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POPULATION POLICY IN CHINA: THEORY AND PRACTICE

- Ilina Sen.

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As the world's most populous country (According to the 1982 Census China had 22.6% of the world's population - a total of 1,031,882,571 people (1)) China has been a focus of interest for statesmen, economists and demographers throughout the world. In particular, interest has centered around the way in which China after the revolution has coped with the combined legacies of a high population and an under developed economy ravaged by war and colonization. And for us in India, of very special interest has been the fact that China has faced these issues under a socialist state ideology, quite unlike our own post-colonial experience. However, it has not been easy to interpret population data from China. Throughout the late 1950s through the 1970s there was a lot of confusion and disagreement over the basic facts about China's population. The Chinese government did not publish statistics or policy documents, and the scraps of information picked up by (mainly Western) China watchers were often contradictory. It was only in the late '70s that documentation began to come out of China. This paper is based is mainly on this documentation although it draws in addition on analytical articles articles in population/Sinology journals.

Population policy in post-revolutionary China has a complex and tortuous history. Broadly speaking, population policies passed through the following major phases (2):-

a) FIRST PHASE 1949-52:- This was the immediate post-revolutionary period. In general it may be said that the government was too busy restoring the wartorn economy and did not promulgate or even consider a clear-cut population policy. Nevertheless, there was a change in the pattern of population growth. In old China, population had been characterized by a high birth rate, a high death rate and a low rate of natural increase. In 1949, China had a birth rate of 36 per thousand, a death rate of 20 per thousand and a rate of natural increase of 16 per thousand. By 1952 however, the death rate had fallen to 17 per thousand, while the birth rate remained high at 37 per thousand. The rate of natural increase thus went up to 20 per thousand.

b) SECOND PHASE 1953-65:- In 1953, China embarked upon her first five-year plan. China's population had increased by nearly 61 millions over 1949 by 1954. As part of the theoretical debate then raging on national reconstruction Ma Yinchu put forward his "New Population Theory" in 1955. This document pointed out contradictions between excessive population growth and the improvement in living standards, and advocated "improving the quality of population and controlling its size." Very little evidence is available now about the actual implementation of this policy or of the kind of response it elicited in public life in China. We do however have records of the Chinese Women's Federation's letter to the Central Government in 1954(4) expressing their (i.e. women's) unwillingness to mother a great number of children. Liu Shaoqi is known to have convened a birth control forum in Dec. 1954 in which he declared that the Communist Party endorsed birth control and felt that it should be promoted and not opposed. In 1955 the government began to manufacture external use contraceptives and relaxed restrictions on induced abortions. In 1956 the health department launched a campaign to provide information on birth control and contraception. In the same year Zhou en lai in his report on the proposals for the 2nd 5-year plan at the 3th Congress of the C.P.C said that "to protect women and children and bring up..... our younger generation in a way conducive to the health and prosperity of our nation, a certain measure of birth control is desirable." In 1957 Mao Zedong also appeared to favour birth control when he remarked (enlarged 3rd Plenary Session of the C.P.C.'s 8th Central Committee) "as far as procreation is concerned the human race has been in total anarchy and has failed to exercise control".

However, even during this second phase, a counter ideology in population theory existed, and towards the end of the period, denunciations of Ma Yinchu and others associated with a policy of birth control took place.

c) THIRD PHASE 1966-71:- This was the period when the so called leftist or socialist population theory gained predominance. The main arguments in this were as follows:

1. It was stated that people were not a liability but a strength. A socialist country did not fear population growth, on the contrary sought to prepare favourable conditions for it. More people would build socialism faster, by making it possible to create more accumulation through socialist labour and develop the socialist economy at greater speed.

2. All theories of population control were motivated by imperialist design and prompted by Malthusian ideas.

While between 1958 and 1965, it was possible to note the conflict of this ideology with one of birth control, after the cultural revolution began in 1966, the work of the state family planning agencies came to a total standstill. Their personnel were disbanded, and any mention of family planning became taboo. For example in 1962 the natural growth rate reached the 25 per thousand mark indicating that not much success was being had with FP. In the same year however, the state council was calling on various localities to promote FP, and as late as 1965, Chou en lai went on record to say that FP work was progressive.

d) FOURTH PHASE:- (From 1971 to the Present):

This period saw great political changes in China. The extreme 'left' line of the cultural revolution was completely given up, and social and economic policies that were much more moderate were introduced. Large scale implementation of a policy of birth control began once more to be encouraged, and far more rigorously than was ever done before. The resolution of the population problem was stated to be important for economic reconstruction, social development, and socialist modernization (5). In 1972, Hebei Province hosted a small national conference on Family Planning, in 1973, population targets were for the first time made part of national economic planning, and in 1974, Chairman Mao Zedong once more emphasized that population growth must be controlled. In 1978 the new constitution explicitly stipulated that 'the state advocates and encourages family planning.'



