

Planned births, unplanned persons:

"Population" in the making of Chinese modernity

ABSTRACT

In this article I suggest that "population" operates as a capacious domain of modern power, with its own imaginaries, discourses, bureaucratic apparatuses, and social effects. Taking China, home to the world's largest population, as my ethnographic case, I examine the role of "birth planning," China's distinctive Marxist-Leninist-Maoist approach to population control, in the construction of "Chinese socialist modernity." I trace the historical, political, and bureaucratic process by which the state's planned birth project, designed to create a modern, planned population, produced not only a large group of planned persons but also a huge outcast group of unplanned, "black" persons who, as legal nonpersons, exist on the margins of society, lacking citizenship rights and state benefits. With its gargantuan population and fearsome birth planning program, China offers striking evidence of the social power of governmental projects of population control—to create new classifications of social life, new types of personhood, and new forms of social and political exclusion. [*population, modernity, personhood, China*]

At the heart of China's renowned population control program lies a modernist binary that cries out for analytic and political attention: the planned–unplanned birth. At the dawn of the 21st century, China is full of images of the poster child of the nation's future. Invariably an urban child, it is the planned progeny, the well-educated, well-dressed, healthy, "quality" child who is playing and laughing as it graces the cities' pleasure spots. Elsewhere—never in the same frame—are cultural images of the unplanned child who is not supposed to exist. Usually the offspring of rural migrants in the cities, it is the uneducated, ragged, unhealthy child who is crying or fighting, disrupting social order, and generally polluting the cities' margins. These two images are never seen together, but they belong side by side, for the creation of the planned child—the marker of modernity, the savior of the nation—has entailed the simultaneous creation of the unplanned child—the sign of backwardness, the obstacle that keeps China from attaining its rightful place on the world stage.¹ Official and scholarly neglect of the unplanned child—its numbers, its socioeconomic plight, its subjectivity—adds to the importance of attending to it.

State-created, bureaucratically elaborated social categories participate in the construction not only of cultural images but also of social reality. Inspired by Foucault's (1975, 1978, 1979, 1991) writings on social normalization and government rationality in modern society, a new body of work on the anthropology of modernity has traced the modernist discourses and governmental technologies through which such normalizing categories are formed and made effective (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990; Gupta 1998; Holston 1989; Horn 1994; Mitchell 2000; Rabinow 1989; on classification more generally, Bowker and Star 1999). In the post-World War II era, the dominant domain of such modernist discourses and technologies in Third World countries such as China is "development." (Here and below, I use quotation marks to highlight the discursive construction of terms.) The anthropological work suggests that development is not merely a rise in economic productivity and living standards. It is also a field of power, with its own imagined futures, modernist discourses, governmental institutions and practices, and social effects (e.g., Arce and Long 2000; Cooper and Packard 1997; Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990; Gupta 1998; Pigg 1992). Development is also a form of government rationality, a

logic of state whose object is the population and whose aim is normalization of society in the name of optimizing the health, welfare, and usefulness of the population (Foucault 1991; Rabinow 1989; on governmental reasoning and technologies generally, Dean 1999; Gordon 1991; Rose 1999). Ethnographic research suggests that the discourses and apparatuses of development are highly *productive*—but rarely in the ways the planners intend (esp. Ferguson 1990; Holston 1989, 1999).² Once bureaucratically embedded in society, the discursive and material practices of development have far-ranging, often unanticipated, effects on the distribution of material goods, the allocation of social power, and the subjectivities of human beings.

Like the discourses of modernity generally, the discourses of development break reality down into discrete sectors—agriculture, industry, public health, urban planning, and so forth (Escobar 1995:60). One developmental sector that has largely escaped the gaze of critical students of modernity is “population.”³ The growing literature in demographic anthropology (e.g., Basu and Aaby 1998; Kertzer and Fricke 1997; Schneider and Schneider 1996) represents an anthropological engagement with (both critique of and elaboration on) demography. As an interdisciplinary conversation with population science, demographic anthropology has not found it especially useful to make the reflexive move of turning its object of study, population, into a figure of discourse, “population.” Medical anthropology has devoted substantial attention to reproduction in Third World contexts (recent contributions can be found in Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Lock and Kaufert 1998). This work, however, has tended to take a bottom-up look at women’s resistance and accommodation to the biomedicalization of childbearing. What is missing is a top-down perspective on states and human scientists as agents in creating the discourses and programs, which women may embrace or contest (an exception is Kligman 1998).⁴ Although the contours of the population sector of development discourse and practice remain sketchily mapped in anthropology, a glance at the large public health and demographic literatures on family planning programs leaves the impression that population operates as a vast field of power, with its own imaginaries, discourses, institutional apparatuses, political technologies, and social effects. The field of “population” merits much more attention, for population is an especially naturalized category (Clarke 1998; Horn 1994). The taken-for-granted character of population has discouraged inquiry into the biopolitical dynamics and sociopolitical effects of governmental projects of population management, despite the pervasiveness of such projects in modern life.

“Population” and modern power: Classifying life, producing the political

Emerging perspectives on governmentality give us analytic purchase on the mentalities, techniques, and effects of population (Dean 1999; Foucault 1991; Rose 1999). Focusing on more or less rationalized schemes and programs to shape conduct according to specific norms so as to achieve particular ends, such approaches allow us to link “big” questions of government to “little” questions of individual identity and to see the historicity and contingency of the political world we take for granted. This work highlights the fundamental role of knowledge (or systematic thought) and its classificatory schemes in the making of the political. It enables us to see how governmental rationalities (plans, problematizations, visions, know-hows) become constitutive of government itself, defining such things as its object, its strategic rationale and aims, and the categories into which life is sorted for purposes of administration and optimization. This emphasis on classificatory schemes for life directs our attention to the *social categories* embedded in governmental technologies for population surveillance, management, and restriction. Such technologies include the census, the survey, and the family planning program. Though seemingly neutral, and purportedly even beneficent, the categories embedded in state projects for population counting and control (“over” versus “underpopulated,” “high” versus “low fertility,” and so forth) are designed to effect direct interventions in the domain of the social. Once built into population projects, such categories are likely to be politically and culturally productive, redistributing resources and social power, transforming existing subjectivities and social groupings, and, perhaps, even creating new forms of personhood.⁵

The efficacy of population categories emerges with particular force in socialist countries, whose states enjoy exceptional power to reshape social life through their extensive control over the resources and institutions of society (for more on the nature of socialism, see Verdery 1991, 1996). Gail Kligman’s (1998) study of “political demography” in Ceaucescu’s Romania provides powerful testimony to the destructive as well as productive potential of demographic engineering carried out in the name of building socialism. Although socialism has been proclaimed dead, throughout the postsocialist world, but especially in late socialist regimes still dominated by communist parties, substantial chunks of socialist discourse and practice remain to shape, if not condemn, the transitions to the “posts” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Stark and Bruszt 1998). The classifying activities of both classical and late socialist states are especially interesting because they are rooted in a Marxian variant of the development and planning discourses dissected by the scholars discussed above. Though constructed as their binary opposite, Marxian discourses of development share

with capitalist development discourses dreams of progress and modernity through development (see, e.g., Kornai 1992: 49–62; Scott 1998:193–222). Marxian discourses, however, give greater emphasis to social and development planning by the state. Indeed, it is the greater scope for state planning that is supposed to give socialist societies a developmental advantage. At least theoretically, socialist modernity is a comprehensively planned modernity, organized and executed by the state. The developmental projects of socialist states are also intriguing because the categories of analysis and intervention employed in them are often created not from the professional discourses of economics, demography, and the other human sciences, but from the ideological discourses of Marxian theory. The use of Marxian categories provides a different way of doing development, a different strategy for intervening in society whose larger effects remain insufficiently understood, even after the purported demise of socialism.

The social productivity of population categories emerges with special clarity in China, home to the world's largest national population and largest still-ruling Communist Party. Research on the classifying activities of the post-1949 Chinese state reveals that state's awesome power to reshape the social order through the creation and forceful imposition of new social categories—from special, despised categories such as the “five black types” (*hei wulei*) 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 (an important early statement is Yang 1989).⁶ Yet the effects of those projects have almost always diverged from the party-state's articulated goal of creating a socialist modernity indexed by a rapidly industrializing economy and an egalitarian socialist society. Only too often have these categorizing practices replaced old systems of inequality with new and set some groups back even as others have been propelled forward.⁷

Despite the monumental significance of China's fertility control efforts—which, official estimates suggest, have averted over 300 million births since the early 1970s, with profound effects at every level of the social system—the categories structuring reproduction have attracted much less interest than those organizing the government of other domains of social life. Writing against a powerful demographic discourse, a handful of anthropologists and feminist scholars have critiqued such terms as *excessively populous*, *population crisis*, *population quality*, *valuing males*, *devaluing females*, and *birth planning* as denoting naturalized categories of state policy making (Anagnost 1988, 1995; Greenhalgh 2001a, 2001b; White 1994a). Although this work has placed state categorizing practices on the intellectual agenda, it has not yet linked the discursive terms to the concrete bureaucratic practices, political dynamics, and socio-demographic effects of China's gargantuan birth planning

project. Nor has it had any discernible impact on the large demographic literature, which dominates discussion of China's population control program.

