

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WITH LIMITED SUPPLIES OF FAMILY LABOR: CHINESE PEASANT FAMILIES IN BALANCING DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC REQUISITES\*

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*In the absence of alternative organizations for efficient economic management in the countryside, the Chinese state decided to rehabilitate the peasant family as the core organization of rural production activities. While rural reform measures have provided peasant families with unexpectedly favorable economic opportunities, the simultaneously strengthened birth control policy has created an ironic shortage of family labor in this supposedly overpopulated country. In examining the Chinese experience of rural reform, this paper places its theoretical focus on the complex relationship between population change and economic development as is shaped by various economic functions of the peasant family. It is theoretically argued and empirically shown here that the family-reliant strategy of economic reform has fundamentally undercut the effectiveness of the population control programs and has ramified such unintended consequences as the reconstruction of "families of old designs" and the inverted proletarianization of small peasant families.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the absence of alternative organizations for efficient economic management in the countryside, the Chinese state decided to rehabilitate the peasant family as the core organization of agricultural and other types of rural production. The whole range of production responsibility systems introduced since the late 1970s have been geared toward gradually restoring the individual production function of the family. Underneath the much publicized successful outcomes of these economic institutional reforms lies a fundamental dilemma in which the Chinese state has to pursue two mutually contradictory goals regarding peasant families.

For the peasant family to function as an efficient economic as well as social institution, its minimal organizational autonomy in terms of size, internal

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structure, communication, and resource flow needs to be ensured. The question of family size is particularly serious to Chinese peasant families, who have been subjected to extensive governmental family planning efforts and, as a result, have reached a bare replacement level of fertility by the late 1970s (CFEPH 1988; Greenhalgh 1988; Chang 1990). While the reform policies of the Communist Party (CPC) provided rural families with unexpectedly favorable economic opportunities, there was a fundamental problem of familial labor shortage due to their rapidly declining size under the *constitutionally endorsed* policy of strict birth control. Under these circumstances, with the one-child family being the official directive, "the heavy fines for having two, three, or more children are little more than an affordable tax on procreation" for today's Chinese peasant families (Morgan 1988, p. 80).

On the part of the Chinese state, there seems to be a pressing need for resolving this contradiction, at least in theory. Extending its implicit official interpretation of the "failure" of collective farming, the Chinese state holds that a large family is less productive and less harmonious than a small one due to shirkings and disagreements, just as large collective farming organizations are inefficient for similar reasons (Su, ed. 1982). This theoretical position does not seem to have thoroughly convinced peasant families. Even local officials have had to substantially tolerate increasing births to peasant families under the pressure of local peasant society. Furthermore, until as late as 1987, ambiguous and lenient messages about family planning sent from the central government added to the relaxed environment for family planning (Wang 1988; Hardec-Cleaveland and Banister 1988).

The issue of family planning in China thus has profound implications and ramifications beyond the domain of demographic control. As the fertility behavior of peasant families has been an essential part of their effort for maintaining the basic integrity of family-centered social and economic life (Chang 1990), the demographic response to the recent reform policies can be considered a germane indicator of the restoration of China's family-centered moral peasantry. The alternating positions of the Chinese state concerning population control, on the other hand, allude to its dilemma between the need to allow peasants' autonomy in determining the basic demographic structure of the familial work organization and the concern about the overall population pressure on China's limited cultivated area. In other words, the family planning policy is an important situational element that both affects and reflects the uneasy process of developing a symbiotic relationship between the peasant family and the socialist state in China's rural modernization.

In examining the Chinese experience of rural reform, this paper places a

theoretical focus on the complex relationship between population change and economic development as is shaped by the production and welfare functions of the peasant family. It is theoretically argued and empirically shown here that the family-reliant strategy of economic reform fundamentally undercuts the effectiveness of population control programs. Sustained industrialization with high labor absorption appears to be the ultimate solution for the burdensome contradiction between the two most important state policies in China. Both the national trends and the particular experience of Dahe People's Commune/Township (cf. Putterman 1989) in regards to various aspects of the population-economy interrelationship are analyzed.

### FAMILY PLANNING AND FAMILY PRODUCTION: THE CHINESE DILEMMA

The 1970s were a period of economic stalemate for most socialist countries after many years of fast economic growth. This may not be an irrelevant observation about China's rural economy. Given the increasingly unfavorable man-land ratio, the institutional impasse in efficiently managing collective agriculture, and the tight migration control against the natural flow of labor for economic adjustment, it became increasingly difficult for Chinese peasant families to maintain the basic material conditions for a decent family life. It was in this historical context that China's family planning programs were implemented with much political pressure and various financial incentives. As the deteriorating social and economic situations of peasant families already weakened the traditional basis of high fertility, the state policy of population control was more easily accepted (Chang 1990; Greenhalgh 1988).<sup>1</sup> In a sense, the 1970s were a period when demographic policy and economic development strategy function in mutual harmony. Conversely, as argued below, the reform strategy of restoring the family-centered peasantry in the 1980s tends to make the one-child family policy much more difficult to implement.

In 1979, even after almost a decade of highly successful family planning, the Chinese state decided to upgrade its population control effort to the famous (infamous?) one-child family policy (Tien 1983; Croll, Davin and Kane 1985). As pragmatists were now fully in charge of the CPC leadership, it was not surprising that birth control measures were stepped up. However, 1979 was also the time when the new reform policies designed to ultimately restore the family as a central organization for rural production began to ramify unex-

<sup>1</sup>The Total Fertility Rate in rural areas plummeted from 7.025 in 1968 to 2.968 in 1978, marking the most drastic "induced fertility transition" in human history (CFEPH 1988, p. 26).

pectedly favorable economic conditions for peasant families, particularly for large ones.

Their fertility having already decreased to a level of slightly above-replacement under the high pressure measures of family planning, peasant families felt more than ever the need for more children to intensify agricultural production, diversify income sources, resume traditional cultural activities, and, of course, ensure their old age security (Saith 1984; Croll 1988). Concurrently, the determination of the Chinese state to control births was as intense as ever. With pragmatic party leaders strongly convinced about the need and feasibility of a tight policy of population control, with the family planning agencies having built up experience and bureaucratic power from a decade of successful family planning, and with the new Constitution of 1978 formally stipulating the state policy of birth control, the one-child family policy was forcefully applied to peasant families. The firm determination of the Chinese state for continuous population control seemed to pay off. The birth rate picked up in the early 1980s, partly due to peasant families' enlarged demand for children (Saith 1984) and partly due to the new marriage law stipulating younger legal ages for marriage (CFEPH 1988), but it showed a precipitous drop in 1984.<sup>2</sup>

But there were other, equally important consequences. First, the coercive nature of family planning was far too intensified, so that the social and political costs of compulsory population control visibly increased. Various forms of compulsion involved in China's birth control programs were hardly new after many years of intensive family planning, but only one child per couple, especially in the context of rapid revitalization of the family economy, was not an easily agreeable directive to peasant families and many sympathetic local cadres (Greenhalgh 1990). Confronting the visible resistances of peasant families and the hesitations of local cadres, the Chinese state in 1983 required that married women of childbearing age with one child wear IUDs, couples with two or more children be sterilized, and unauthorized pregnancies be aborted (see Hardee-Cleaveland and Banister 1988).

