

POPULATION CONTROL POLICY THROUGH GENDER LENS: A LOOK AT CHINA

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Abstract

This paper will examine whether gendered assumptions are embodied in population control policies, and if there are any resulting social justice concerns, specifically gender equality, women's health. This process can be studied by using China as a case study because its nationalist rhetoric calls for state centered population control involving socio-economic implications. The paper will first discuss gender as a tool of analysis set forth by the feminist perspective as a theoretical base, addressing "gendered assumptions" and explore whether population issues are gendered. By understanding population issue through the lens of gender, we can examine whether gendered assumptions were the basis of state-centered population control policy in China, and if this policy impacted society. China is also an interesting case study because its population control policy has been controversial within the international community, particularly those interested in human rights and social justice.

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Gender

What is gender and how does it apply to population and reproductive issue? Gender is a social construct involving power relations based on societal preference and norms, which include both women and men. In other words gender differences are interwoven with systems of the power and societal hierarchy based on the dividing lines of age, class, ethnicity and race¹. As De Barbieri states “gender is the social construction that defines and gives meaning to sexuality and human reproduction. Gender is a system of power relations over certain capacities of the human body: sexuality and reproduction. Central to this system of power is the control men exercise over women’s sexuality and reproductive lives and the power that men exert over women’s capacity to work”².

Gender is a useful tool of analysis, because it allows us to explore the assumption that reproduction and birth control are inherently women’s responsibility, simply because women physically get pregnant and give birth. Jiggins writes, “Population control policies target women as bearers of children as if they were solely responsible for their own fertility, yet in reality women, may have little say in fertility decisions”³. This poses a dilemma for policy makers who wish to effectively control population (for what ever reason) because of the social justice components involved in such policies. Keeping in mind that both gender and population issues are socially constructed, one can begin to see the links between the two concepts and their relationship.

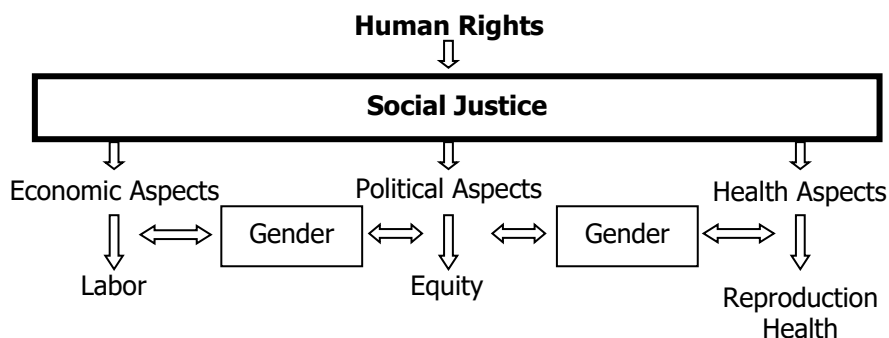
Population Control Policies: Population control can typically take two forms – measures to increase the population or measures to decrease the population. As noted by Montgomery⁴ governments adopt antigrowth policies for several reasons: to conserve food and water, to maintain economies of scale in farm units, to improve the quality of services available to the community, and to maintain homogeneity. This implies environmental and economic reasons.

Correa describes six types of Trends in Population Policies: Fully established state – led policies which follows the Malthusian model, often implement draconian measures. In this type, governments are convinced that reducing population must be a component of development policies⁵.

Semi-established policies include policies that have been in place for a long time, but have partially been implemented as a result of political controversies, cultural or women's resistance. Combined policies include situations in which state led policies are mildly involved and do not fully explain fertility decline, but promote and support both the family planning and market operations. Pronatal policies are those in which state sponsors measures to increase the population (found in many Eastern European Countries during the Cold War). Double-Standard Policies specific groups are targeted for fertility control while others are left alone or provided with incentives for high fertility. The basic needs approach links fertility decline with the expansion of education, health services and better economic opportunities for women.