The great bulk of research on population control in China has focused on the demographics and the politics, illuminating the striking demographic effects of the program and the byzantine politics of policy formulation and implementation (on the demographics, Banister 1987; Peng and Guo 2000; Poston and Yaukey 1992; on the politics, Tien 1973, 1991; also White 1991, 1994b). At the same time, it has left the Marxian ideological and discursive structure of China's approach to population work largely unexamined. This general avoidance of the Marxian discourse might represent a reaction against the pervasive Cold War–esque media images of China's population program as the coercive product of a totalitarian Marxian state. It could also reflect Western population science's conviction that Malthusian perspectives are scientific, whereas Marxian ones are merely ideological and thus unworthy of scholarly note.⁸ Most likely, however, this inattention is a product of the general neglect of discourse in population studies, where most students of China's population find their intellectual home. Whatever the reasons, the neglect of discourse has had two unfortunate results. First, we are left with a skewed picture of China's population work, one that emphasizes coercive methods to the neglect of inspiring dreams, one that stresses policy and program to the neglect of the population plan. Second, in failing to confront the very real influence of Marxist discourse on the program, we leave the media images of China as totalitarian Other, unchallenged and, hence, all the more powerful.

I argue here that the Marxian categories underlying China's population control program command our attention, for they enable us to see how that program has spawned a vast underground population whose existence is almost never officially acknowledged and, therefore, remains little studied in China and virtually unknown beyond China's borders.⁹ This article takes as its point of analytic departure the Chinese term *jihua shengyü* (birth planning), the central construct and categorical norm in the official state discourse on population. Birth planning by the state, rather than by individual couples, is a Chinese invention: It is, in the official lingo, “family planning with Chinese characteristics.” This chapter tracks the process by which the birth planning project, designed to create a modern, planned population, produced not only a large group of what I call *planned persons* but also a huge outcast group of distinctly unmodern *unplanned persons* who will surely complicate, if not actually slow, China's modernization. The anthropology of the state has illuminated the production of graded forms of personhood in contemporary society (Maurer 1997; Ong 1999). China's unplanned persons provide a striking example of such stratified citizenship. *Unplanned persons* is a term I have coined to draw attention to these people's ironic

origins in state planning and their awkward status in what, not so long ago, was a theoretically planned society. The Chinese term for them, *hei renkou* (black population; or *heiren heihu*, black persons, black households), underscores their illegitimate status as persons outside the household registration system. (In the late 1990s, the state expunged the term *black population* from the official lexicon, replacing it with *unregistered population*. The former term stubbornly persists in popular culture, however.¹⁰) Though little is known about them, unplanned or black persons are without doubt marginal members of society who lack full citizenship rights, including access to schooling, jobs, housing, and a host of other state-supplied benefits.

I contend that this unexpected effect of China's population control project stemmed only in part from factors emphasized by other ethnographers: the workings of social structures unacknowledged in the discourse and overly totalizing assumptions of state planners (esp. Ferguson 1990; Holston 1989). Although these were important, I argue that this contradictory effect of state birth planning was also an inevitable consequence of the way modernity itself is constituted out of binary discourses based on assumed differences between "the West and the Rest" (Hall 1992).¹¹ Drawing on the invention of tradition literature (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992), anthropologists have variously emphasized the importance of nonmodern elements in the making of the modern (e.g., di Leonardo 1998; Gupta 1998; Mitchell 2000). While building on this important work, I also suggest that modernizing states, in their rush to generate development, *actively create* the tradition that affirms and troubles their putative modernity. At the heart of modernity's making lie the twin processes of social categorization and social normalization. States and other modernizing agents create modernist discourses that establish categorical norms—socially desirable, "modern" ways of being—and deviations. Familiar norm-deviant categories include modern-traditional, advanced-backward, and so on. These agents of modernization then introduce bureaucratic plans, practices, and programs structured to shape society to the norm. In this moment of bureaucratic actualization, however, modernizing agencies inadvertently create the underside of modernity, even as they attempt to fabricate modernity alone. Put another way, it is only when some persons (places, activities, etc.) are labeled modern and bestowed with bureaucratic advantages, that others, denied the normative label and benefits, fall behind and become unmodern. Had the modern-nonmodern (or normative-deviant) labels and associated benefits not been introduced, the two sets of persons (places, activities) would not differ from each other in systematic ways. Although these contradictory features of the construction of modernity are quite general, China throws them into sharp relief because of the exceptional power of the Chinese state and because of that state's ambition to create Chinese modernity at the fastest possible

speed. China's leaders dared to dream what most could only fantasize and had the chutzpah to try to transform that dream into reality—regardless of the human costs.

These arguments emerge from long-term ethnographic study of practices of population governance that were spatially dispersed across a great variety of sites. Those spaces include the village, the township office, the provincial committee, the central ministry, the statistical bureau, the international NGO, the UN delegation, and the population studies conference. This research clearly belongs to a new wave of nonlocalized or multisited ethnographies (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1998). Its roots lie not only in changing disciplinary practices, however, but also in shifting career paths that afford anthropologists new opportunities to engage with—and to see—the worlds we study differently. In my case, ten years (1984–94) as an anthropologist and policy analyst at the Population Council, an international nongovernmental research organization, gave me access to some of the inner recesses of the policy making process in China—while leaving me with deep political commitments to critiquing or, in official Chinese terms, "improving," the one-child policy.¹² Working as a colleague and collaborator of Chinese population scientists, themselves key policy makers, gave me opportunities not only to conduct village fieldwork but also to immerse myself in the *techne* of the program, observe at close range the work of numbers gatherers, study important internal documents, and engage with top policy makers in the government, all the while negotiating the complex transnational and Chinese domestic politics surrounding the birth program. These experiences provided different pieces of the puzzle that, when all fitted together, sparked the discovery reported here. For example, detailed knowledge of the program's rules, regulations, rewards, and sanctions, gathered from documentary study and then filtered through the village ethnographer's sense of the local politics of reproductive control, opened my eyes to the unremarked process by which the programmatic category of unplanned birth was producing a new type of illegal infant bereft of benefits. Observations of the statistical practices of number gatherers at village, provincial, and central levels showed me how counting was serving as a technique not of enumeration but of invisibilization. Knowledge of the marked deterioration in the reliability of population statistics produced since the early 1990s, gleaned from private conversations with Chinese demographers and birth planners, allowed me to see how the number of unplanned persons might be proliferating on the ground even as it was shrinking in the statistics. Gathered over many years and in multiple ethnographic spaces, these various experiences enabled me to draw a line connecting the dots in the ethnography of a state into a startling new picture of the state production of nonpersons. These insider knowledges proved to be important tools of insight and critique, for in China the state retains hegemonic control over

public discourse on population, rendering some things unseeable and unthinkable. When my informants—Chinese officials, demographers, statisticians, cadres, and so on—propagated powerful documentary, statistical, and scholarly narratives that kept the black population and its awkward origins out of sight, I was able to see these stories as stories and to unpack how the state itself had unwittingly produced a vast sea of nonpersons and how it had then narrowed the field of vision so as to keep this difficult subject from becoming a political liability. Projects such as this one might hold broader interest, for they stretch the boundaries of what ethnography can be made to do, especially in the arena of public policy, a domain anthropologists have penetrated with some difficulty.¹³

What I offer here is an interpretive chapter that brings together and makes order out of various incommensurable ethnographic observations, experiences, and readings to illuminate a process of political subject making that until now has remained opaque—in China and abroad. To make analytic sense of this multifaceted, multileveled, and historically embedded process, I employ the copious notion of the political offered by the literature on governmentality. The governmental takes as its object a scheme, policy, or program and renders it politically meaningful by elaborating its underlying political ambitions and rationale, the techniques and technologies by which it is deployed, and its effects on human subjects and subjectivities (esp. Dean 1999; Rose 1999). These aspects of what I call the life cycle of a governmental project unfold historically and often over a long stretch of time. Accordingly, my narrative is arranged in rough chronological order and spans the full five decades since the founding of the People's Republic, from the era of high socialism under Mao Zedong (1949–76) to the years of reform or late socialism inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping (1978–present). In the article, I trace the life history of the discursive figure “birth planning.” From its birth in socialist dreams and Marxist-Maoist ideology, I follow it through its theoretical elaboration, bureaucratic embodiment, and programmatic implementation, to trace its social effects on subjectivities and the distribution of economic resources and social power. Each of those analytic steps is undertaken in a separate section.

