1997; Iritani 2003). In the 1980s, then, women's own worries about their future worked together with broader cultural shifts in the meaning of femininity and with birth planning's new emphasis on population quality to produce a generation of young mothers deeply committed to nurturing perfect children.

CREATING SCIENTIFIC MOTHERING PRACTICES

Creating healthy babies required healthy mothers embracing health-promoting maternal practices. To this end, the population and medical establishments have undertaken concerted efforts to encourage women to give up traditional practices surrounding pregnancy and infant feeding and to adopt the Western scientific, or biomedical, model of motherhood instead. Popular books on fetal education (*taijiao*) and eugenic births have depicted pregnancy and infant care as difficult tasks that could be successfully accomplished only with the help of medical experts and the charts, diagrams, and lists of standards offered in their pages (e.g., Wang ed. 2002; Liu and Zhang eds. 1999).

A centerpiece of these efforts was a large-scale government program, launched in the early 1990s in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to encourage women to breastfeed their infants. Suzanne Gottschang's anthropological research on the politics of breastfeeding in a Beijing maternity hospital illuminates the micropolitical dynamics surrounding child quality in the 1990s and early 2000s (Gottschang 2000, 2001). Those dynamics involve the struggles between competing—and cooperating—authorities to establish and instill maternal norms, and the growing success of foreign corporations and market logics of consumer desire in influencing health care practices.

Following U.N. and Chinese government guidelines, in the 1990s more than 5,000 urban hospitals were reorganized into "baby friendly hospitals." The dominant authority in restructuring these institutions was the science promoted by the state's birth planning and medical fields. Medical workers used a variety of means to get women to relinquish private judgment to medical experts, accepting scientific ideas and practices as authoritative. For example, hospital space and time were reorganized in ways that regulated women's ideas, practices, and bodies in relation to infant feeding. Mandatory prenatal classes, postpartum exercises, diet regimes, and breastfeeding sessions conveyed the message that medically guided bodily discipline is best to ensure the health of mother and child. Educational materials presented in classes, on posters, and in brochures also promoted the new routines as scientific, modern, and necessary for child health.

Science was not the only voice of authority in the hospital, however. Transnational consumer culture, with its temptations and sensualities, was also competing to establish and instill maternal norms. Exploited by food and pharmaceutical companies eager to sell health-related products, consumerist images of the sexy, slender maternal body were beamed out at young mothers in colorful advertisements and wall posters (Hooper 1998; Andrews and

Shen 2002). Advertising for maternal nutritional supplements and infant formula, while promoting the goods as scientific products that would foster the development of healthy infant brains, also presented images of the sexualized and consumerist mother who breastfed while remaining slim and beautiful. The two forces, state bureaucracy and capitalist corporation, not only competed by presenting differing norms for the maternal body, they also worked in tandem in appealing to science and modernity as bases for making health care decisions. Reflecting growing corporate influence on the state, foreign food corporations have actually participated in the construction of official child nutrition norms (Jing 2000a, 20).¹⁸ In the hospital Gottschang studied, medical professionals distributed brochures prepared by multinational corporations to educate women about healthful practices, dispensing consumer advertising along with advice on health. Meantime, a third, quieter but still influential voice of authority, tradition, was competing for women's loyalties. Although tradition had no formal representation in the hospital, traditional Chinese medical and religious prescriptions for the care of the pregnant and postpartum body and the newborn, taught by mothers and grandmothers, also influenced young mothers' thinking.

In a wider culture that associates knowledge of scientific ideas and the consumption of scientific products with modernity, young mothers found the appeals to science seductive. All the mothers studied in depth wanted to raise healthy children and many indicated that they would consult a biomedical professional if they encountered health problems. The imperatives of producing a healthy infant, however, often conflicted with women's desires to maintain their own femininity in a culture that idealized the slender, sexualized body. Facing such conflicting norms, women followed some of the program's ideas, tried and rejected other recommended practices, and rejected still others outright. Many rebelled against the idea of attending classes, insisting that breastfeeding and mothering were "natural" activities on which their mothers were the main authorities in any case (Gottschang 2000, 175). Only one-third followed the WHO/UNICEF guideline and breastfed their infants the full recommended four months. In this microcosm of the societal politics of quality, the images and products of transnational consumerist culture were clearly gaining force relative to those of state science.