While these stringent measures actually forced most families to comply with the one-child norm, the discontent over the excess state intervention in familial procreation quickly spread throughout Chinese society. Also, peasant families tried to evade the official one-child plan in various ways.<sup>3</sup> Their

<sup>2</sup>Previously, the legal minimum age for marriage was 23 for women and 25 for men.

<sup>3</sup>A flourishing informal business in this regard is the illegal removal of coils, the most widely disseminated device for contraception in China. According to Bianco and Hua (1988, Pp. 154-155),

Doctors or *ad hoc* practitioners are making a fortune by removing the coil from a

concern about the preservation of family lineage and old-age security even led to many incidents of female infanticide (Kallgren 1985; Bianco and Hua 1988). Table 1 shows unusually high sex ratios (female = 100) at birth in 1982 and 1987. Since about 105 is the average natural sex ratio at birth, 107.63 in 1982 and 109.60 in 1987 clearly indicate the harm done by son-wanting Chinese families to their female fetuses and infants. These numbers may allude to both the actual cases of female infanticide and the willful hiding of female infants from the official demographic supervision. In either case, the desperate effort of the Chinese population to construct a complete form of patriarchal family by having at least one son is documented at the national level. Understandably, this most cruel form of gender segregation seems to have increased its popularity between 1982 and 1987 as the economic reform measures rapidly increased the autonomy and responsibility of each peasant family in rural production and consumption during this period. The fact that the subsequent change in the sex ratio were very slow also reflects the continuing maltreatment of female children.

Second and relatedly, the backlash against state coercion in birth control immediately began to mount, so that the Chinese state in 1984 had to replace the head of the State Family Commission as a gesture for softening its position. The leadership change in the central state organ for family planning was accompanied by increasing leniency and ambivalence in the policy guidelines disseminated to local cadres and, ultimately, by a sharp increase in fertility rate from 1986 (Hardee-Cleaveland and Banister 1988). While abrupt policy swings and sharp fertility fluctuations were not unusual in China, the situation of the mid 1980s suggests that the Chinese state apparently recognized the need to compromise its ambitious population control program, so as not to hamper its critical dependence on the family for rural economic revitalization.

considerable proportion (quite often 30%, sometimes 60% or 80%, in one case all without exception) of the women in their brigade or commune who have had one inserted... In the south-east of Sichuan, on the borders with Hubei and Guizhou, a whole network of planned parenthood saboteurs was uncovered who were operating in 41 districts (*qu*) and 149 communes. The charges varied from three to thirty, in some cases fifty *yuan* per patient... With most of the others, the removal of the coil sooner or later led to an unplanned pregnancy which the authorities sought to terminate. Removal of the coil is responsible for a good number of 'out-of-plan' births. . .

The same authors report a kind of local collective effort to evade what can be literally called "demographic policing."

In some villages near Guangzhou, the inhabitants mounted guard in turns. As soon as the birth control team was sighted, a clap on the gong would warn pregnant women and they would quickly flee to the hills carrying with them a little dried food prepared beforehand (Bianco and Hua 1988, p. 154).

TABLE 1. CHANGES IN GENDER-AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHILD POPULATION BETWEEN 1982 AND 1987

Age	1982 Census			Age Total	1987 1% Survey		
	Male (100,000)	Female (100,000)	Sex ratio (fem=100)		Male (1,000)	Female (1,000)	Sex ratio (fem=100)
Total	5,152,775	4,886,364	105.45		5,441,469	5,237,838	103.89
				0	118,792	108,390	109.60
				1	106,009	95,024	111.56
				2	97,059	88,223	110.02
				3	95,079	86,516	109.90
				4	102,922	94,666	108.82
0	107,870	100,223	107.63	5	113,802	105,402	107.97
1	90,150	83,608	107.83	6	93,626	87,318	107.22
2	94,608	88,130	107.35	7	99,056	91,057	108.78
3	101,313	94,942	106.71	8	90,759	94,284	105.81
4	95,896	90,303	106.19	9	95,132	89,665	106.10
5	100,060	94,153	106.27	10	100,404	94,030	106.78
6	105,289	99,037	106.31	11	104,950	98,561	106.48
7	112,160	105,635	106.18	12	113,327	107,172	105.74
8	123,732	116,598	106.12	13	123,491	116,344	106.15
9	129,023	121,674	106.04	14	129,405	122,207	105.89
10	129,904	122,321	106.20	15	123,955	122,409	105.66
11	140,719	132,514	106.19	16	137,899	132,284	104.24
12	136,147	128,727	105.76	17	131,235	126,234	104.00
13	145,222	137,174	105.87	18	137,032	133,530	102.66
14	126,388	118,994	106.21	19	116,642	114,758	101.64
				0-4	519,862	472,818	109.95
0-4	489,838	457,205	107.14	5-9	501,375	467,726	107.19
5-9	570,263	537,096	106.18	10-14	571,530	538,314	106.18
10-14	678,379	639,730	106.04	15-19	651,863	628,855	103.66

Sources: For 1982 census data, compiled from *1982 Population Census of China: Results of Computer Tabulation* (Population Census Office, ed. 1985); for 1987 survey data, compiled from *China 1% Population Sample Survey Data in 1987: National Volume* (SSB, ed. 1988).

Having instituted rural reform policies that generally favor large families, the Chinese state implicitly acknowledged that it could no longer force peasant families to unwillingly accept family planning. The economic autonomy of the peasant family, which is crucial for the success of many rural reform measures, appeared to require autonomy in demographic decision-making as well. The relaxation of birth control in the mid 1980s may be interpreted as a clear signal that the Chinese state hoped to maintain its

symbiotic relationship with peasant families for rural development, even at the risk of underfulfilling its population control target of 1.2 billion by the year of 2000 (World Bank 1985)<sup>4</sup>.

## FAMILY SIZE AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE: OLD AND NEW EVIDENCE

There is an interesting parallel between Western economists' analysis of the structural problems of agricultural collective in China and the official Chinese explanation of the advantages of smaller families. For instance, a report on Zhuge village, located 250 kilometers south of Beijing, describes:

families are more industrious when they live in smaller, more independent units... [A brigade cadre] used the example of peasant Wang Shouchen, whose family income was not very great even though he lived with his two married sons. The problem was that the two daughters-in-law shirked their share of farmwork... But after the family split into three nuclear units, each person needed to earn more, which served as an incentive for the two women... Maintaining harmony is much easier in smaller family units, the brigade leaders said... In large families, quarrels between generations, particularly disagreements over economic matters and household work between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law were common, they said (Su, ed. 1982, p. 66).