With all the controversy surrounding China's population control program, it is hard to write about it in a way that does not participate in the exoticization, orientalization, and villainization of the leaders, bureaucrats, and scholars who created and enforced it. Yet my aim here is to avoid reproducing those Othering practices. By drawing on what Chinese officials, academics, and cadres told me in sometimes lengthy discussions conducted over more than 15 years, during ten of which I was deeply involved in scholarly collaborations and policy debates in China's population field, as well as respectful readings of their various writings, I hope I can avoid that kind of discourse and represent the

aspirations of China's policy makers and planners as fairly as I might depict the hopes of ordinary Chinese. Building on this history of personal engagement, this article charts the theoretical, political, and bureaucratic construction of the unplanned Chinese person in hopes of drawing scholarly attention to the existence of this new kind of personhood and, more generally, to the unsuspected efficacy of population as a domain of modern power.

Socialist dreams and the anti-Malthusian roots of “birth planning”

Like most modernity projects, China's birth planning venture was based on a beautiful dream. Fashioned in the early years of the People's Republic, it was a dream of transforming a poor, backward, agrarian nation into a prosperous, modern, industrialized power in a short period of time. Such dreams are shared by modernizing states around the world. But China's dream differed from most in its socialist character. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and guided by its Marxist-Leninist-Maoist understanding of historical development, the Chinese state would undertake comprehensive state planning, subjecting everything under the sun to the coordinated control of its social engineers (Howe and Walker 1989; Lardy 1978). Comprehensive state planning would enable China to accelerate its industrialization and modernization, “catch up” with the West, and achieve its rightful place of wealth and power in the world within the imaginable future. Captured in Mao's simple words, “The Chinese people have stood up” (Schram 1969:167–168), China's dream of escaping its “backward” identity in the global order (cf. Gupta 1998) and, through planned development, recovering its past identity as a proud and glorious nation, inspired many a project of national self-transformation.¹⁴

China's dream of accelerated modernization entailed the planning not only of production but also of reproduction. Because of Marx's disagreement with Malthus, however, when they assumed control of the country in 1949, China's new leaders had a theoretical problem with population. Although I cannot elaborate this point here, I want to note that a fundamental modern binary of the 20th century—capitalist–socialist, personified in the Malthus–Marx dispute over population—was very present at the birth of the birth planning formula. Because of China's commitment to socialism and the larger Cold War context in which its revolutionary development strategy was forged, China's formulation of the population problem and its solution had to be, above all, *not* capitalist. A telling episode in this larger history occurred in 1949, when U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson taunted “new China” about its ability to feed its people, prompting Mao Zedong to issue his famous rebuttal: “It is a very good thing that China has a big population. . . . Of all things in the world, people are the most precious. Under the

leadership of the communist party, as long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be performed" (1954:453–454).

As good Marxists, Chinese theorists had to avoid Malthus's universal formulation of excess population as a problem of resource shortage. Instead, they had to see China's population problem as relative, or specific to its mode of production. At mid-century, though, no Marxian formulation of the population problems of a poor, crowded, "semifeudal, semicolonial" country such as China yet existed. Over the first decade of CCP rule, China's leaders worked out a distinctive Marxist-Leninist-Maoist formulation of China's population problems. Traced elsewhere (see, e.g., Aird 1972; Tien 1973; White 1994a), the process unfolded in several stages. From 1949 to 1953, the official stance was, as Mao's statement suggests, pronatalist. In 1954 the leadership shifted to cautious advocacy of "birth control" (Liu 1985), closing off discussion outside the state. Then, in 1956–57, in the context of a nationwide campaign to promote comprehensive socialist planning, Mao introduced the novel concept of (state) "birth planning" (White 1994a; Zhang 1998:29–32). In a major speech delivered in early 1957, Mao reframed the population problem this way:

I think humanity is most inept at managing itself. It has plans for industrial production . . . [but] it does not have plans for the production of humans. This is anarchism, no government, no organization, no rules. If [we] go on this way, I think humanity will prematurely fall into strife and hasten toward destruction. [Mao 1989:159]

Mao's construction cleverly avoided the Malthus–Marx conflict: By framing China's population problem in the Marxian language of anarchy in the production of human beings, he could construe unregulated human reproduction as antisocialist, contrary to the fundamental interests of the Chinese state. This formulation of the problem allowed him to reframe the solution as one of socialist planning. In early 1956 Mao had called for promoting "childbirth according to plan" (White 1994a:268). In late 1957 he elaborated this idea: "[As for] population control, [if we] have three years of experimental propaganda, three years of popularization, and four years of universal implementation, this is also a ten-year plan" (White 1994a:271). In a stroke Mao had redefined the planning of births as an irrefutable task of the socialist state—and placed a weighty modernist binary, anarchic-planned childbearing or the unplanned-planned birth, at the heart of China's approach to population control.¹⁵

Mao's ambivalence about the "good thingness" of China's huge population, coupled with the tumultuous political campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s, kept the state planning of births largely off the policy agenda. Yet through a complicated political process that involved the persecution of those with other ideas and the declaration of population as forbidden territory (Tien 1973), the birth planning construct survived the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution to

become not only the sole legitimate approach to population control but also an essential task of China's government.¹⁶ In the mid-1970s the anarchy–plan formula was made the centerpiece of an elaborate conceptual apparatus, explored just below, that has guided thinking about population in China to this day. The significance of the birth planning formulation cannot be overstated. In the more familiar Western, liberal notion of "family planning," births are planned in a voluntary way by the couple on the basis of their individual circumstances, as the couple perceives them. The role of the state is largely limited to the provision of education and contraception. In the Chinese notion of birth planning, births are planned by the state on the basis of the collective good, as determined ultimately by a small number of top party leaders.

During the revolutionary decades of the 1950s and 1960s, birth planning not only became the *official* formulation of the population issue, but it also became the *hegemonic* formulation, the only way the population question could be spoken about in public discourse. Some controls on demographic discussion were lifted in the mid- to late 1970s, when population was removed from the list of forbidden zones and the field of demography was re-created to serve a new project of state-directed population control. Yet new restraints on demographic discourse were effectively imposed in 1978, when birth planning was made a constitutional obligation, and again in 1982, when the planning of births was declared a "basic state policy," off-limits to criticism on fundamentals. To be sure, the climate for debate is more open today than it has been at any time since the mid-1950s. Since the mid-1990s the birth control program has been slowly embracing a reproductive health care agenda inspired by the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (Gu 2000; Winckler 2002; Zhang et al. 1999).¹⁷ Yet despite the flowering of new discourses on client services, quality care, and informed choice, population remains a sensitive and somewhat risky subject to this day. It is hemmed in by the specific constraints just mentioned and by the general restraints imposed on all political discourse by the "four cardinal principles" laid down in 1979: commitments to party leadership, socialism, the existing state structure, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Their grip is loosening, but the subject of population still belongs firmly to the party and the state.

Theoretical elaborations: Establishing the rationale for, method of, and agent in charge of birth planning

Mao died in 1976, but the concept of birth planning he had authored did not die with him. To the contrary, it gained fresh life and added urgency. After a brief leadership struggle, in 1978 a new leadership coalition took over, with Deng Xiaoping as its head. Determined to overcome decades of

sluggish economic growth and low living standards, the Deng regime rewrote the script for China's future, placing the development of "market socialism" and the transformation of China into a modern nation within decades at the top. Of course, China was to remain socialist and the Communist Party was to remain at the helm. Indeed, the new economic goals were to provide a fresh basis for party legitimacy, which had been badly eroded during the ten years of political chaos that was the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese people were to get an appealing new goal toward which to work: achieving a "comfortable standard of living" (*xiaokang shuiping*) by the year 2000. Because economic goals were expressed as per capita targets, population control—drastic population control—was to be a key item on the new agenda.¹⁸

Between mid-1978 and late 1980, the leadership and its scholarly advisors dreamed up a bold new strategy for restricting population growth, announcing it to the broad masses of the Chinese people through an unusual "Open Letter" from the party's Central Committee (CC) calling on all couples to limit themselves to one child (CC 1985). Between the mid-1970s and early 1980s, discursive elements from many sources were drawn together and elaborated into a complex conceptual apparatus that served to legitimize and later, in the 1980s and 1990s, guide the enforcement of the one-child policy.¹⁹ This discourse established the basic rationale, goals, and methods of birth planning under reform socialism. Although the Marxist ideology in which the population discourse is framed has lost its dominant position in reform-era Chinese politics, ideology retains a critical role in shaping policy options and choices (Misra 1998; Zhang 1996). As David Kelly has argued, "Orthodox Marxism continues to provide and propagate a discursive field, setting up the ways in which social and political reality is categorized, and thus the ways in which political problems are resolved" (1991:21). The continued salience of Marxian constructs is clearly evident in the population domain. Although problems encountered in the enforcement of birth planning forced modification of concrete methods and targets, and the larger discursive framings in which population control practice is set have been modified to fit changing ideological orthodoxies established by successive party congresses ("primary stage of socialism," "socialist market economy," and so on), the political ideas about the proper rationale and means of birth planning that were worked out in the late 1970s remain intact to this day. (At the same time, however, the meaning of population planning is now changing, on which there is more below.) These ideas remain in place in part because they got built into the institutionalized program and political practice of birth planning in a way that rendered them difficult to dislodge.

