

effort. Indeed, the author has produced a book that sets a high standard for other economists to follow, especially for young development economists. (Takashi Yamano)

*Birth Control in China, 1949–2000: Population Policy and Demographic Development* by Thomas Scharping, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, xvi + 406 pp.

This is a comprehensive study on the activities relating to family planning<sup>1</sup> in China, which was based on the author's three stays in China, in 1986, 1990, and 1992, for this project, two visits in the course of different projects during 1993 and 1994, and one visit for attending the IUSSP (International Union for the Scientific Study of Population) meeting held in China in 1997. The author collected a large amount of materials and documents, one of the important features of this book, including official documents, research papers and books, and empirical data dealing with Chinese family planning. In addition, the author has interviewed relevant leaders, scholars, and people from which first-hand information and direct impression of Chinese society could be obtained. Sometimes, it is not easy for a foreign scholar to collect official documents and data in China.

The book is comprehensive because it covers various aspects relating to family planning programs such as the history of population development in China, the processes of policy making and changes, the impact of the policies on gender role and fertility decline, and the problems that the implementation of the programs are facing. The crucial contribution and difference of this book from others are that the reasons why the Chinese government intended to control its population in such a harsh way are described in detail rather than superficially.

#### *Contents of the Book*

In the first chapter, the author indicated his understanding of family planning in China in terms of hardships of the family planning activities, the conflict between the liberalization of the economy and tight control of birth, and the limits of government intervention in family planning. The author attributed all the problems faced by the implementation of family planning in China to the changes in the values and concepts associated with social, economic, and political development. In Chapter 2, the author attempted to elucidate the contradiction between the human right issue and the need for action to limit the rapid increase of population by considering that family-size preferences that would be economically viable at the private level may conflict with the concerns of the society in general. The author mentioned that "it is not the individual but the institution of the family, in a broad sense also society at large, that opposes the government's birth-planning efforts" (p. 10).

<sup>1</sup> I noticed that the author preferred to use the terms "birth control," instead of "family planning." I used the terms "family planning" in this review because, to my understanding, the activities relating to family planning in China are far beyond those for birth control.

The institution of the family used to be strongly governed by the traditional son-preference ideas and the ideas that define identities and unite individuals with eternity by way of the family line. The author mentioned the sources for this study in Chapter 3.

In order to understand why China promoted birth control, in Chapter 4 the author described the motives and the reasons for the decision of family planning implemented in China before the onset of the ambitious campaign. The author mentioned that Premier “Zhou Enlai acted as the main promoter of renewed birth-control activities . . . the Politburo, including Mao Zedong, at long last endorsed his proposal to cease treating birth control as an aspect of health work and to deal with it instead in the context of food and economic policies. Henceforth, birth control occupied an increasingly important place in government policy” (p. 32). Continuing his review of the experiences of family planning before the 1970s, in Chapter 5 the author discussed the phases of the one-child policy from which the author divided the family planning campaigns into several phases, i.e., the muddle from 1949 to 1978, the campaign from 1979 to 1983, the relaxation from 1984 to 1985, the controversy from 1986 to 1989, and the administration from 1990 to 1999. The author described the background of the changes in the family planning policies from the two-child policy to one-child policy to one-and-half-child policy, depicting the changes in the concepts and conditions of family planning based on official and academic documents. The population target for limiting the total population within 1.2 billion in the year 2000 was focused, which led to the one-child policy, and the relaxation of such a strict policy shortly after generated an intense debate for formulating the following policies.