Interestingly, these problems of monitoring work efforts, providing incentives, and maintaining communication have been discussed by Western economists as the main causes of the stagnation of China's collective agriculture (Chang 1991b). In this regard, the Chinese state seems to use the conception of the self-interested economic man even more widely than bourgeois economists.

This theoretical position not only contradicts the Maoist vision of the spontaneously collectivist communist man but also fundamentally differs from the traditional *and* contemporary perception of peasants about the social and economic advantages of large families. Croll (1988, p. 92) makes the following observation:

That peasant households have traditionally perceived there to be a direct correlation between the size of the family and its income and welfare is reflected in many an old folk saying which linked the idea of greater family size and more children to more wealth and blessings. This link still holds sway in much of rural China where many of the 'thousand-yuan and

<sup>4</sup>The 1990 Census (taken as of 1 July 1990) enumerated 1,133,682,501 people, which indicates a 12.45% increase since the 1982 Census (*People's Daily*, 7 November 1990).

ten-thousand-jin' households are recognizably larger than their neighbors'.

As Chayanov (1986, p. 67) explained, the "demographic process of growth and family distribution by size... to a considerable extent" determines the operating scale of farming and sideline activities. This is because the overall factor endowment situations of different peasant families are critically determined by the availability of family labor and also because the satisfaction of family members' basic needs is the primary purpose of peasant production.

Among other production factors, land (farm size) also varies significantly among different peasant families, but this variation is largely accounted for by the availability of family labor itself (Buck 1930, pp. 334-35). In a situation of largely unlimited land supply (such as the early 20th century Russia), expanded cultivation or reclamation of land is determined by family members' labor power and their unmet basic needs. Even during a chronic land shortage (as in pre-revolutionary China), family labor is the most important factor by which scarce land is coveted by and allocated to different tenant farmers (Buck 1930; Fei 1939). Thus, farm size could be considered one of the central reasons for the advantaged economic position of large families. For instance, among 2,866 Chinese family farms surveyed between 1921 and 1925, Buck (1930, p. 34) found a highly significant correlation of 0.54 between farm size and family size (measured by the number of adult males).

Table 2 shows clear differences in farm capital, crop production, family earnings, and labor returns by family size in pre-revolutionary China. It is particularly notable that larger families (or larger farms) surpassed smaller families (or smaller farms) in these economic indications not only in aggregate terms but also in per capita (per adult male) terms. Furthermore, smaller families were burdened by greater interest on capital investment per hectare and made less profits per hectare, with some even experiencing net losses. The only exception involved non-farm income, with small families having a higher per capita average than medium-size families.<sup>5</sup> Yet this did not change the overall economic advantages of large families. If the usually lower dependency ratios of families with more adult laborers and the better economies of scale in consumption of larger families are also taken into account, the actual advantages could be even larger.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>This seems to imply that a small family size would lead to easy proletarianization due to the resultant disadvantages in family farming. A subsequent section will discuss this issue in the current context, in which the one-child family policy has facilitated the need and desire for urban migration and proletarianization among those families lacking sufficient family labor power for family-based production activities.

<sup>6</sup>Even under collective farming, family size (family labor power) was probably the most important determinant of family income. Above all, grain ration was done mainly according to family size (i.e., the number of mouths to be fed). Also, workpoint grain was distributed according to



**TABLE 2. FAMILY SIZE, FARM SIZE, AND EARNINGS IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY CHINA (BUCK'S SURVEY OF 2,866 FAMILY FARMS, 1921-1925)**

	Farm size			
	Small	Medium	Large	All
<i>Size of family labor force</i>				
(1) Adult males in family	3.0	4.2	5.9	4.3
<i>Size of operation</i>				
(2) Family farm area (ha)	0.96	2.47	5.66	2.84
(3) Farm area per adult-male (ha)	0.32	0.59	0.96	0.66
(4) Crop hectare per man-equivalent	1.10	1.74	2.33	1.71
(5) Farm capital (\$)	685.85	1535.76	3452.40	1769.29
(6) Farm capital per adult-male (\$)	228.62	365.66	585.15	411.46
(7) Interest on capital investment per h.a. (\$)	73.82	71.06	66.31	68.24
<i>Earnings and returns</i>				
(8) Net profits per crop h.a. (\$)	-2.78	15.19	21.29	11.85
(9) Farm earnings (\$)	105.91	241.98	438.63	239.60
(10) Operator earnings (\$)	105.91	80.73	438.63	87.42
(11) Farm labor earnings (\$)	51.48	92.11	139.75	98.06
(12) Farm earnings per adult-male (\$)	51.05	59.11	162.44	65.51
(13) Non-farm income (\$)	45.38	59.99	85.85	34.08
(14) Non-farm income per adult-male (\$)	23.56	29.72	58.00	7.93
(15) Family earnings (\$)	7.85	7.08	9.83	278.48
(16) Family earnings per adult-male (\$)	146.26	251.51	483.93	7.93
(17) Labor returns (\$)	48.75	59.88	82.02	64.76
(18) Labor returns per man-equivalent (\$)	91.11	162.88	317.95	181.06
	45.38	59.99	85.85	65.51

Sources: For (1), (2), (4), (5), (7), (8), (9), (10), (11), (12), (13), (15), (17), (18), from p. 448 in John Lossing Buck's (1930) *Chinese Economy: A Study of 2866 Farms in Seventeen Localities and Seven Provinces in China*; for (3), (6), (14), (16), calculated by the author.

the hours of collective work contribution by the workers from each family. Of course, the variations in standard workpoints by gender and age need to be taken into account. In fact, according to Hsiung and Putterman (1988), the correlation between family size and family income was more explicit under collective farming than under family farming.

When family farming was reinstated in China in the 1980s after decades of arduous experiments with socialist collective agriculture, largely similar advantages of large families were observed. First, reallocation of the team land to individual families has mostly been based upon family size and, though much less frequently, upon family labor force (see Chapter 5 in Chang 1991b). Under the system of *baogan daohu*, collectively owned land has been redistributed to individual families as grain-ration land and contract land. The case of Dahe Township in 1985 (see Table 3) illustrates that the redistribution was done quite proportionally to family size — and, in a lesser degree, to family labor force size — regardless of land tenure types. A nation-wide official survey indicated that this was the case across China (Watson 1987).