The most fundamental notions underlying the birth planning formulation were Marx's materialist vision of society

and the associated idea of historical movement of society through successive modes of production.²⁰ In that vision, population was considered part of the economic base, to be planned and manipulated like steel, grain, or any other commodity. In Marxist teleology, society progressed through the stages of slavery or primitivism, feudalism, and capitalism (a phase China largely missed) to socialism and, finally, communism, each one superior to its predecessor. Each mode of production had its own laws of population. China was determined to be in the stage of socialism (as of 1987 in the primary stage of socialism [Zhang 1996:160–165]), having emerged from its historical semifeudal, semicolonial state with the assumption of power by the Communist Party and the collectivization of the means of production in the early to mid-1950s (for details see Meisner 1982).

China's population theorists in the 1970s drew on Engels's notion of the "twofold character of production" to explain why, in a developing socialist country, population growth must be controlled. This notion provided theoretical justification for treating the production of human beings like the production of material commodities, subject to overall coordination by planners in the state. The key passage from Engels, quoted again and again in Chinese population-theory texts, comes from the preface to the first edition of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*:

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence . . . ; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. [Engels 1972:71]

Chen Muhua, vice premier and head of the State Council Birth Planning Leading Group (forerunner of the State Birth Planning Commission, discussed below), spelled out this Marxian-theoretic rationale in the lead section of an important article published in the *People's Daily* in mid-1979:

Marxism holds that there are two kinds of social production. "One is the production of means of livelihood. . . . The other is the production of human beings . . ." We have yet to conscientiously study and explore population law under the socialist system. However, one point is definitely beyond any doubt—that is, on the basis of public ownership of the means of production, our national economy must follow the law of proportional and planned development. This law demands not only a planned production of material goods, but also the planned reproduction of human beings; therefore, a planned control of the population growth of our country is not the product of a subjective whim, but is determined and demanded by the form of socialist production. [Chen 1979:2]

Chen not only made birth planning central to China's definition of its national purpose and identity, but she also removed it from the trivial arena of individual decisions, placing it squarely in the "serious" realm of China's historical evolution toward economic modernization and communist utopia:

Under present conditions in China, whether or not to control population growth is definitely not merely a question of having fewer or more children, but a serious question related to the development of our social productive force, to the realization of the four modernizations, to socialist construction, and to the strategic transition to communism. [1979:2]

The primary method by which births were to be planned was propaganda and education. Viewing history as progress from feudal to socialist, backward to advanced, traditional to modern, the discourse framed the project as one of political education designed to transform the old into the new, thereby propelling China into the next stage of historical development. Like "development" discourse generally, the birth planning discourse divided the world into modernist binaries, precisely to erode them. This old-into-new construction of the task was emphasized in an important speech by Chairman Hua Guofeng, Mao's short-lived successor, that was delivered to the State Council (SC) meeting of the Birth Planning Leading Group in mid-1978: "Planned parenthood is a profound revolution to destroy the old and establish the new, change existing habits and customs, and reform society in the realm of marriage, family, and childbirth" (Hua 1985:21). Although the population as an aggregate was treated as part of the material base of society, individual couples' views about marriage and children were seen as "organic components of the superstructure" (Liu et al. 1980:63). As matters of thought or ideology, these notions were subject to political transformation (see esp., Liu et al. 1980:63–70). The major ideological obstacles to the spread of the single-child family were remnants of "feudal" culture, in particular, the ideas that many children bring much happiness (*duozi duofu*) and that males are more valuable than females (*zhongnan qingnü*). Despite China's socialist political economy, such feudal ideas were said to linger because of the deep influence of centuries of Confucian and Mencian thought (Hua 1985:21).

These elements of "feudal culture" were seen as especially problematic because they persisted most stubbornly in the countryside, where the bulk of the population lived. Indeed, the feudal reproductive values of the peasantry were seen not only as persisting but also as being reinforced by the introduction of the household responsibility system in agriculture. In a major document issued in early 1982, "Targets for Doing a Better Job in Birth Planning Work," the Central Committee (CC) and SC described the problem this way:

Since the production responsibility system was carried out in the countryside, the peasants have put forth a demand to have more children, and especially more boys. . . . The contradictions that are thus generated by old-fashioned ideas under new circumstances have created a special degree of difficulty in our work. [CC and SC 1985b:45–46]

This modern-binaristic (old–new) formulation of the problem was significant for a number of reasons. By labeling the preferences for several children and for sons over daughters "old-fashioned" and "feudal" in origin, the discourse rendered unthinkable the possibility that contemporary forces might have inadvertently reproduced them. Important sociocultural and political-economic structures shaping childbearing decisions remained unacknowledged in the official discourse. By tagging the ideas of the peasants feudal and in need of transformation into socialist, the population discourse turned the rural masses into the primary objects of reproductive intervention and control.

The answer to the question of who should be in charge of this task drew on Lenin's views of a vanguard party that, through thorough training in Marxian thought, represented the leading edge of society. Politically farsighted, party members could see above their own petty personal interests to the interests of society as a whole. Top party leaders would be in charge of important policy decisions, while rank-and-file members of the party and party-affiliated mass organizations at all levels of society would "take the lead" in carrying it out. Working with party cadres, government officials at each administrative level were to ensure policy implementation and fulfillment of the population plan. Because the task was defined primarily as one of changing ideas, the project for the party membership at large was to transform their own reproductive views so as to convince the masses to follow suit. The Open Letter issued in September 1980 makes this charge clear:

The Central Committee demands that all members of the Party and the Communist Youth League, particularly cadres at all levels, set a good example and have a thorough understanding of the significance and necessity of this important task. They must concern themselves with the future of the state and hold themselves responsible for the people's interests and the happiness of generations to come. Cadres who are party members ought to take the lead in getting rid of feudal ideas. . . . Every comrade should do publicity work patiently and enthusiastically among the people around them. [CC 1985:29]

The party was portrayed as not only all-knowing in its understanding of the reproductive desires of the masses but also all-powerful in its ability eventually to change their childbearing ideas and accomplish the goals set by the top leadership. Such representations of the party are not surprising;

indeed, they are no doubt standardized conventions in all party-produced discourse (cf. Schoenhals 1992; also Kornai 1992:55–57). Yet even if they are not surprising, they are interesting and, above all, important. Infusing the discourse on birth planning was a striking optimism that the party could do whatever it set out to do. Although the task of planning all the births in a country as large and heterogeneous as China was seen as monumental, there was no hint of doubt about whether it could be accomplished. As Hua Guofeng put it in his 1978 speech, “Although the task is arduous, it can be done” (1985:21). Or, in the words of the 1980 Open Letter, “The goal can be attained provided we make concerted efforts” (CC 1985:28). Nor was there any fallback plan, any theoretical provision for failure, for inability to plan. The solution to poor planning performance was always for cadres to redouble their efforts, to work harder to achieve the “struggle targets” established by the political center. Common to master plans for development generally (e.g., Holston 1989; Scott 1998, esp. 87–102), the planners’ assumptions—that they could bend political reality to their will—were wildly overambitious. This can-do attitude, this failure to imagine failure, although doubtless good for motivating party cadres and legitimating party practice, was to have unintended consequences when party rhetoric met up with social reality.

Bureaucratic inscription: From Marxian construct to social category, planning target, and policy goal

To be useful, the Marxist-theoretic construct of birth planning had to be converted into a social category and inscribed in the bureaucratic apparatus guiding economic and social planning. Bureaucratic inscription was the crucial step by which population discourse would be translated into political practice—and thence social reality. Consistent with a materialist perspective that treats the production of human beings in the same manner as the production of economic goods, population planning was made part of the larger process of national economic planning, the primary obligation of the socialist state. As part of this central obligation, population planning was considered “a serious political task [that] requires meticulous scientific work” (Wang 1991a:71).