The new family planning policy lays down the specific requirements of 'Late, sparse and few', i.e. late marriage, few children and widely spaced out births. Marriage age was officially raised to 25 for men and 23 for women in the countryside and 26 for men and 24 for women in towns. At the third session of the fifth national Peoples' congress, in 1980, the State council put forth the call of only one child per couple and made the one child family compulsory for all State and party cadres. As a means of motivation of couples to adhere to the one child family norm, special incentives like extra work points in rural areas, additional benefits like preferential access to housing, extra rations have been in use.

To judge by results, China's new population policy has achieved what it set out to achieve, viz reduction in fertility levels. According to the result as of the 'One per thousand population fertility sampling survey' carried out in 1985, (6) the Total fertility rate (TFR) which was at the level of 5.4 in the 1940s fell to 2.6 in 1981. At the same time, 'ideological education' or propaganda has also gone on. For example, a people's daily editorial in March 1982 reaffirms the nation's commitment to the one child family norm (7). This document is notable also for its strident tone, its advocacy of disincentives if positive incentives did not work, as well as for its strong emphasis on the eugenic goals of fertility control.

What methods have been most commonly used in China for birth control? From the table below, (8) it appears that the major stress has been on female mechanical contraceptives, notably IUDs, although male and female sterilizations have also been in use.

We can conclude this brief survey with a few general observations. From what has been said above, it is obvious that there has been in China since the success of the revolution, a conflict between two lines as far as population policy is concerned, and which line has predominated at a particular moment has depended on the larger ideological orientation of state policy. It is also apparent that Chinese

socialist theory has failed to work out clearly the relationship between population and resource base, having swung from one extreme to another. This is an area in which Marx's own writings are incomplete (9). Our last observation concerns the way in which the women's question has surfaced along with population policy in China. In the first period of pro FP policies in China, birth control was seen much more in the context of women's and children's health and also in the context of freeing women from a situation in which they were bonded to bearing children only. It must be remembered that this was also a period in which Chinese women made great strides in emerging in public life and throwing off feudal shackles. In the later, post 1971 period however, FP is seen much more as an issue of state planning. It is also a period of relative withdrawal from public life for Chinese women. The One child family norm has also reportedly led to an increase in female infanticides, patriarchal values and a desire for male children still being strong in the Chinese family and social structure.(10) To what extent Chinese population policy is more humane and equitable in spirit is an issue for debate and discussion, a discussion that it is hoped will be set in motion by this paper.

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BIRTH CONTROL AND LATE MARRIAGE.

Table 15.

THE FOUR MAJOR METHODS OF BIRTH CONTROL 1971 - 1977.

Method of Contracep- tion.	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977
I.U.D	6,172,889 (47.4%)	9,220,297 (51.7%)	13,949,569 (58.2%)	12,579,886 (59.1%)	16,743,693 (60.3%)	11,620,000 (51.8%)	12,974,000 (55.6%)
Vasectomy	1,223,480 (9.4%)	1,715,822 (9.6%)	1,933,210 (8.1%)	1,445,251 (6.8%)	2,652,653 (9.6%)	1,490,000 (6.7%)	2,616,000 (11.1%)
Tubal Ligation.	1,744,644 (13.4%)	2,087,160 (11.7%)	2,955,617 (12.4%)	2,275,741 (10.7%)	3,260,042 (11.8%)	2,700,000 (12.1%)	2,776,000 (11.8%)
Induced Abortion	3,910,110 (29.9%)	4,813,542 (27.0%)	5,116,405 (21.3%)	4,984,564 (23.4%)	5,084,260 (18.3%)	6,570,000 (29.3%)	5,229,000 (22.1%)
TOTAL*	13,051,123 (100%)	17,836,821 (100%)	23,948,801 (100%)	21,285,442 (100%)	27,740,648 (100%)	22,380,000 (100%)	23,595,000 (100%)

\* If a person uses more than one method, it is reflected in the total.

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