NURTURING THE "QUALITY (DISCIPLINED, CONSUMERIST, GLOBALIST) CHILD"

The ultimate goal of all these efforts was the "quality child," the personification and guarantor of a new and prosperous global future. In the 1980s, the birth program propagandized and promoted health and education, but other forces, each with its own interests, soon began to take over the work of

creating that quality child. From the early 1980s, other government agencies, especially the Ministry of Health, working with the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine, began actively promoting child health and nutrition through the development of nutrition surveys, the establishment of dietary guidelines, and the formation of the Program for Chinese Children's Development for the 1990s. Still other agencies oversaw the creation of a children's food industry, the formulation of laws protecting children's health, and the establishment of agencies to enforce them (Guldan 2000; Zhao 2000). In the 1980s and 1990s children's health became a major government enterprise.

The 1990s brought a more economically driven mode of producing quality children. As in the West, in China the explosion of the market brought a growing commercialization of childhood and new definitions of child quality in terms of the consumption of consumer goods and services. Foreign firms played an active role in this process. Since the early 1990s, when corporations were permitted to advertise their products on television, big companies, including such prominent transnational firms as McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and H. J. Heinz Co., have become some of the biggest promoters—and sellers—of “child quality.” These companies have done what business firms do: define the public's needs in terms of the consumption of their products. McDonalds has been especially creative and successful in tapping into parental anxieties in order to create a market for its goods. The company has advertised its food as scientifically designed and nutritionally beneficial, while creating special child-centered events (such as talent and essay contests) orchestrated to entertain and educate the young diners (Yan 1997; on similar efforts by KFC, see Lozada 2000). Parents have responded enthusiastically, seeing opportunities to nurture the bodies and minds of their youngsters while giving them an opportunity to participate in transnational, especially American, culture. Exploiting the burgeoning opportunities in China, food and pharmaceutical companies have introduced an ever-proliferating number of infant, baby, and toddler products, associating their goods with science, modernity, foreignness, and progress. A visit to some of Beijing's stores for children in late 2003 revealed shelf after shelf of foreign goods—formula, food, breastfeeding devices, advice books, educational toys—all colorfully packaged and offered at much higher cost than Chinese goods. In the absence of strict regulation of product claims, scientific exaggerations have become commonplace (Guo 2000). In the early 1990s, items such as chocolate and potato chips were promoted as “opening up [child] intelligence” (Anagnost 1997b, 217). By the early 2000s, even diapers were being promoted as products scientifically proven to develop the infant brain. Working with, through, and around the state, by the 2000s corporations had come to play an important role in establishing and instilling the norms of “quality” childhood,

creating a young generation “deeply engaged with the products and advertising of global capitalism” (Davis and Sensenbrenner 2000, 54; on state-business relations, see Zhao Yang 2000). By the turn of the century, then, the politics of population quality had been deeply infused with the market logics of individual consumer desire and global consumption fantasy—the fantasy that one can participate in global culture and even become a kind of global person through the consumption of foreign, especially Western, products.

The production of the “quality” child has also brought striking shifts in the locus of population regulation. In the 1980s, the state's new norms for child health and education were eagerly, even anxiously, taken up and pursued by parents. With virtually all urban couples having but one child, that child, whether boy or girl, became a precious commodity. Parents and grandparents invested ever more heavily in their “little emperors and empresses,” purchasing for them every health- and education-related food, toy, lesson, and experience available, in an effort to ensure their educational and career successes in an ever more competitive environment (Jing ed. 2000; Lozada 2000; Davis and Sensenbrenner 2000; Fong 2004; Rosen 2004). Such investments are fueled by such success stories as that told by the 2001 best seller, *Harvard Girl Liu Ying*, whose parents scientifically prepared their daughter from birth to get into Harvard University (Rosen 2004). Parents have made enormous sacrifices for their children, spending over half their monthly incomes on their youngsters. In the early 1990s, there were urban families who could not afford telephones or running hot water who nevertheless purchased computers and video games for their child (WuDunn 1991a).