To facilitate birth planning work, a multitiered birth planning bureaucracy was tentatively established in the early 1960s, solidly reestablished in the early 1970s, and then firmly institutionalized in the early 1980s, with the creation of the interministerial State Birth Planning Commission (SBPC) at the political center. The first step in the process of bureaucratic inscription was to integrate population goals into the economic plan by establishing long- and short-term targets for total population size and the natural growth rate of the population. The first national population planning

target was announced in 1965 (Wang 1991b:47), but the Cultural Revolution, which disrupted every government function during 1966–69, interrupted its implementation. As the chaotic phase of the Cultural Revolution was brought to an end, the catastrophic economic consequences of neglecting the explosion of human numbers became evident even to Mao, who, unlike his more pragmatic colleagues in the top leadership, had vacillated between pro- and antinatalism (Zhang 1998:36–39). With the political logjam broken, the long-elusive consensus on the urgency of population planning was apparently reached. Around 1970 Premier Zhou Enlai declared population planning an essential part of economic planning, and the population plan quickly became reality (Zhang 1998:36–39). In 1971 a population target was incorporated into the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1970–74), in 1973 a demographic target was built into the annual plan, and in 1975 national targets for the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1975–79) were translated into local targets and handed down to grassroots leaders throughout the country. The year 1975 thus marked a momentous change in population control practice: From that point on, local reproductive practice became a regular, integral feature of the centrally organized, target-driven process of economic planning (cf. Wang 1991b:48). As the mechanisms of depersonalized central planning were applied to the previously personal matter of childbirth, babies and, thus, persons would become planned products of the socialist state (cf. White 1994a:276).

A few years later, shorter-term planning targets were linked up to longer-term reform goals for century’s end, when the first stage of socialist modernization was to be completed. In 1980 the first long-term population size goal was announced: China would keep its population within 1.2 billion by 2000 (CC 1985). As that goal began to look unreachable, the long-term target was cautiously raised. In the mid-1980s the year 2000 goal was changed to “about 1.2 billion,” and around 1990 it was raised to under 1.3 billion, where it remained until the turn of the 21st century. These planning targets were crucially important, for they were to become the focal point, the *raison d’être* for a whole series of practices introduced in the name of planning births and population growth.

Ensuring that plan targets were met required the construction of measures of plan performance that could be created and regularly updated at every level of the administrative system. Chinese planners developed a number of measures to guide the state planning of births. The main quantity indices were total population size, crude birth and death rates, and the rate of natural population increase (Wang 1991a:74). To facilitate birth planning work, the SBPC and its subordinate units at each level also collected indices of planned births; late marriage and late childbearing; and the proportion of first, second, and higher-order (called “multiple”) births in all births. Most important for our purposes is the planned birth rate (*jihua shengyǔlǜ*). This rate,

according to Wang Hong, “reflect[s] the overall effect of fertility control work. It is given as the number of births conforming to the local birth targets during the period divided by the total number of births during the period” (1991a:74).

Because it was based on a binary construction, the index of planned births (*jihuanei shengyü*) implied the existence of its opposite, unplanned births (*jihuawai shengyü*). Indeed, the planned birth rate *required* the presence of unplanned births, for without them the category planned births would have no meaning. Yet unplanned births received less formal bureaucratic expression. While planned birth rates were proudly publicized in the media as evidence of cadres’ achievements, rates of unplanned births were less often made public. Where unplanned births were bureaucratically noted, that notice often took punitive form, as, for example, in provincial birth planning regulations, which stipulated fines, mandatory birth control surgery, and other punishments for those with unplanned pregnancies and births (see, e.g., Greenhalgh 1990). Unplanned births, also known as “excess” or “above-quota” births (*chaosheng*), were also the objects of critical scrutiny in articles published in Chinese birth planning journals. In these articles, roughly one hundred of which I reviewed for this article, unplanned pregnancies and births were without exception designated “problems” that needed to be “prevented” so as to “raise the low quality” of birth planning work.²¹ The authors, invariably responsible cadres, sought to understand the causes of unplanned childbearing in their respective localities, so as to devise effective countermeasures. Their articles bore such titles as “Preliminary Analysis of the Causes of Unplanned Births in the Rural Areas and Their Countermeasures” (Gao and Shen 1993), “In China’s Birth Planning Work, the Key Is Excess Childbearing, the Problem Is in the Villages” (Han 1991), and “Strategic Thinking on Shutting Off Multiple Births in the Rural Areas” (Chen 1991). Designated illegal and punishable, childbearing outside the plan became an underground activity that could survive only by escaping the network of control. The bureaucratic results, which were as predictable as they were unpredicted and unwanted, were monumental problems of oversight and measurement for cadres in charge of planning births. Politically dangerous and virtually unsurveillable, unplanned births entered a gray zone of uncountability or, better yet, inaccuracy, in the bureaucratic apparatus. (Unplanned births could be counted, but not with any accuracy.) The unplanned birth became a danger-fraught category, the dark, unenumerated underside of the bright planned birth rate all communist cadres were supposed to raise.

Population policy, the rules guiding population control practice, was to be expressed as a set of finely modulated rules. Embodying the totalizing aspirations of the planners, population policy broke reproduction down into its component parts (marriage, childbearing, contraception, and so forth) and then established detailed and precise regulations

so that every aspect of reproduction could be planned and controlled in a comprehensive, meticulous way. The complex regulations would then be translated into simple slogans for wide dissemination through the party’s propaganda machine. Under the slogan “later-longer-fewer” (*wan xi shao*), in the 1970s official policy called for “late marriage, long spacing, and few births.” In the 1970s two children became the official norm: “One child is not too few, two are just right, three are too many.” In the 1980s, child “quality” was added to the list of reproductive attributes subject to state management and control. Under the one-child policy announced in 1979–80, the official slogan became “late marriage, late childbearing, few births, quality births” (*wanhun, wanyü, shaosheng, yousheng*). The norm for number of children became “encourage one child, strictly limit second children, resolutely prohibit third and higher-order children.” Such demands, although good for achieving ambitious control targets, neglected the social structures and cultural values fostering desires for two or three children and at least one son in the countryside. Those overlooked beliefs and social practices, discussed in the next section, would come to plague the planners when the plans and policies were transformed into concrete political practice.

Policy implementation: Peasant resistance and the proliferation of unplanned births

These general reproductive guidelines were established at the political center and then turned into concrete policy regulations at the provincial level. Beginning in the late 1970s, China’s roughly thirty provincial-level units issued birth planning regulations and assumed responsibility for enforcing them. Although created from above, the birth planning policy was actually enforced at the grassroots, in urban neighborhoods and rural villages all over the country.²² The major task for local birth planning officials was to ensure the planning of births within their areas—in bureaucratic terms, to achieve high rates of planned births so that the population plan target might be fulfilled. Each year officials at the grassroots were given a numerical quota of births that fell within the state plan. All births in excess of that number were by definition unplanned.

To achieve high planned birth rates, local officials were instructed to rely primarily on “propaganda and education” (*xuanchuan jiaoyü*). With the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979–80, they were to supplement educational means with economic rewards and penalties and, when those failed, administrative measures. Legal means were gradually introduced as well, as birth planning rules were incorporated into laws on marriage, adoption, women’s rights, and other social matters (Palmer 1995). In the cities, cadre control over the means of urban subsistence (jobs, housing, education, health care, rations, and so on), combined with

the high costs of raising children in the urban environment, made it relatively easy to reach high rates of planned births (Milwertz 1997; also Ikels 1996:118–129; Rofel 1999:244–255). The situation in the countryside was more complex. My own village field research suggested that in the 1970s, when rural society was still organized in socialist collectives, cadre control over work, income, and other necessities of life made birth planning work manageable (for a countrywide account, see Chen and Kols 1982). That changed with the introduction of rural economic and political reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Documented ethnographically elsewhere (Greenhalgh 1993), the dismantling of rural collectives brought declines in cadre power, shifts of resources into the hands of ordinary peasants, and growing peasant desires for more children, especially sons. Those desires, however, were not so much feudal remnants as reflections of the multiple needs children fulfilled in rural China's still-familistic culture and socioeconomy: labor, old-age support, family continuity, lineage power, and just plain love and affection (see, e.g., Croll et al. 1985; Greenhalgh 1994; Peng and Dai 1992; Zhu and Peng 1996). Increasingly, economic incentives available for policy enforcement disappeared and administrative measures failed to work.²³

Despite efforts to achieve the full planning of births, in the countryside there was massive resistance to a policy that was profoundly out of touch with rural sociocultural reality. Widespread opposition to the one-child rule led to big gaps in enforcement and, in turn, large numbers of unplanned births.²⁴ Local cadres often colluded with peasant resisters because of unwillingness or simply inability to enforce the state's strict limits on fertility. As the tactics of resistance multiplied, the numbers and types of unplanned births—and, hence, children—grew. This is not the place to elaborate the manifold forms of resistance and thus types of unplanned children that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Chinese-language articles hint at the existence of a huge underground culture of escape from the birth planning network, complete with a richly nuanced vocabulary of illegitimacy: “dark childbirth” (*ansheng*), “struggle childbirth” (*qiangsheng*), “supplementary childbirth” (*busheng*), “next birth” (*mingsheng*), “bought birth” (*maisheng*), and so on (see esp. Han 1991). A few illustrative examples of these evasive strategies should suffice to make the point.