In Chapter 6 the author discussed the implementation of the national policy in terms of the regulations and rules at the provincial and grassroots levels. The author noticed that, even though there was a lack of regulation at the national level, the regulations based on national policies and instructions were universal at the provincial level, which were used as guidelines for the implementation of family planning at the grassroots levels. It should be emphasized that the author noticed the discrepancies in the regulations between upper and lower administrative levels, with lack of information about grassroots conditions at the upper level and constantly modifying central directives by claiming “special circumstances” and “necessary adjustments” at the lower level. In Chapter 7 the role of various organizations in family planning such as parties, family planning commissions, academic bodies, and others were introduced. The effects of grassroots organizations and medical network were also mentioned. As family planning focused on the birth plan, in Chapter 8 the author described the plan system and procedures. Based on the projected target population, 1.2 billion in the year 2000, the birth plan was formulated at the national level each five years. Such a national plan then was transmitted to the authorities concerned at the provincial and grassroots levels, which decided the quota in terms of the number of births for each village. The author also introduced statistical and other information systems in order to clearly indicate how the processes of birth planning were implemented in the whole family planning system.

In order to avoid bias and incomplete data in portraying the family planning program in China, the author considered the problems from the perspective of family and individuals. In Chapter 9 he attempted to analyze the family size and sex preferences based on presently available, though insufficient, datasets. It was found that the rejection of one-child norms in

rural areas was universal and that, in general, more than two-thirds of the respondents exhibited a preference for two children. Due to the large discrepancy between the desired number and sex of children in families and the requirement of national policies, the non-compliance and the conflicts between some individuals and grassroots personnel were inevitable. Some cases dealing with the conflicts associated with the desire to have more children, such as the use of ultrasound B machines in order to have a son, unauthorized adoption for avoiding punishment were mentioned in Chapter 10.

In Chapters 11 and 12 female marriage trends and the fertility levels for time series were described based on some national statistical data. Due to the son preference and the drastic changes in the fertility rate, the sex, and age structure, in China there has been a dramatic transition since the beginning of the family planning. The author analyzed such changes in Chapter 13. High sex ratios at a lower age were prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s. The age structure from the young pattern to the old pattern caused a fast increase in the proportion of elderly people, resulting in changes in the dependency ratio, which indicates the numbers of children and old people as a percentage of the active population aged 15 to 64.

In Chapter 14 the previous analyses were summarized, with emphasis placed on the causes and the effects of family planning. In order to predict further development of the Chinese population and the family planning program, in Chapter 15 the author reviewed various results of population projections and discussed the implications for the Chinese population development in the future. In the last chapter the options of Chinese population development were considered from the viewpoint of the government, scholars, and the author's own ideas. The author suggested that the birth-planning control has been tightening up since 1990 and that there is no clue to reversal in the coming years.

### *Some Comments*

My main impression in reading this book is that the author is very well acquainted with the situation of family planning in China in terms of both policies and implementation. It is very interesting to note that the book referred to some important events that occurred in the course of the family planning programs, such as Yicheng trial by Liang Zhongtang, the policy changes in Guangdong Province, and the serious underreporting of the number of births, as well as the research project on future population policy.

The author emphasized that, "the Chinese leadership has tried hard to gloss over the toughness of its measures" (p. 7), such that the government still mentioned that birth planning in China is practiced on voluntary basis, which caused vociferous protests in the United States and other Western countries (p. 7). I think that what the author mentioned is true. However, the voluntary basis in China is conditional. We could not say that the three-child policy was a voluntary-based policy when each family wished to have four children on the average. It must be acknowledged that China has the most rigorous family planning program in the world. Unlike the other countries which focused their attention on the process of family planning, the Chinese government focused on the results, namely, to reduce as much as possible the total population, regardless of whatever sacrifices had to be made, whereas many Chinese scholars would have preferred to consider the rights of both families and country, by advocating the two-child policy. It is certain that, if an absolute voluntary basis had been adopted from the beginning of the family planning program in the early

1970s, the Chinese population might have reached at least the 1.5 billion mark now, the economic development would not have been as remarkable as presently, the unemployment rate would have tripled, and the living conditions of the people would not have been as satisfactory as now. Without the development of the country and decrease in the number of births, how would it have been possible to improve dramatically the living conditions in China? Only Chinese people can imagine, enjoy, and realize what China has achieved.