Grain-ration land in principle was a mechanism for ensuring each family's equal entitlement to consumption grain and a minimum cash income. Therefore, the distribution of grain-ration land more or less uniformly reflected the number of mouths to be fed, i.e., family size. Contract land, on the other hand, was leased out supposedly as a result of state-peasant negotiation (in-

TABLE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF PRIVATE PLOT LAND, GRAIN RATION LAND, AND CONTRACT LAND AT DAHE TOWNSHIP UNDER *DA BAOGAN* IN 1985.

	All family				Per person or laborer			
	Total land	Private plot	Grain ration land	Contract land	Total land	Private plot	Grain ration land	Contract land
<i>Family size</i>								
(cases)								
1 (10)	1.168	.063	.260	.845	1.168	.063	.260	.845
2 (8)	3.176	.189	.562	2.424	1.588	.095	.281	1.212
3 (36)	4.110	.239	.845	3.026	1.370	.080	.282	1.009
4 (74)	5.423	.299	1.089	4.036	1.356	.075	.272	1.009
5 (54)	6.401	.406	1.283	4.711	1.280	.081	.257	.942
6 (36)	6.920	.474	1.684	4.762	1.153	.079	.281	.794
7 (10)	8.543	.552	2.475	5.516	1.220	.079	.354	.788
8-13 (18)	8.761	.634	2.142	5.985	.927	.065	.216	.646
<i>Labor force size</i>								
(cases)								
0, 1 (19)	2.745	.217	.464	2.064	2.897	.229	.490	2.178
2 (122)	5.358	.303	1.091	3.964	2.679	.151	.546	1.982
3 (46)	6.606	.463	1.691	4.452	2.202	.154	.564	1.484
4 (27)	6.962	.414	1.081	5.466	1.740	.104	.270	1.366
5 (15)	8.282	.480	1.660	6.142	1.656	.096	.332	1.228
6-9 (12)	8.191	.647	3.004	8.225	1.276	.100	.465	.711

Source: Computed from the Dahe Commune/Township Data Set (Putterman 1989).

mediated by village leaders or cadres) over production quotas and collective obligations. That is, those who placed higher bids on production quotas and collective contributions were supposed to receive larger parcels of contract land. In practice, however, even this category of land seems to have largely reflected family size as well. Moreover, the inverse relationship between family labor force and per capita contract land seems to suggest that contract land was purposely used to compensate for the difficulties of those families that have fewer laborers — perhaps those very families who had been more compliant to the birth control policy. (Other state policies designed to help one-child families overcome their economic disadvantages are subsequently discussed in detail.) In sum, when there is universal overcompetition for acutely insufficient land, family size — as the most essential indicator of basic needs to be satisfied and of willingness and capacity to cultivate — seems to have provided an appropriate criterion for efficient (that is, economically rational) as well as egalitarian (that is, ideologically acceptable) land allocation.

Although collective ownership of land remains a distinct feature of the *socialist* peasant economy, the actual practice of land allocation for individualized cultivation seems to have reinforced the traditional significance of family size and family labor power as the prime determinants of the scale of farming enterprise. This implies that Chayanov's thesis and Buck's observation are still relevant in contemporary rural China. While the political factors matter much more explicitly in contemporary rural China than in pre-revolutionary rural Russia or in pre-revolutionary rural China, such political factors themselves are fundamentally predicated upon a basically Chayanovian understanding of the peasant economy — the family population denotes the goal, willingness, and capacity of agricultural production.

Family size and family labor power are not necessarily correlated. In cases where the former is to an unusually high extent accounted for by economically dependent persons such as children and elderly — that is, in cases where the correlation between family size and family labor power is unusually low — there can be a large number of poor large families. Such is increasingly the case in contemporary rural China. Peasant families are increasingly willing to have “unregulated” births amid the currently and prospectively auspicious economic environment, and more and more elderly people are living longer thanks to the “health care revolution” since the late 1960s. Land allocation based upon family size, however, seems to have substantially relieved the immediate economic burden of having more infants or toddlers. Moreover, these dependents will soon become laborers, in many cases, even before they reach the schooling ages. That is, the land allocation policy helps peasant

families with newly born children pass through the initial difficult stage of having a high dependency ratio before they fully benefit from the larger family sizes. Similarly, it also helps them support elderly parents and grandparents, so that they are more likely to remain lineal families than otherwise would be. (From the official point of view, the latter aspect is highly desirable, considering that effective governmental support programs for the rural elderly are virtually absent, but the former has a critically dysfunctional side in regards to the population control policy.)

Of course, larger families are also advantageous for reasons other than their larger farms. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, families with more laborers have performed better in improving agricultural and non-agricultural production and, no less importantly, in sectorally diversifying economic activities. Table 4 shows that the economic advantages of larger families in today's Dahe Township are similar to those observed by Buck in pre-revolutionary rural China. More family labor was undisputably associated with higher levels of total net family income, although per capita net income does not systematically vary according to family labor size. But self-employment net income showed some systematic variations with family labor size both in aggregate and per capita terms. If the relatively favorable distribution of contract land to smaller families (recall Table 3) and the unique situations of the extremely large households (such as welfare institutions, boarding houses, etc.) are taken into account, larger family labor forces seem to improve self-employed production activities, even in per capita terms.<sup>7</sup>

However, larger families have no advantages concerning outside employment incomes. Rather, scarce family labor — in particular, one or no laborer — was associated with the greater significance of outside employment incomes. As detailed in a subsequent section of this paper, insufficient family labor seems to have triggered the proletarianization of many small families. When the detailed components of self-employment income (in aggregate terms) are examined, the main advantage of a relatively large number of family workers (i.e., 3 or 4 laborers) consisted in sideline income. For those families with notably scarce or notably abundant family labor, self-employment income from small-scale manufacturing and tertiary sectors was particularly important.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>To take into account demographic dependency situations and to present comparable information to Buck's data on the pre-revolutionary period, per capita (instead of per worker) incomes are presented here.

<sup>8</sup>These better economic performances of larger families are not an isolated phenomenon at Dahe, but a widely recognized fact across China. For instance, a Chinese source — cited by Croll (1988, pp. 92-93) — reported the results of a 1981 survey of 396 peasant families in which larger families were more likely to have a per capita income over 100 rmb than smaller counterparts. In

TABLE 4. FAMILY LABOR FORCE SIZE AND INCOMES AT DAHE TOWNSHIP IN 1985.