One common form of resistance was to conceal a pregnancy from local officials, have the baby in a distant hospital, and then either hide it at home or place it in the care of relatives elsewhere for a few months or years. A second group of resisters came to be known as “excess-birth guerrillas” (*chaosheng youji dui*) for their practice of fleeing their home areas and moving elsewhere, often to locations along provincial borders or the peripheries of large cities, to have children. Those moving to cities became part of the 100-million-plus “floating population.” A third group of evaders married and had children before reaching the legal ages

(under the 1980 Marriage Law) of 20 for women and 22 for men. Their children were by definition illegal. At birth, all of these (and many other) types of unplanned offspring were black children (*hei haizi*), for they were off the books (that is, not included in the household register) and, thus, ineligible for state benefits. What happened to these children? Discussions with Chinese population specialists suggest that a very small minority may have met an early death through infanticide or neglect. More ended up abandoned and, of these, a lucky few were adopted. The majority were probably raised by their birth parents, either as legitimate offspring whose parents succeeded in removing their black status by somehow acquiring registration for them, or as unregistered black children, those I have called unplanned persons.

In the next section I sketch in what we know about the very different life opportunities faced by planned and unplanned children. What I want to note here is the role of the birth planning policy itself in *creating* those differences in life chances. If the bureaucratic categories planned and unplanned created two kinds of births, the policy implementation measures attached material benefits and sanctions to the two identities. Detailed in the provincial birth planning regulations, planned single children received one-child certificates entitling them to preferential treatment in schooling, health care, and a host of other domains (e.g., Greenhalgh 1990). Unplanned children, virtually all second or higher-order offspring, were denied these advantages, and their parents were subject to steep fines, loss of state-sector jobs, expulsion from the party, and many other punitive measures. As illegitimate persons, unplanned children were ineligible for inclusion in the household register, and thus for participation in a wide range of benefits (described below). As these measures were imposed on people's lives, the planned and unplanned persons were transformed from mere categorical positions into concrete identities and lives, with differing levels of material well-being and life prospects. The policy measures played a crucial role in making the planned–unplanned difference a material reality.

How many unplanned persons exist in China today? Unfortunately, the absence of reliable statistics makes it impossible to calculate either how many unplanned births have taken place or how many of those unplanned infants have remained outside the register to become unplanned persons. Indeed, because of extensive underreporting of births—itsself a form of revenge against the sharp limits on childbearing—birth statistics in China are in frightful disarray. Leading Chinese demographers and census bureau officials readily acknowledge that the problem of statistical manipulation has become so serious that the state has no idea how many births have taken place—or how many citizens constitute the People's Republic!²⁵ Figures published by the SBPC suggest that the proportion of births that are unplanned fell from 32 percent in the early 1980s to seven percent in the late 1990s (SBPC 1986–97). According to the commission's

own data, between 1979, when the one-child policy was introduced, and 1999, as many as 82 million unplanned births took place. High as this figure seems, it is far below the real figure. Chinese demographers believe that, because of underreporting and other forms of statistical doctoring, the number of births counted in official surveys was understated by as much as 20 to 25 percent in the late 1980s and 30 to 35 percent in the 1990s.²⁶ Unreported births are virtually all unplanned births. Given the absence of many key figures, an absence because of both the "dark" nature of the unplanned birth rate and the politics of statistical concealment deployed by policy resisters, I can only compute a rough order-of-magnitude estimate. Such estimates, detailed elsewhere (Greenhalgh in press), suggest that between 1979 and 1999 between 112 and 157 million unplanned births may have taken place. Assuming all those infants lived, that works out to 8.9 to 12.5 percent of China's 1999 population of 1.259 billion. By this calculation—which is conservative—roughly ten percent of China's population may have come into the world unplanned.²⁷

How many unplanned infants remain outside the register to become unplanned persons? Given their illegal and stigmatized status, it is not surprising that this population is largely uncounted—and *uncountable*. In a rare published study on this question, fully 72 percent of unplanned children in two counties, some as old as school age, remained unregistered (Wang 1989). Chinese population specialists interviewed in 1999 suggested that most unplanned babies probably eventually obtain official registration.²⁸ One would hope this is the case, but one simply does not know. Even if a small proportion of those estimated 180 million unplanned infants failed to obtain official registration, the absolute numbers of unplanned persons would be very large.

Ironically, the proliferation of unplanned births was an outcome of the categorizing practices of birth planning itself. In creating the social norm, planned births, the population discourse also created the deviation, unplanned births, so that the production of one inevitably entailed the production of the other. With its wide array of incentives and disincentives, population control practice heaped material benefits on one identity while depriving the other of the necessities of social life, transforming what began as two different identity labels into two very different types of personhood, with radically unequal life prospects.

The gap between the planners' intentions and the program's outcomes was so large in part because of the overly optimistic political assumptions built into the birth planning discourse. (Another major factor, discussed above, was the introduction of marketizing economic reforms, which weakened the apparatus of planning and policy enforcement.) Some degree of popular resistance was anticipated in constructions of the problem as a monumental task of transforming the old into the new. Yet the tone of the official discourse was decidedly optimistic—and overly so. The

guiding assumption was that the party, because of its grounding in Marxist fundamentals, knew the interests of the people and, through "meticulous ideological and political work," could eventually persuade them that party thought on population was correct. What these assumptions of an all-knowledgeable and persuasive party did not anticipate was the huge number of determined resisters whose interests could not be made to conform to those of the party and who would not accept the party's version of correct thinking, no matter what. Another problematic political assumption was that the male-oriented, familistic reproductive culture that encouraged more births was feudal, a holdover from the old society rather than a product of contemporary political economy. Although I do not have space to elaborate here (but see Greenhalgh and Li 1995), what the discourse labeled backward was as much a product of reform-era social and economic policy as a remnant of the past. Unacknowledged features of rural society and political economy worked to undercut the population planning project. A final, more general problem was the totalistic assumption of the planners that society could be made to bend to their will. Accordingly, the population plan made no room for people who persistently refused to conform to the planners' design. By failing to make theoretical, bureaucratic, or political provisions for some degree of failure, party theoreticians and state planners ended up creating a new set of problems—and a new type of unplanned person—that they found difficult publicly to acknowledge, let alone address.

When unplanned infants become unplanned persons: Human consequences, anthropological concerns

The huge number of unplanned births in China is not only a planning problem or a political problem, though those are serious enough. It is also a human problem. Much has been written about the social, economic, and bodily costs suffered by women and couples who have unplanned births. Less attention has been devoted to the costs of being unplanned to the child him- or herself. Yet these may well be the steepest of all. What do we know about these costs and who bears them? Unfortunately, not much.

Given the strong son preference in rural China and the gendered nature of contraception, abortion, and postnatal child management practices, there can be no doubt that the vast majority of unplanned children are girls (see, e.g., Johnson 1993; Yuan and Skinner 2000; Zeng et al. 1993). Whatever its gender, the unplanned infant is at greater risk of abandonment, a fate that may result in death, institutionalization in a state-run orphanage, or, for the fortunate ones, adoption (see esp. Johnson et al. 1998). The infant who is loaned out to relatives in another village for the first months or years of her life is deprived of her mother's milk

and daily care, as well as her status as full member of her natal household.²⁹ If she survives—and most probably do—the unplanned infant may grow into an unplanned person. Yet that person is legally and socially a nonperson. Ineligible for household registration, she has no right to schooling, health care, state-sector employment, and a host of other state services and benefits (Fan and Huang 1989). Of course, all do not suffer equally. New forms of social and economic mobility emerging in China's marketizing and globalizing economy have enabled some to bypass the state's provisioning system. Some unplanned persons are now obtaining these services from the market—though at higher cost and lower quality than if they had been provided by official sources (Eckholm 1999). We have no idea how many are getting services in other ways. Available statistics would seem to suggest that most of the unplanned persons are probably peasants living in the rural areas or peasant migrants in the cities.³⁰ For those in the countryside, the household register appears to be a less important mediator of state services such as education and health care than it was in the past (e.g., Zhang 1999), although inclusion in the register appears necessary for participation in land distributions. In addition, registration for the unplanned child may be bought or otherwise negotiated with sympathetic local officials. Articles by grassroots birth planning officials suggest that in some rural areas children are legalized—that is, entered in the register—after payment of a fine, although in others cadres prefer to keep unplanned children out of the register to make their planned birth rates appear higher than they actually are (e.g., Fan and Huang 1989; Wang 1989). In the cities, however, registration continues to provide access to the full range of state services and welfare benefits. The result is that unregistered persons, in particular, rural members of the floating population, enjoy much less than full citizenship rights (Eckholm 1999; Solinger 1999; Zhang 2001a, 2001b, 2001c).

Beyond the welfare consequences of being unplanned is the more fundamental problem of subjectivity, or sense of self. In the absence of ethnographic research, we can only surmise that being an illegitimate person, someone who was not supposed to have been born and who has no formal rights, has a profound impact on one's sense of whom one is. Informally circulated stories of unregistered young adults suggest that, compounding the problem of lack of rights in society is the guilt such a person feels toward her parents and family for the financial and political hardships that bringing her into the world and raising her imposed on them. One can only imagine that, given the way she has been treated, the unplanned daughter feels unwanted, unimportant relative to her siblings, and a burden to her family. For such persons, creating a positive sense of personhood is likely to be difficult.