What is the main cause of the fertility decline in China since the early 1970s? Even though there are no reliable and substantiated data to answer this question, most Chinese scholars consider that the family planning program played a more important role in decreasing the fertility than the socioeconomic factors. The author agrees with this concept. However, such a conclusion was based on the perception of the scholars rather than on calculations, as pointed out by the author.

I appreciate the opinion expressed by the author, "Chinese birth control may be equally termed a huge success and a gigantic failure" (p. 330). This should be explained further, "This would apply not only to the twists and turns in the first three decades of the People's Republic but also to the original, ambitious targets of the one-child policy" (p. 330). In fact, the Chinese government had never considered that exceeding the 1.2 billion people target at the end of the year 2000 through the one-child policy was a failure of family planning, except for those who proposed the target. The failure is represented by the unreasonable target.<sup>2</sup> I consider that the "huge success" is reflected in the sharp decrease of the fertility and its beneficial effects on the socioeconomic development and the living conditions of the people, whereas the "gigantic failure" is associated with the large cost of the fertility decline or the adverse consequences such as family sacrifice, high sex ratios at birth, reproductive health effect, and population aging.

The author noted the inconsistencies among the decision of the Politburo's Standing Committee from February 1998, the statement from the research project on future population policy six months after February 1998, and the decision of the Central Committee on "Strengthening Population and Birth-Control Work and Stabilizing the Low Fertility Level" in March 2000" (pp. 339–40). Since I drafted the report of the Yicheng investigation (one of the subprojects of the project of the future population policy) and the project design,<sup>3</sup> I know that the concept of some scholars were quite different from those of the government. It appears that the final report of the project eventually became a document supporting the decision of the Central Committee made in March 2000, and that the concepts of the report totally changed from the original research purpose.<sup>4</sup>

The author seems to consider that the activities relating to family planning in China in the 1990s have been tightening up, as evidenced by the change of the two-child policy to the

<sup>2</sup> Xiaochun Qiao, *Dui jinhua shengyu de lishi, xianshi he weilai de jidian sikao, Zhongguo renkou de kunjing yu duiche* [Consideration of the historical, current, coming family planning: The dilemma and the countermeasures of China's population] (Beijing: Zhongguo Renkou Chubanshe, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Xiaochun Qiao, "Guanyu 21 shiji Zhongguo shengyu zhengce yanjiu de sikao" [Consideration on China's fertility policy in 21st century], *Renkou yanjiu*, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>4</sup> Research Group of the State Family Planning Commission, "Zhongguo weilai renkou fazhan he shengyu zhengce" [Future population development and fertility policy in China], *Renkou yanjiu*, no. 3 (2000).

one-and-half-child policy in Guangdong Province (pp. 340–41). In fact, such a decision was made by the provincial government, not by the central government. Since the fertility declined dramatically in the 1990s, almost no one at the national level wished to tighten the policy. The central government is now facing the following dilemma; it may not be necessary to tighten the population policy because the fertility rates are already very low, and at the same time it should be recognized that the fertility rates might rebound if the activities were to be relaxed. Facing the two opposite choices, the government may choose the latter. Finally, I would like to refer to the family planning activities implemented since the early 1990s. In 1991, Peng Peiyun, the president of the State Family Planning Commission, suggested that “the family planning policy should not only be tightened but also give a feeling of well-being.” The latter condition implied that the policy should be satisfactory for or acceptable by the people. In 1994, “three integrations” were proposed in order to provide financial and living support to the families adopting the birth-control policy. In 1995, “two transitions” of the family planning policy were proposed, namely, from family planning management to family planning service. Especially after the 1994 Cairo Conference, the family planning program started emphasizing two objectives: “quality of service” and “reproductive health” which have been incorporated into the conventional family planning program. As a result, at the grassroots level, for the first time, it was recognized that the policy of family planning did not just aim at controlling the number of births but also at improving the reproductive health of the people. Such impact is crucial, and should not be ignored.

(Xiaochun Qiao)