These extraordinary efforts have been driven by the deep desires, anxieties, and fears of parents (Anagnost 1997b; Lei 2003; Fong 2004; Rosen 2004). The desire is to compensate for their own deprived Cultural Revolution childhoods by seeing that their child has everything they did not. Larger consumer investments in the young have also been motivated by the class anxiety of urban parents fearful of losing their privileged position in an economy marked by growing economic differentiation. Parents' obsessive focus on their children is also motivated by the fear that their only child might eventually abandon them—financially, socially, and/or emotionally. To counter that dreaded prospect, parents have “drowned their children in love” (*ni ai*) and commodities, in desperate hope that those investments will be reciprocated by filial comfort, economic support, and nursing care in old age.

With parental anxieties, corporate interests, professional and state concerns all converging on the single child, the result has been the production of a highly disciplined childhood, in which few periods and few arenas of the young child's life have been left unprogrammed. Unstructured play has been increasingly squeezed out of urban Chinese childhood. Over the

1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, urban childhood has been subject to the “scientific” (educational, psychological, dietary, medical) disciplines of the professions and state bureaucracy and the consumer disciplines of the markets, all specifying norms for the quality child. With parents increasingly internalizing these norms and enforcing them as “self-disciplines” of the family, Chinese children growing up in these decades have lived closely monitored, managed, and even regimented lives (e.g., Tyler 1996).

Meantime, parental overindulgence in their singletons has led to further shifts in the locus of regulation and the emergence of the quintessential self-cultivating neoliberal subject. Parents anxious to secure their child’s affections have allowed their youngsters to choose the toys, snacks, fast foods, and other items they will buy, turning them into increasingly independent and sophisticated “superconsumers” (WuDunn 1991a). Ethnographers report that children are now making decisions on everything from food to entertainment to large commodity purchases, including numerous items that affect their health, education, and training (Yan 1997; Watson ed. 1997; Chee 2000; Guo 2000; Lozada 2000; Iritani 2003). Companies are targeting children, directing their advertisements to young eyes and ears, in the process turning China’s little emperors into what experts call the “single greatest force in determining consumer decisions today” (Tyler 1996, A6).

While the decision-making power of children should not be exaggerated, their growing role in making individual and household consumer decisions amounts to a new kind of self-regulation of population “quality”: by the child himself or herself. These trends are noteworthy because in a culture whose glossy advertisements celebrate the foreign—especially the Western (*yang*)—children are increasingly choosing “trendy” products with global cachet, turning themselves into consumerist versions of the global citizens the state has long sought to create. In a process that the regime probably did not envision, certainly does not control, yet may ambivalently endorse—after all, a prosperous middle class is likely to support the regime—market forces have combined with the state’s programmatic efforts and societal dynamics to create a new kind of highly independent, market-minded “quality” person who will increasingly make up the citizenry of twenty-first century China. The result is a kind of “autonomous,” neoliberal subject whose interests, desires, and choices align with those of a neoliberalizing market and state that have shaped those interests, desires, and choices to their own ends.

Restratifying Chinese Society

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER charted the rapid governmentalization of population in the post-Mao years and the effects on those enjoined to be key actors in that process—reproductive women, mothers, and children. In this chapter and the next, we turn to the broader and deeper effects of the intensified governance of population on China’s society and politics as a whole. In both chapters we deal somewhat with the effects of professional disciplinary power and individual self-cultivation, but our primary focus is on the effects of bureaucratic state power. Throughout most of the post-Mao period, the state was the dominant locus of population governance, and it was one with formidable powers to reorder social and political life. To understand the broad consequences of governmentalization—some predicted, many more unpredicted—we must begin then by understanding the larger capacities and projects of the PRC regime.

Since it came to power in 1949, the Chinese communist regime has sought to remake the Chinese social order through the creation and forceful imposition of new social categories. Such classifications of life have ranged from special categories created during the Cultural Revolution to punish class enemies, to broader classifications of class, residence, ethnicity, and gender designed to organize and regulate the whole population.¹ Yet the effects of these state projects have almost always differed from their lofty goals of creating a socialist modernity featuring a rapidly industrializing economy and egalitarian society. Only too often have these classifying practices replaced old stratifications with new and set some categories of persons back, even as others have been propelled forward. And so it has been with population.

The greatest social engineering venture of the reform era, the state’s birth planning project sought to quantitatively trim and qualitatively upgrade the Chinese population in order to speed China’s transformation into a global