Notwithstanding the size of this population and the severity of the problems they face, little is known about this

dark underside of China's planned program of population modernization. Given the sensitivity of this issue, the anthropologist Jing Jun (personal communication, February 23, 2002) has suggested that the state has engaged in a kind of self-censorship that keeps the topic from being addressed in a systematic manner and discourages inquiry from a social justice perspective. Constrained to follow state priorities, Chinese social scientists so far have paid little attention to this population group, though they are certainly aware of it and its plight.³¹ Though less hemmed in by the sensitivities of the Chinese government, Western scholars have done the same. Indeed, Western population science's construction of China's Marxian discourse as nonscientific ("ideological," "propagandistic," etc. [Aird 1982]) and, thus, ignorable (indeed, beratable) might well have closed the eyes of Western demographers (and even Chinese adherents to Western demography!) to the existence of this population group, adding a transnational scientific dynamic of invisibilization to the local political one. Meanwhile, with its triumphal rhetoric of planning and progress, the official discourse on birth planning works to erase the subjectivities of the unplanned persons and deflect attention away from the problems they face. The discourse is matched by an official attitude that appears neglectful at best, punitive at worst. My computer search of the periodical literature at the nation's leading population research library yielded only one official statement about the problem of the black population. This appeared as an article in the official party organ *People's Daily* (1988: 3), over ten years ago. (There may well have been other items that were not caught by the computer search.) The attitude conveyed by the Birth Planning Commission is that unplanned persons are a result not of overly totalistic planning assumptions or overly optimistic political assumptions; they are a result of citizens failing to heed the clearly stated law that all births must be planned. Parental punishment is deserved—and meted out. Yet innocent children and young people are also punished by being deprived of essential social support. Unintentionally created by the activities of the birth planning bureaucracy, as they grow older they fall between the bureaucratic cracks, for no bureaucracy in the Chinese government has responsibility for unplanned persons. When these illegitimate young people do not cause obvious social problems, the response of state agencies appears to be to ignore them. Where they cause problems—crime, social disorder, urban blight, and so forth—the approach is more punitive (Eckholm 1999; Solinger 1999; Zhang 2001a, 2001b).

The case of a 12-year-old girl known as Xiaomin, which came to light when she turned to crime, highlights the troubles these outlaws by birth can encounter—and also create (Ni 2000). The third daughter of a rural Sichuan family, Xiaomin was informally adopted by a Chengdu couple, who were not told that her birth parents were still alive (under which circumstances adoption is illegal). Xiaomin's happy

life came to an end at age eight, when her adoptive mother died. Her father remarried. After her baby brother was born, her stepmother began actively discriminating against her. Hungry and physically abused, Xiaomin turned to snatching money and stealing food to fill her belly. At age nine Xiaomin learned from a neighbor that she was adopted. She found a cooperative judge, who legally dissolved the adoptive relationship and sent her back to her biological parents in a mountain village. But her birth parents turned out to be dirt-poor farmers. A city girl, Xiaomin refused to do the arduous farmwork her sisters were required to do. She repeatedly ran away, stole money, and engaged in other behaviors that violated village norms. At her wit's end, and legally responsible for the child—"criminal" until she reaches age 14, her mother chained the errant child to a wall. Xiaomin wants to return to Chengdu and live on the streets. But she worries about her future: "What can I do when I grow up?" she laments, "I don't have a primary education so I can't even clean toilets." Meanwhile, from her chains, she has become adept at pulling adults' heartstrings. When reporters visit, she asks them to take this message back to her city parents: "I feel abandoned and all alone. Daddy, Mommy, I want to go home. Please take me back."

The birth planning program was established to modernize the population, but it has had the perverse effect of creating a substantial, albeit unenumerated, class of unplanned, distinctly unmodern persons.³² Given the uncertainties surrounding their numbers and life conditions, I can only lay out some likely scenarios. In the worst-case scenario, this group includes precisely the types of persons the birth planning program sought to eliminate: "backward," poorly educated individuals who are a "drain" on the socioeconomy and saboteurs of present and future modernization. (Just as informal economies throughout the world often serve as growth points, however, the black population may actually enhance China's economic growth by providing cheap, unskilled labor and by taking the kinds of jobs of official citizens shun.) In the best-case scenario, the life chances of the unplanned must surely be dimmer than those of the planned person, who is showered with state support. Although their outsiders' status gives them opportunities to develop alternative modes of living and to resist official definitions of proper personhood that may be confining, their marginal status overall must be seen as more liability than opportunity.

Because China achieved fertility levels of around two children per couple in 1992–93, the SBPC has introduced important changes in the birth control program (Greenhalgh 2001a; Winckler 1999). Although the birth planning construction remains the official one and China recently affirmed its commitment to the planning of population growth (SC 2002), with China's incorporation into transnational social policy networks, the meaning of birth planning is being redefined in practice (as, indeed, is the meaning of

society, state, and party!).³³ For Chinese social scientists, whose research generally must follow state priorities, the time may finally be ripe to attend to some of the unintended consequences of the birth planning formulation that was applied much more literally in the past.

For anthropological students of politics, this article has outlined a set of ethnographic practices that allow us to see more fully than generally has been possible how states govern through policies, programs, and projects. By keeping my ethnographic eye trained for many years on a single, albeit massive and mutating, state project, and taking advantage of my location as a policy analyst in an international NGO, a location that gave me both insider knowledge of how power works and connections to the centers of institutionalized power, over time I was able to view "the state" operating in ever more capacities: national dreamer, discourse maker, political rationalizer, population surveiller, policy enforcer, social service provider, statistics producer, and so on. It was this multiperspectival research strategy, which gave me the insider's cultural perspective of anthropology while extending that vision to multiple analytic levels (local, provincial, central state), social domains (village, population science, government bureaucracy, and more), and times (past, present, imagined future), that enabled me to make the analytical connections laid out in this article. As anthropologists search for new ways to grasp "the state" and "the governmental," and more anthropologists have opportunities to work in policy and program research positions, this kind of method might find wider use in the discipline.

For students of modernity more generally, this piece of Chinese political history is of interest because it generated a new kind of person, a new sort of subjectivity, whose bearers face troubling existential dilemmas (as well as some intriguing opportunities). Although the Western discourse on China's birth control program, especially that portrayed by the media, tends to exoticize and demonize China's "totalitarian" and "coercive" population program, I have stressed the parallels between the discourses and practices of China's socialist form of development planning and the capitalist forms of development planning pursued in much of the Third World. I have argued that the unplanned Chinese person is the product not just of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology of birth planning and an extraordinarily, if decreasingly, strong socialist state, but also of the discourse of development and modernity, an identity of national backwardness, and a dream of catching up with the global leaders that China shares with Third World states around the world. Moreover, the birth planning formula itself was an outcome of the Marxian–Malthusian conflict over the nature of "the population problem," a conflict that, in turn, was rooted in a quintessential West versus the rest binary of the 20th century: socialism–capitalism. China, the "totalitarian" ("coercive," "barbaric," "uncivilized," "impoverished"—the list of media adjectives is unending, and thoroughly

predictable) Other, turns out to be a product of modernity's own categorizing practices.

At a broader level, the Chinese material suggests the productivity, even inventiveness, of population—as figure of discourse, source of social categories, and form of bureaucratic state practice. Like the larger development discourse of which it is a part, population control discourse has the power to create new classifications of social life, new types of personhood, and new forms of social and political exclusion that may subvert the goals of the state planners, even as the persons, exclusions, and subversions remain hidden from official view. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) identified two poles around which modern biopower clusters: the disciplines of the individual body and the regulations of the population, or social body. Anthropologists have devoted great attention to the former, but until quite recently the latter has languished in disciplinary obscurity. With its gargantuan population and fearsome birth planning program, China offers some of the world's most striking support for Foucault's observations on the social power of population discourse and practice. That power operates everywhere that population control is on the agenda of state development planners. A new chapter in the anthropology of modernity is waiting to be written.

Notes

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1. For a fascinating discussion of the child as a site of national salvation, see Anagnost 1997. Her article on the notion of "population quality" (Anagnost 1995) sheds light on how the official discourses on population that I examine in this article circulate at the level of popular culture and everyday practice. A useful entree into the anthropology of Chinese modernity is Rofel 1999.