	Labor force size (number of cases)					
	0, 1 (19)	2 (122)	3 (46)	4 (27)	5 (15)	6-9 (12)
<i>Net family income</i>						
Total net income	1,679	2,872	4,155	4,665	5,744	6,064
Self-employed income	1,076	1,961	2,481	3,357	4,280	3,606
Employment income	603	897	1,647	1,311	1,465	2,457
Collectives	139	276	445	450	417	375
NEA's <sup>a</sup>	200	128	178	178	178	400
Vil/Town enterprises <sup>b</sup>	264	494	1,024	683	870	1,682
p.c. net income	894	729	823	782	905	682
p.c. self-employed	554	494	499	549	672	400
p.c. employment	340	231	320	234	234	282
<i>Gross income from self-employment</i>						
Total income	1,522	3,310	3,844	4,952	6,113	5,397
Crop income	801	1,593	2,151	2,186	2,432	2,557
Grains	600	1,087	1,447	1,634	1,982	1,848
Cash crops	203	496	703	555	610	708
Sideline income	193	526	843	1,125	821	1,166
Industry, services income	519	1,157	849	1,640	2,857	1,757
p.c. total income	779	835	774	808	936	605
p.c. crop income	360	403	437	359	375	287
p.c. sideline income	69	130	291	185	126	143
p.c. indust & serv income	346	293	160	264	435	187

<sup>a</sup>New Economic Associations.

<sup>b</sup>Village and township enterprises.

Source: Computed from the Dahe Commune/Township Data Set (Putterman 1989).

Table 5 presents more explicitly the different degrees of economic diversification that result from different family labor sizes in Dahe Township. In labor allocation, larger family labor forces entailed more income-earning workers in agriculture, sidelines, and enterprise activities but not necessarily more houseworkers. Larger families have an advantage in efficient labor allocation in that peasant families have to use a largely similar amount of

1980, 31 percent of those families with 6 to 8 members and only 8 percent of those families with 1 to 2 members had a per capita income over 100 rmb.

TABLE 5. FAMILY LABOR FORCE SIZE AND ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AT DAHE TOWNSHIP IN 1985.

	Labor force size (number of cases)					
	0, 1 (19)	2 (122)	3 (46)	4 (27)	5 (15)	6-9 (12)
<i>Labor allocation</i>						
Agricultural workers	.53	1.00	1.33	1.67	2.00	2.75
Side & Ent workers	.58	1.06	1.69	2.15	2.60	4.08
Sideline workers	.26	.60	.58	.89	.93	1.50
Enterprise workers	.32	.46	1.11	1.26	1.67	2.58
Houseworkers	.32	.15	.36	.37	.60	.42
<i>Proportions in net family income</i>						
Self-employment	.667	.705	.635	.696	.704	.592
Outside employment	.333	.295	.365	.304	.296	.408
<i>Proportions in gross self-employment income</i>						
Crop income	.566	.643	.646	.545	.523	.546
Sideline income	.119	.209	.243	.223	.159	.254
Indust & serv income	.315	.148	.111	.232	.328	.200
Among crop income						
Grains	.721	.703	.701	.761	.572	.708
Cash crops	.288	.297	.299	.239	.428	.292

Source: Computed from the Dahe Commune/Township Data Set (Putterman 1989).

family labor power in home maintenance, regardless of how much total labor power they possess. This advantage of saving labor power from home maintenance seems to be directly linked to the relatively large numbers and proportions of enterprise workers. Proportions of different categories of net family income and aggregate self-employment income are largely identical to what was observed in Table 4. Again, the overall trend was that bigger families were able to more actively diversify their economic activities into sideline production and small-scale manufacturing and service activities. Also, Dahe families, with only one or no laborer, were more reliant on industrial or service income.

## WELFARE OUTCOMES OF FAMILY SIZE

To these advantages of large families in agricultural and non-agricultural production must be added the actual welfare outcomes of family size in the

particular historical context of contemporary rural China. As pointed out elsewhere (Chang 1991a), the Chinese state has tried to transfer the burden of rural social security from the emasculated collective organizations to individual peasant families. Thus, each family's self-support has become the locus of the new rural welfare system. Consequently, all the advantages of larger families in improving agricultural and non-agricultural production and in earning better incomes directly determine the welfare situation as well. That is, the economic strains generated by the demolition of the collective welfare systems are particularly acute for smaller families because of their disadvantaged position in improving production and in securing material welfare. If the economies of scale and the financial flexibility attained by larger families and kin groups pooling resources for mutual emergency relief are also considered, the disadvantages faced by smaller families in welfare provision are even more obvious.

In addition to the general economic concerns associated with family size, there are particular social and cultural elements of Chinese society that work against the official one-child norm. Young couples strongly desire to have 'at least one son' for their old age security and for maintenance of the ancestral line (see Table 6). For instance, in a recent survey of peasant families, no more than 2.2 percent were willing to have a daughter as the only child. With all of the pressures emanating from economic institutional changes and population control policies, the traditional patterns of patrilineal and patrilocal arrangements of kinship relations have been maintained — or have even been reinforced by the recent reform policy of restoring family farming — for most families (Croll 1985; Davis-Friedmann 1985; Davin 1985). Thus, parents expect to have stronger social and economic ties with married sons than with married daughters.

When a couple's only child is a daughter, the consequences include lack of a firm security source in old age, interruption of the repopularized ceremonies of ancestor worship, and even discontinuance of the (father-side) lineage. The concern with old age security looms large in part because the Chinese state has visibly reduced its financial as well as its organizational commitment to rural welfare (Chang 1991a) and in part because social and economic segregations against women have not been satisfactorily reduced (Wolf 1985; Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983). In fact, as Honig and Hershatter (1988) show, gender inequality has recently increased as families freely apply the traditional patterns of familial division of labor which are determined, above all, by gender and age. On the other hand, the restoration of family farming has inevitably revitalized the traditional cultural practices closely associated with the patriarch-dominated peasantry, so that the importance of

TABLE 6. DESIRED NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND REASONS FOR MORE CHILDREN AMONG RURAL FAMILIES.

<i>Desired Number</i>	1982 rural survey <sup>a</sup>	1989 temporary urban migrant survey <sup>b</sup>
1	4.81%	19.40%
2	51.24%	70.56%
3	28.43%	6.19%
4 or more	15.52%	1.58%
Until a son <sup>c</sup>	—	2.23%
<i>Reasons<sup>d</sup></i>		
To produce sons for support in old age		51%
To produce successors for the ancestral line		25%
To increase the household labour force		21%
Loves children		3%

<sup>a</sup>Based upon a survey of 728 women of child-bearing age.

<sup>b</sup>Based upon a survey of 2,211 married women of child-bearing age who were temporary urban migrants in Anhui.

<sup>c</sup>Asked only in the 1989 migrant survey.

<sup>d</sup>Based upon a survey of 808 rural residents in Hubei.

Sources: For desired number of children in the 1982 rural survey, in Croll (1988, p. 94) which in turn is based upon a report in *Jingji Yanjiu (Economic Research)*, 20 June 1982; for desired number of children in the 1989 migrant survey, an informal report on the Anhui Migration/Fertility Sampling Survey; for fertility reasons in rural Hubei, in Davin (1985, p. 41).

having a son is reassured (Davis-Friedmann 1985). For these reasons, as Davin (1985, p. 41) noted, “the *number* of sons a peasant couple wants is negotiable but the desire for a minimum of one boy to take care of his parents and to assure the continuance of the family line is unwavering.”

## THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN ALTERING THE DEMOGRAPHIC BALANCE SHEET

It is perhaps not only peasant families but also the Chinese state that acutely realizes the significant consequences of family size for peasant life (see Croll 1985; Tien 1983). Compared to the overwhelming social and economic advantages of larger families in the context of China's rural reform, the supposedly more harmonious family relations and the lower child-raising costs of smaller families do not seem to significantly weigh in peasants' reproductive decision-making — at least not as significantly as the Chinese state has hoped and argued. Thus, political pressure and moral exhortation — familiar practices in China's policy implementation — were intensified so that



the Chinese people may be “aware that population growth at an excessive rate and in excessive numbers will aggravate the difficulties faced in education, employment, accumulation of construction funds and improvement in the living standards of the people” and, therefore, “voluntarily accept family planning in the interests of the country as a whole” (Liu 1981, p. 21). This effort is aimed at publicly reminding peasant families that their procreation generates costly externalities of resource drain and economic congestion at the national level.

But any hope for “mass voluntarism” (Tien 1983, p. 33) in attaining the one-child ideal tends to be defeated by the very strategy of revitalizing peasants’ family-centrism for rural economic growth and by the overall weakening of the idiosyncratic basis of state authority. Consequently, the earlier effort at education and collective persuasion was soon replaced by the stringent policing of the child-bearing population and even outright coercion for abortion and sterilization. As noted earlier, even these draconian measures were challenged by equally staunch resistance and evasion by peasant families and had to be gradually retracted.

A more crucial lesson learned from the successful experience of the 1970s concerns the importance of effectively using material rewards and sanctions to influence the balance of the cost-benefit calculation of childbearing (Chang 1990; Parish and Whyte 1978). Attaching various economic privileges to young couples’ compliance with the one-child norm, on the one hand, and depriving noncomplying couples (and their children) of various material benefits, on the other, the Chinese state has consciously tried to offset the above discussed disadvantages of small, primarily one-child, families. That is, the Chinese state has attempted to create a politically sustained environment in which peasant compliance to the state-led birth control becomes ‘rational’. Of course, to the extent that the poverty and old age insecurity of small families are relieved by general programs of public assistance (mainly the five guarantee system), the disadvantages of having only one child can be somewhat counterbalanced by improved welfare services. But, perhaps in part because of the greater psychological effect that can be generated when birth control is more explicitly and more directly linked with material advantages or disadvantages, the “only child glory certificate” has been distributed as a voucher for various state-administered benefits.

When a couple pledges to have only one child (and is often induced to become sterilized after having it), a monthly payment for child welfare — usually five yuan a month or from 30 to 60 yuan each year at the beginning (Liu 1981, p. 22; Perkins and Yusuf 1984, p. 156) — is distributed until the child reaches the age of fourteen. In addition, the child is entitled to free

medical care and school tuition. Also, priority will be given to children of one-child families for places in creches and nurseries and even for eventual job assignment. If employed by collective enterprises, the mother of the one child is given a fully paid and longer maternity leave than are her co-workers with more than one child. One-child families are supposed to be given the same housing space and private plots as those families with two or more children. To reduce the concern about old age security, a guaranteed standard of living in old age for one-child parents, equal to or higher than the local average, is often promised. One related development is the idea of giving preferences to one-child parents in the newly discussed retirement pension program (Liu 1981, p. 23; Davin 1985, p. 67) although the pension programs have not yet been implemented and are not likely to be in any near future.

When a couple has more than one child, it signals not only their exclusion from all the benefits mentioned above but also their subjection to various penalties. If they have received any of these benefits (by pledging to have only one child), they must repay or return all of the received funds and gifts (Davin 1985). Serious penalties accrue when a third or higher-order child is born: no public assistance for delivery and no maternal and child health care; limited access to child care and schools; at least 10 percent reduction in the monthly wages of state-employed or collective-employed parents; and a multi-child tax.

In addition to these more explicitly institutionalized rewards and sanctions, one-child families receive preferential treatment in the allocation of various resources and privileges coveted by economically motivated families. In fact, the one-child certificate can buy favorable consideration in competition for almost any types of limited materials and rights. An illustrative example is provided by a clothing merchant in Yuanzhai, a village in Henan Province:

My wife and I were among the first few people in the village who decided to have only one child. At that time we made a living by growing wheat and making brooms... About six years ago the village leaders told us that the one-child families wouldn't be neglected. That was policy, they said. They wrote a letter with which we got a license and a bank loan of 5,000 yuan with no interest... It is not easy to get loans. You have to have the approval of the village, the township and the county authorities. But we didn't have much trouble getting the money. (*Beijing Review*, 23-29 July 1990, p. 36)

Just as good class origins became politically certified privileges in the assignment of material resources and occupations in the Maoist era (Parish and Whyte 1978), the one-child family status in the reform era is accompanied by preferential treatment in social and economic relations.

Despite these comprehensive rewards and sanctions for birth control, the one-child norm has not yet been firmly ingrained among the peasant population. Resistance and deception in procreation have been rather common, and the actual birth rate has been substantially higher than the official targets (Bianco and Hua 1988; Hardee-Cleaveland and Banister 1988). This trend, of course, is due to the social and economic advantages of large families which, in turn, have been reinforced by economic reform policies. Also, various difficulties in the implementation of the reward/sanction mechanisms themselves should not be neglected: different local economic conditions make it difficult to universalize the reward mechanisms; many of the family planning benefits are only *promises* whose realization is extremely uncertain due to volatile economic and political situations; even the currently dispensed benefits are increasingly threatened by the deteriorating financial capacity of the state and the organizational ineffectiveness of social programs in the de-collectivized context; a rapid increase in population mobility makes the screening and control of births more and more difficult, and the effective screening and control of births more and more difficult; and the preferential treatment of one-child families can easily be considered part of the increasingly criticized practice of bureaucratic interventionism.

Nevertheless, one or two-child families now constitute an overwhelming proportion of the peasant population, a proportion which would have been far from observable if a *laissez-faire* fertility regime had governed the procreation of China's rehabilitated peasantry. Of course, even for these compliant families, it is extremely difficult to disentangle the impact of material rewards and sanctions (which facilitate the one-child norm by supposedly helping small families overcome their disadvantages in production and welfare) from the result of a formidable array of direct measures, such as political pressure, demographic policing and even organized coercion for abortion and sterilization.

However, it is obvious that the peasant population has had to modify its family structures and kinship relations in order to take advantage of various income-earning opportunities. Another response, especially by young parents, is to adapt the present and future economic undertakings and social choices to the demographic exigency of being a one-child family. In what follows, these issues will be briefly discussed.