Social Justice: Some of the most talked about aspects to over population and population control are social, economic and environmental impacts. Traditional theorist such as Malthus, Hardin and Ehrlich focus on the impact of over

population on the environment and on economics. Social Justice is defined under the broad umbrella of human rights. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights human rights are comprised of social justice issues. Including economic issues (labor rights), political freedom (equal justice) and adequate health. Interwoven throughout human rights and social justice is gender (see below) figure-1.



The environmental justice literature and the eco feminist literature provide us with a useful definition of social justice which includes environmental degradation, poverty, racism, sexism, classism, animal cruelty, etc. Social justice Gottlieb⁶ asserts, is part of contemporary environmentalism which focuses on issues of empowerment and equity. In other words, in order for social justice to exist, empowerment and equity must also exist. In fact, The Declaration on the Environment and Development suggests that the eradication of poverty (principle 5) and the inclusion of women, indigenous people and oppressed people (Principles 20, 22, 23) are crucial to the empowerment of society and the health of the environment.

This paper incorporates the notion of social justice as empowerment and equality among humans and nature and to evaluate whether population policies are gendered,

specifically the effects upon women and social justice (economics, politics and health). The interconnections between gender, population control policies and social justice can be found through crucial questions. How is population control policies gendered? Do gendered population control policies perpetuate social injustice? What can we learn about reproductive policies and state – sponsored population control policies (e.g. .case of China). Are there connections between reproductive control and socialist ideology? These are not new questions or concepts, but have been discussed by many scholars in differing fields past 30 years. What is not so common in the incorporation of the state sponsored control measures of China into a discussion about women's choices, social justice and universal rights.

Feminist Theory and Population Control

Coined as the Decade of Women, the 1970s marked the beginning of a new era in the global women's movement. Feminist scholars and researchers brought internal women's issues (health, environment, equality, labor reproduction and population control) to the forefront of many international forums and conferences. For example, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women defines gender discrimination as well as the right of reproduction choice⁷.

[Men and Women shall have the] same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and the means to enable them to exercise these rights (CEDAW 1979 Article16).

Social Justice: Economics, Politics and Health

The UDHR asserts that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (Article 1) and “without distinction of any kind such as race, color sex, language religion “ (Article 2) (1945 UDHR) this paper focuses on three main components of human rights (recall figure 1) labor as an economic aspects of social justice, equity as political aspect of social justice and reproductive health as a health aspect of social justice.

Labor is an interesting and complex component of economic social justice because it crosses all ideological boundaries, including capitalism and socialism. In both scenarios laborers are an essential part of the economy in that they keep industry (or agriculture, etc.) running, which in terms keeps the economy running.

Gender plays an important role in labor because often, the division of labor is split between women and men e.g. in most cultures child care and house keeping jobs are viewed as feminine, whereas medical and mechanical jobs are viewed as masculine. This paper acknowledges the importance of gender and labor as two component of social justice and will be evaluated in the case study.

Equality, as a political component of social justice allows us to observe the power dynamics of policy making. The feminist literature is dedicated to deconstructing policy hierarchy through a discussion of gender equality. Terisita De Barbieri asserts that the leading voices and actors in policy making have been, for the most part, male and as a result, population policies aim to preserve the existing social order, with its hierarchies and divisions, De Barbieri argues that the design of population policies and planning programs have been and continue to be dominated by a

male perspective. Her assertion also suggests that power imbalance between male-policing makers and those affected by the policy (pre-dominantly women) clearly create a non-egalitarian political environment. Her assertion also suggest that gendered assumptions are the basis of scientific inquiring, and often times, scientific research and data are the backbone of public policies, particularly population control policies, e.g. she asserts that population control has been mostly implemented through birth control programs, which have concentrated on female methods of birth control as opposed to male methods of birth control⁸.

In the book, Ecofeminism Mies and Shiva develop a formal critique of current population control policies, pointing to the many inequities of gender, class and race which have resulted in human rights violations. Essentially they argue that population policies and reproductive technologies are racist, sexist, imperialist and anti-poor which have resulted from the traditional Malthusian-type policy which seeks to decrease the global population at the expense of poor women. "The female" body's generative capacity has now been discovered as a new 'area of investment' and profit making for scientists, medical engineers, and pharmaceutical companies. Thus technologies are based on exploitation and domination. The aim is total control of all women's reproductive capacity - in this, the women as a person with human dignity is ignored.