2. In his work on sub-Saharan Africa, James Ferguson (1990) has argued that the outcomes of development projects often fail to match the intentions of the development planners because the plans interact with unacknowledged social structures and even chance events. In Lesotho, the deployment of development worked not to eradicate poverty, but to spread bureaucratic state power throughout local society, while ideologically concealing the political realities of both poverty and the state. In his writings on Latin America, James Holston (1989, 1999) has contended that modernist architecture and urban planning, key components of development planning, not only fail in their aims of subverting "tradition," but they also often strengthen the social forms and cultural values they aim to challenge. Brazil's planned capital city of Brasilia became an exaggerated

version of what planners sought to abolish—a disorderly, socially stratified place—because of problems inherent in all master-plan solutions: the misguided attempt to negate the past to achieve a new future, an effort that prompts the reassertion of traditional values and social structures; and the totalizing ambitions of the planners, who think they can will their utopian dreams into being, without attending to the real-world conflicts and contradictions that inevitably confront planned projects of social change.

3. Scholars in neighboring fields have begun to work this intellectual ground. For example, historians have analyzed deployments of colonial medicine and public health as biopolitical projects of the colonial state (Prakash 2000). In cultural studies, Greene (1999) has elaborated a discursive approach to the government of the world population crisis. In anthropology, the government of life is an emerging area of interest, especially in studies of science, technology, and medicine.

4. Feminist researchers have, however, analyzed the global politics and political economy of international population control. See especially Bandarage 1997; Correa 1994; Hartmann 1995.

5. Research on the colonial census has highlighted the unexpected productivity of census categories in creating new group identities and new group politics, politics that, in some places, ended up not just undermining their creators' goals but also subverting colonial rule itself (Anderson 1991; Appadurai 1996; Cohn 1987; on contemporary censuses and identities, Kertzer and Arel 2002). On the governmental functions of the family planning program in the construction of modern subjects, see especially Ali 2002; Chatterjee and Riley 2001.

6. The "five black types" (landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, criminals, and rightists) were selected for punitive treatment during the Cultural Revolution. They and their children suffered terribly as a result of this designation.

7. In the Maoist era, state-created, arbitrarily imposed "class status" (*jiejichengfen*) categories, designed to reduce the disparities of precommunist Chinese society, introduced a harsh new system of inequalities that quite literally destroyed the lives of many members of the "bad classes" (Billeter 1985). Equally consequential were the categories embedded in the household registration (*hukou*) system, which was established in the 1950s to limit cityward migration and ensure that the fruits of development went to the urban areas and heavy industries. During the Maoist years, the *hukou* classification peasant-nonpeasant household (*nongye-feinongye hu*) created a virtual two-caste society that left the peasant majority, Mao's "revolutionary creators," poor and village bound (Potter 1983). In the post-Mao era of socialist reform, that same household registration system has fostered the emergence of a huge "floating population," over 100 million strong, of supposedly short-term peasant migrants to the cities. Lacking urban registration, the rude rural "intruders" on China's urban spaces have become a vast underclass of citizens who face discrimination and criminalization and, at the same time, new opportunities for community organization outside the state (e.g., Chan and Zhang 1999; Cheng and Selden 1994; Solinger 1999; Zhang 2001a, 2001b, 2001c). Growing anthropological literatures on ethnicity and gender reveal how state categorizations of those domains, designed to facilitate party rule, have also effected powerful interventions in social life, reproducing old differences and creating new ones (on ethnicity see, e.g., Gladney 1991; Litzinger 2000; Schein 2000; on gender, Barlow 1994; Evans 1997; Rofel 1999).

8. This idea emerged from a stimulating discussion with Bill Maurer.

9. Of course, some concerned scholars, journalists, and officials have addressed the issue, but this attention has been sporadic. Chinese colleagues share my belief that this underground population has not been the focus of any major research effort.

10. Conversation with Chinese demographer, February 28, 2002, California.

11. In these discourses, “the West” is assumed to be developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern, whereas the rest is none of these.

12. During the late 1980s I chaired the Committee on China Scholarship and Exchange within the Population Association of America. In that capacity I traveled often to China, working to connect U.S. and Chinese scholars working on population issues. In 1993 I visited China as a member of a high-level UN delegation assigned to determine why fertility had dropped so dramatically in 1992. These and other experiences provided novel vantage points on the science and politics of population in China.

13. I thank Carol Greenhouse for illuminating discussion of these issues.

14. In nursing such dreams, China was in good company. For Ethiopia and other Third World states, Donham has shown, the story of Marxist revolution was compelling because it told how revolution making would enable a weak and backward group of nations to “jump ahead” in the “grand international scheme of modernization” (1999, esp. p. 123).

15. In an important article, Tyrene White (1994a) has shown how the anarchy–plan formulation had its roots in politics as much as in ideology. Born in a distinctive political moment—the mid-1950s transition to socialism—it was kept alive not because it was the only Marxian formulation of the population problem, but because Mao, China’s paramount leader, had proposed it. To advocate any other approach was to court political danger. By the early 1960s China’s more pragmatic leaders had adopted the term as the only politically viable formula under which to pursue their population control goals.

16. Important documents and speeches chart this process. In the early 1960s birth planning was declared “a fixed policy during the socialist construction of our country” (CC and SC 1985a). In 1970 population planning was declared a prerequisite of economic planning, the primary function of the socialist state (Wang 1991b:47–48).

17. The Cairo Conference fundamentally shifted the means and ends of international population policy from concern with demographic targets to concern for women’s reproductive and sexual health, choice, and rights.

18. For more on the elite politics of population policy in the 1980s, see Tien 1991; White 1994b.

19. Key texts were *Renkou Lilun* (Population Theory), published in 1977, parts of which are translated in Tien 1980, and *China’s Population Problems and Prospects* (Liu et al. 1981), published in English, apparently for a foreign audience. The former established many basic concepts, but it lacked the sense of urgency that developed in 1979–80. The Marxian population discourse developed in texts such as these shaped population control practice in ways that have not been appreciated by the existing scholarship on China’s birth control program.

20. The arguments developed in this section are based on reading hundreds of official birth planning documents and speeches by top party and government leaders as well as Chinese works on population theory. Some of the key documents are mentioned later in the text. For more on the fundamentals of Chinese Maoist Marxism, see, for example, Meisner 1982; Schram 1969.

21. This discussion is based on an analysis of Chinese articles on unplanned and excess childbearing published between the mid-1980s and late 1990s. Of the approximately one hundred articles I reviewed, I read 16 closely. Some of the most interesting items are cited later in the article.

22. This section on policy enforcement is based on wide reading of the Chinese birth planning literature, as well as two periods of field research in China, involving village fieldwork and interviews with cadres at all levels of the administrative system. For accounts of the

politics of policy enforcement in the villages studied, see Greenhalgh 1993, 1994, and Greenhalgh and Li 1995.

23. For more on the impact of the rural economic and political reforms on the enforcement of birth planning, see White 1991. A case study of the process is Greenhalgh 1993.

24. For entrees into the large literature on resistance to the policy, see Chu 1991; Greenhalgh 1994; Johnson et al. 1998; Wasserstrom 1984; White 2000.

25. Conversation with Chinese demographer, February 28, 2002, California.

26. Interview with Chinese birth planning official, November 23, 1999, Beijing; discussion with Chinese demographer, March 24, 2000, Los Angeles.

27. The numbers 112 and 157 million unplanned births are based on estimates that 25 and 35 percent of births were unreported. These figures are conservative because they assume that official birth tallies are complete—which they are not.

28. Discussion with Chinese demographer, September 15, 1999, Cairo; discussion with Chinese demographer, November 25, 1999, Beijing.

29. Unplanned infants in the villages are likely to be deprived of access to state-organized inoculations against infectious diseases, for these shots are administered by medical personnel who are responsible for birth planning (Jing Jun, personal communication, February 23, 2002).

30. In 1990, for example, Shanghai and the relatively urbanized province of Zhejiang claimed planned birth rates above 95 percent, whereas the rural provinces of Fujian and Jiangxi reported rates of around sixty percent (SBPC 1991).

31. In China, the great bulk of social science research is conducted by scholars employed in state-run organizations, whether universities or social science academies. In general, research topics are assigned to research units by central-level agencies, with financing attached to specific projects. Lack of funding makes it difficult to work on topics that fall outside the purview of state concern. Chinese population specialists I have spoken to described unplanned childbearing and the black population as highly sensitive subjects, ones they are reluctant to pursue without explicit political support.

32. They may be enumerated as members of the school population, work force, and so on, but they are not classified as unplanned or black persons.

33. At the macrolevel, the planning process is moving from a more mandatory to a more indicative style of target setting. At the microlevel, some of the micromanagement practices surrounding childbearing are gradually falling away. For example, in some places the practice of passing quotas down to the grassroots level is dropping away; in others newlyweds no longer need apply for permission to have a first child. My understanding of recent changes in the birth control program is based on my reading of recent birth planning yearbooks, conversations with Chinese birth planning officials who participated in the Advanced Leadership Program sponsored by the SBPC and the Public Media Center, and discussions with others attending the International Symposium on Quality of Care held in Beijing, November 17–19, 1999.

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