## STRATEGIC RESPONSE OF PEASANT FAMILIES: RESTRUCTURING AND EXIT

### *Bringing "Families of Old Designs" Back In*

While childbearing is clearly the most important long-term strategy of each peasant family for achieving an appropriate organizational form for various social and economic activities, it does not always determine the *effective* family structure and relations. Chinese peasant families in the pre-revolutionary period would flexibly restructure their living arrangements and mutual support relations to cope with varying conditions of family resource endowment and external social and economic situations. Thus, some families were able to maintain "extended" and/or "associated" form whereas others would retain family relations for mutual support and cooperation, despite their separate living and work arrangements (Fei 1939; Yang 1959).

These traditions were functionally unraveled under the collective economic systems but have recently been reactivated as peasant families attempt to exploit new economic opportunities in decollectivized agriculture and rural industrial sectors and, in the absence of any effective collective welfare systems, provide material relief and social support for needy members. Thus Hareven (1987, pp. 683-84) observed,

Even though the changes in the organization of production were dictated by the system, the peasant families have exercised considerable initiatives in responding to those changes and in realizing their family organizations in order to meet these new needs... In response to the new needs for a family labor force, however, the peasants began to reconstitute extended families once again.

Needless to say, the need for this organizational adaptation has increased as the family structural consequences of the induced fertility transition have become more evident since the mid-1980s. Such organizational adaptation includes "delay[ing] division [of the family] in the interests of maximizing their labour and the economic operation of their members" (Croll 1988, p. 82); "married sons who had left home return[ing] with their families and join [ing] their parents" (Hareven 1987, p. 684); or even relatively distant kin members and neighbors joining the household and/or a new or already flourishing venture (Croll 1987, pp. 490-91). With the demographic impacts of the improving life expectancy of elderly people and of the declining proportions of the younger age groups taken into account, it is not difficult to understand why extended and associated families — in Tien and Lee's (1988,

p. 624) words, “families of old designs” — have recently increased in both relative and absolute terms amid a rapid process of rural *modernization*.

While the ensuing complex forms of households and effective family relations largely resemble those of the pre-revolutionary period, their primarily practical orientation is certainly a new trait. They “merged voluntarily around the shared goal of maximizing their incomes” and “their living arrangements and division of profits were, therefore, negotiated and maintained through certain compromises” (Hareven 1987, p. 686). The central criteria for the formation of these new types of families are not necessarily common residence and lineal relations but often specified organizational goals of economic interdependence and cooperation. This is why Croll (1987) uses the notion of “the aggregate family.” An aggregate family, according to Croll (1987, p. 491),

may come either to specialise in a single income-generating activity or, as is more likely, to evolve a division of labour within the aggregate family whereby one household undertakes to cultivate all the lands allocated to the aggregate family, another may promote some kind of commodity production or service and yet another provide transport, technical or commercial marketing expertise, so that member households are to a large degree interdependent and the aggregate family becomes a relatively integrated and self-sustaining unit.

When such economic aggregation proves socially viable and economically rewarding, aggregate families tend to develop into “new economic associations” under the active governmental encouragement and thereby take on a formalized organizational framework.

#### *Inverted Proletarianization of One-Child Families*

While the early phase of rural reform was experienced by most peasant families with relatively adequate amounts of family labor power, labor shortage in each household is now an increasingly pronounced phenomenon. Thus, the strategic dependence of the Chinese state on the peasant family economy for rural economic growth and diversification as well as social security will be temporally limited. In fact, this constitutes another fundamental reason for the imperative of timely urban growth, which, hopefully, will facilitate the smooth proletarianization of the estimated 178 million or more surplus workers that existed in rural China in 1988 (see Chapter 5 in Chang 1991b). Sustained industrialization with high labor absorption appears to be the ultimate solution for the burdensome contradiction between the two most important state policies of economic institutional reforms and population control (Goldstein and Goldstein 1988).

Urban migration and proletarianization appears to be a more rational option for one-child families than for others, because family labor shortage obstructs the efficient organizational operation of the one-child family in self-employment. We earlier documented various disadvantages of smaller families in exploiting newly available economic opportunities under the rural reform and in operating as a self-sustained unit of production and consumption in the absence of effective public welfare services. On the other hand, there is an increasingly auspicious environment created for out-migration from the countryside, owing to reduced administrative control over population mobility, fast growth of rural industrial and tertiary sectors in towns and townships, and rapid increase of non-state sector jobs in cities (see chapter 6 in Chang 1991b). Thus, for those one-child families or other small families which have acutely felt the contradictory demographic and economic pressures, urban migration in search of more suitable forms of economic activities — in most cases, individual labor opportunities and personal informal sector undertakings — appears to be the most prevalent type of economic response.

The situation of Chinese peasant families constitutes a highly unique relationship between demographic and socioeconomic changes. It has been widely argued that proletarianization — the massive creation of urban working classes through urbanization and industrialization — was primarily responsible for the fertility transition and for family nucleation in Western countries and in many late developing countries (Caldwell 1982; Goode 1963, 1982). In particular, Caldwell's wealth flows theory convincingly explains how the rise of modern capitalist industries and labor markets affected the internal economic conditions and social relations of the peasant family in such a way that fertility decline was triggered as an adaptation strategy. In the recent Chinese situation, however, the only significant force for fertility decline has been the high pressure state policy for population control, whereas the earlier collective institutional factor for low fertility had been effectively dismantled (Chang 1990). Thus, Chinese families have had to adapt their economic activities to their state-controlled demographic structure rather than, as was the case elsewhere, adapting their demographic structure to the proletarianization process.

It was above noted that, among the Dahe residents, families with scant labor power could not earn much income from self-employed activities and thus had to heavily rely on wages from employment in the rural industrial and tertiary sectors. Thus, even when small families stay in rural areas they tend to proletarianize themselves faster than others. Of course, a more radical response by small families is to permanently uproot themselves from the village terrain and enter the urban economy as laborers and peddlers. A

recent national survey of migration (in 74 cities and towns) revealed an important development in this regard (Population Research Institute 1988). According to the 1986 survey of different levels of urban places, 32.7 percent to 46.5 percent of the constituent populations had moved in from other places since the liberation of 1949 whereas 11.9 percent to 18.4 percent had moved in since 1979 (see Table 7). Concerning the origins of migrants since 1949, 45.2 percent were from rural areas; 21.1 percent from towns; and 31.5 percent from cities. Although year-specific information was not published, the proportion of rural-to-urban migrants should have been much higher during

TABLE 7. FAMILY SIZE COMPOSITION OF URBAN MIGRANTS AND NATIVES (PERCENT DISTRIBUTION).