In fact, Correa found that because global contraceptive sales are so high (\$2.6-2.9 billion a year), the pharmaceutical companies reap a great deal of eco power and are able to influence governments and their policies¹⁰.

Political inequities and power imbalances involved in such technologies suggest a third component of Social justice – health particularly reproductive health, e.g. the birth -

control short called Depo-Provera was tested on women in India for many years during the drug testing and development stages, which resulted in the sterilization of hundreds of women in India¹¹. Cites many other examples of Depo-Provera “guinea pigs” including minority women in the USA Aboriginal women in Canada, poor women in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Jamaica and many more¹².

Such health concerns, along with discrimination and coercion can also be found on many “Third World” women, e.g. Norplant was administered to 1,000 women in Bangladesh, none of whom were told that they were participating in a list sponsored by the Bangladesh Fertility Research Program¹³. The testing of contraceptives on women throughout the globe suggests that social injustices are indeed occurring. In addition to coercion by population programs, discrimination and poor services, maternal mortality and unsafe abortion provided empirical evidence of persistent gender biases in program creation and implementation¹⁴.

Thus, it is clear from the feminist literature that social justice issues of labor, equality and reproduction health are interwoven throughout the critiques of population control theories and policies. The literature clearly illustrates gender inequities and gendered assumptions about reproduction and contraception, these gendered assumptions are found in reproductive science †

Role of Women and Population in Socialism

Theoretically, socialism focuses on eco and societal issues. Socialism outlines an economic system of production and consumption in which both are dependent upon and driven

† Once again see Bandarage 1997, Mies & Shiva 1993, Sen 1994.

by supply and demand, not profit (as in capitalism). As for the societal aspects of socialism, it focuses on creating an egalitarian society, particularly class and gender equality. Verdery¹⁵ argues that the socialist state takes on a "potential" role which implicates gender by seeking to eradicate female/male differences to an unprecedented degree, casting onto the state certain tasks associates with household gender roles.

Montgomery¹⁶ adds to this by assisting that government intervention is necessary to influence or control individual action in the interest of the common good; demographically driven population policies have assumed that individual welfare would be advanced by collective action to assist, persuade, or include individuals to increase or decrease their fertility to meet socially desirable goals. Although socialism and feminism, as complementary ideologies offered women recognition of their oppressed status and the promise of equality¹⁷, the reality was that gender equality was never achieved. Using Socialist ideology as an excuse, the state supported "gender equality" in order to incorporate women in the work force¹⁸. Women's reproduction was merely another facet of labor. They were supposed to uphold all of the old patriarchal values (Women doing house work and child rearing) while simultaneously satisfying socialist labor values. The socio-economic realities of socialism encompass gendered labor inequalities stemming from the state's will to industrialize.

Finally, let us revert back to the original research question and ask "Does socialism contribute to the discussion of whether gendered assumptions are imbedded in population policies? Interestingly the literature suggests that the power structure in socialism involves gender in three notable ways. First is the Marxist notion that women's emancipation can come only with socialism. As a result,

Marx places the responsibility of gender equality on socialism. Secondly socialism illustrates a gendered power structure that as part of the policy – making dynamic, women's labor and reproduction are seen by the state as essential to industrialization adding an eco element. As women entered the work force, the socialist state argued that women would gain autonomy and empowerment. Thirdly, this socialist power structure involves a state and its society, theoretically based in egalitarian values undermined by industrialization and eco development, both of which seem to be at odds with each other.

The One – Child Policy of China

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was established as a Socialist state in 1949. The Socialist state believed that one of the major inhibitors to eco growth was the large (and growing) population. With this concern in mind China began to regulate fertility and established a state sponsored population control policy which called for negative population growth. This section looks at China's Socialist experience with population control, specifically the so called One Child Policy.

John Aird reports that the first public call for birth control was delivered at the National People Congress on September 18, 1954. The census indicated that population number had increased dramatically and the state believed that this could only have negative effects on the economy. By 1955 Mao warned that uncontrolled population growth would lead to the extinction of the Chinese people and that human race must control itself to achieve a planned increase¹⁹. Mao believed that a larger population would deplete China's agricultural and economic resources. In 1956 the Ministry of Public Health issued a directive requiring local health agencies to promote birth control

actively. Interestingly this refers to the Socialists ideology in that the state took on a paternal role because it knew what was best for its citizens. The state used this socialist principle to mandate and implement unpopular policies, causing a dilemma for the state.

The Second population control campaign (1966) urging families to limit procreation and later, the third campaign beginning in 1975 involved stricter enforcement of the pro birth policies²⁰. The state urged families to have no more than 2 or 3 children. Although Birth Control was not mandating, couples were urged to utilize free family planning facilities, for the good of society – so as to prevent an economic disaster that would eventually lead to famine and the extinction of the Chinese. By the late 1970s, the population growth of China had dropped from almost 26 per thousand in 1970 to 12.6 in 1976²¹. Encouraged by these figures, the government recognized the implications of halting the population control effort and soon embarked on the one child policy (1979).

China's one child policy is one of the most talked about fertility control policies in the world, and one of the most controversial. The controversy stems from human rights concerns over alleged reports of coercion and corruption by local enforcers, and from praises by some environmentalists, who believe that China is doing a good job reducing population and thus reducing environmental harm.

The One Child Policy is different from the other attempt at reducing the population in that this policy placed heavy consequences on those who had more than one 'state approved' Child. As a result 70% of 170 million women in China were using birth control, of these 25% had been sterilized, while only 10% of their male partners had been sterilized²². By 1990, women's contraceptive prevalence rate

was as high as 100% in some communities, among the users, 62% had IUDs, 27% were sterilized and 6% were married to sterilized men²³. The following graph compares China contraceptive rates to global rates. Notice that China's female sterilization figures are similar to global numbers, yet drastically different with regard to IUD use. This is interesting because it indicates that China is indeed focusing on female fertility control measures at both the same rate as the rest of the world (sterilization) and above the global average (IUD).

It is clear from this data that the One Child Policy relieved heavily on promoting and providing female forms of contraception, while virtually ignoring male forms of contraception. This raises question about gendered perceptions and social justice. Although China is commended for allowing women access to safe abortion (Not only is abortion legal, but because of cultural norm no shame or guilt is attached to having an abortion (Davin 1987, 121) and keeping maternal mortality rates low. In fact, Joni Seager²⁴ reports that maternal mortality rates in China (1990) are similar to those found in many industrialized nations, specifically between 10 to 100 deaths per 100,000 live births. Although there is no quantitative evidence, qualitative research suggest that forced abortion usually take place in the country side where women tend to have more children than the cadres allowed, followed by forced sterilization²⁵.

Another aspect to this policy is the restriction on births that are mentally challenged. 1995Eugenics Law later renamed Maternal and Infant Health Care Law is to prevent new births of inferior quality, particularly in under developed or poor areas²⁶. The above assertions raise many social justice concerns, particularly surrounding equity and reproduction freedom.

Incentives and Disincentives: Along with the strong practices regarding contraceptives which primarily focused on women, the official incentives and disincentives of the One Child Policy seem to affect both parents (except for maternity leave). For those who comply include a certificate entitling them to a monthly allowance, while the child grows up, extra paid maternity leave, lump sum and gifts. Priority in housing, health subsidy, extra work points, bonuses, old age subsidies for the parents and free medical care. Single children have privilege access to education, free health care, job preferences²⁷.

Some of the disincentives include a social payment or fine if an official office holder, the parent can be demoted, blocks on future promotion, and the wages of parents can be locked by 10 or 15% monthly until the child reaches a set age - usually between 10 and 16²⁸. Some of the penalties for rural families include cuts in the amount of contract land and increase in the quotas to be supplied to the state, birth expenses must be the responsibility of the parents and maternity leave is unpaid, no priority in health care or education for the child, and charges will be levied for both²⁹.

This One Child Policy was enforced by the local cadres. Boland (1994, 98) reports: "Despite official denials, coercion plays a large role in China's population control. Much of the coercion is psychological - implicit or explicit threats of force. Typically Party members, local officials, co-workers, and neighbors bring intense pressure to bear on individuals to enforce the One-Child Policy. Despite the reported abuses surrounding enforcement of China's policies, many international population control organizations uphold China as a model for other countries. In a confidential letter to Dr. Nafis Sadik, from Walter Holzhausen, UNFPA Director in Bangladesh, wrote that most donor representatives in Bangladesh "greatly admire" the Chinese "Success" in

population control, brought about with “massive direct and indirect compulsion”, thus upholding China as a model for emulation³⁰. The result of this polarization of opinion is that values regarding the environment, economy and human rights are placed into hierarchy, illustrating the trade – off’s of the policy. In other words, economic and environmental concerns are placed above human rights and social justice concerns, causing confusion on all sides of the debate.

The greatest obstacle to the general acceptance of the One Child Policy is son preference. Chinese culture’s preference for a son, as a result there has been the re-emergence of the infanticide of girl babies and of high mortality rates for infant girls. A 1982 statistic shows that there are 108.5 males to 100 females in 1982³¹. In 1992 an estimated 1.7 million girls were aborted³².

Reframing Chinese Population Control Policies through gender and Social Justice

Finally, as the research question asks, how does the One-Child Policy of China add to the discussion of whether gendered assumptions are embedded in population control policies and if there are verifiable impacts on social justice issues?

We must begin by looking at the role of gender, using De Barbieri’s³³ definition of gender as a social construction that defines reproduction and the power relations involved, we can assess the linkages between gender, reproduction and socialist China.

The Chinese Communist Party believes that reproduction is the key element to economic prosperity and development. Too many people meant that the state committed to socialist welfare and redistribution would deplete its

economic and agricultural resources in order for the growing population to survive. And because much of the One Child Policy is centered around women's contraceptive methods, this suggests that the State equates population control with women's reproductive control (and assumes that fertility is the responsibility of women) as opposed to both men's and women's methods. As a result, gender becomes a primary component of the One Child Policy and the larger goal of eco development.

Gender is also a key component of Chinese nationalism and propaganda. Using gender equity (based in Marxist theory) as a theoretical base for the inclusion of women in the labor force, and that all must work for the good of society a nationalist (Paternal state) trend was evolving. As Aird states "The (Chinese) Ministry recognized that birth control would not be popular, however, they asserted that birth control was not the private affair of individuals, but a matter of importance for the national welfare and therefore an "affair of the state"³⁴. Thus it becomes clear that in China, gendered assumptions about population control are/were constructed through certain, economic political and health components of social justice in China, specifically eco development concerns, labor policies, state nationalism and reproductive control measures. As discussed earlier, the One Child Policy is seen as controversial because although it is accomplishing its goal of reducing population, it has been more criticized for its reported coercive methods (forced abortion, female infanticide and sterilization) resulting in social injustices, particularly regarding equality and health.

In Conclusion, China's One Child Policy contributes much to the discussion of whether gender is embedded in population control policies and any resulting social injustices. China's One-Child Policy suggests that eco

development modernization, labor policies and nationalism produce a gendered population control policy which aims at negative population growth. Once again, women's contraceptive methods, not men's, are the primary focus of the state implemented plan. Women, not men, are often required to undergo abortion, sterilization, and IUD insertions. It is primarily women who endure the wrath and scrutiny of societal and states pressure to have One Child. And finally, it is China's female fetus, because of their gender, are more likely to be aborted, due to cultural son preference. These examples suggest that gendered assumptions (about development labor, and nationalism) are embedded in China's One-Child Policy, thus causing great stress for the Chinese policy-makers and the rest of the global community.

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