City & migration status	Family size									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1986 MIGRATION SURVEY <sup>a</sup>										
<i>Mega Cities</i> (1 million or more)										
Immigrants <sup>b</sup>	3.6	9.4	27.2	27.0	17.1	8.4	3.8	1.7	0.8	0.9
Native	7.5	15.3	31.2	23.0	13.0	6.0	2.3	0.9	0.4	0.4
<i>Large Cities</i> (500,000-999,999)										
Immigrants <sup>b</sup>	2.2	7.3	28.9	27.5	17.4	6.9	3.0	1.2	1.0	4.5
Native	12.5	13.5	32.4	20.2	11.3	5.2	2.8	0.8	0.8	0.6
<i>Middle Cities</i> (200,000-499,999)										
Immigrants <sup>b</sup>	3.3	7.1	25.2	30.6	16.5	8.5	4.0	2.2	1.4	1.2
Native	9.6	12.4	26.1	22.8	14.4	7.6	3.8	1.6	0.8	0.1
<i>Small Cities</i> (less than 200,000)										
Immigrants <sup>b</sup>	4.6	8.9	25.9	28.3	17.0	7.9	4.2	0.8	1.2	1.2
Native	9.8	17.2	27.6	20.8	14.1	5.7	2.8	1.0	0.8	0.2
<i>Rural Towns</i>										
Immigrants <sup>b</sup>	4.4	9.0	26.8	25.9	15.8	9.4	4.0	1.9	0.9	1.9
Native	11.2	17.3	25.6	20.9	14.1	6.1	2.9	0.9	0.6	0.5
1987 1% SURVEY <sup>c</sup>										
<i>All Population</i>										
City pop	5.6	11.7	30.9	23.5	15.2	7.2	3.2	1.5	0.6	0.5
Town pop	5.7	10.0	22.0	24.6	18.6	9.9	4.9	2.2	1.0	0.9
County pop	5.3	8.5	17.1	23.8	20.6	12.2	6.6	3.2	1.5	1.2

<sup>a</sup>Based upon a sample survey of 74 cities and towns across China.

<sup>b</sup>Moved since the liberation.

<sup>c</sup>Based upon a nation-wide 1% sample survey of the population.

Sources: For 1986 migration data, compiled from *China migration of 74 Cities and Towns: Sampling Survey Data* (Population Research Institute, ed. 1988); for 1987 population data, compiled from pp. 504-5 in *China 1% Population Sample Survey Data in 1987: National Volume* (SSB, ed. 1988).

the reform period (i.e., since 1979) because rural-to-urban migration was strictly limited for most of the pre-reform period. For instance, according to the *Statistical Yearbook of China 1988*, as many as 20.9 percent of the persons entering urban employment in 1987 were from rural areas.

Among the migrant families in various urban places, according to the 1986 migration survey, 25.2 percent to 28.9 percent were three-member families and 25.9 percent to 30.4 percent four-member families. In contrast, according to the *China 1% Population Sample Survey of 1987*, three-member and four-member families respectively accounted for 17.1 percent and 23.8 percent of the total population in rural counties in 1987. Different patterns were observed for larger families. Five-member families accounted for 15.8 percent to 17.4 percent of the urban migrant families of 1986 and 20.6 percent of the rural county population of 1987; six-member families accounted for 6.9 percent to 9.4 percent of urban migrant families of 1986 and 12.2 percent of the rural county population of 1987, and so on. While the urban migrant families included relatively long-term residents, some of whom may have given birth to children after their arrival in their current places, a significant part of the urban migrant vs. rural stayer differentials in the family size distribution may well reflect the process of *inverted proletarianization* explained above.

Recalling Table 6, if the outcomes of the 1982 rural survey and the 1989 temporary urban migrant survey are compared, an important implication can be drawn in support of this inverted proletarianization thesis. Among those temporary urban migrant women of child bearing age surveyed in Anhui in 1989, the preference for one child was as high as 19.4 percent. If the two child preference is added, about 90 percent of those exploring urban economic opportunities were ready to comply with the generally acceptable range of procreation under the current, more flexible, policy. Their differences in fertility preference from those covered in the 1982 rural survey can be explained partly by possible migrant selectivity (that is, rural couples with fewer actual or desired children are more likely to move to urban areas) and partly by post-migration adaptation to urban social and economic environments (which usually offer economic activities outside the family). In either case, those peasants-turned-proletarians or semi-proletarians in Chinese towns and cities seem to find fewer contradictions between the state-controlled family structure and the social and economic needs to be satisfied through the family.

To the extent that proletarianization ultimately implies overcoming the "idiocy of rural life" (which, in China, has largely consisted in the urban-rural cleavages created by dualist state policies) and to the extent that smaller families are more likely to proletarianize themselves, the short-term economic



disadvantages of one-child families should be weighed against the advantages of long-term emancipation from peasant life. But it must be pointed out that rural-to-urban migrants have entered an economic sector that does not offer the privileges of the state industrial sector, namely, relatively high and stable wages, permanent job tenure, and various subsidies for food, health care, and housing (see Chang 1991a). Chinese urban migrants constitute a 'new class' whose economic as well as political conditions have to be shaped by their potentially conflicting relations with the state-sector workers and the Chinese state itself amid the turbulent and abortive environment of urban economic reform.

## CONCLUSION

Almost every Third World state has tried to justify its intervention in the family's reproductive decision-making by pointing out various negative developmental consequences of overpopulation. But extensive scholarly efforts to identify the causal relationship between population growth and economic development have not produced conclusions that fully support universalized population control in the late-developing world. Instead, there is a growing awareness that human social organization, not the man-land ratio, ultimately shape the developmental consequences of population growth. Thus, even the World Bank, a major funding agency for the family planning programs of many Third World countries, noted that "the effects of population growth may vary widely, depending on the institutional, economic, cultural, and demographic setting" (*World Development Report* 1984, p. 105).

While this trend does not clearly refute nor support the existing population control programs, it nonetheless has implications for the protracted Marxian-versus-Malthusian debate on population. In attacking Malthus's thesis of universal overpopulation, Marx argued:

[overpopulation is never] a relation to a *non-existent* absolute mass of means of subsistence, but rather a relation to the conditions of reproduction, of the production of these means, including likewise the *conditions of reproduction of human beings*, of the total population, of relative surplus population. This surplus is purely relative: in no way related to the *means of subsistence* as such, but rather to the mode of producing them. (Marx and Engels 1978, pp. 276-78)

Marx's emphasis on human social organizations as a central determinant of the population-development relationship seems to be popularly echoed in most cautious statements by contemporary scholars on the same issue. To the extent that the population control policies of most Third World countries are

theoretically predicated upon a Malthusian notion of resources-population imbalance, the need to more carefully incorporate human organizational factors abounds.

In post-revolutionary China, Mao tried to show that the notion of overpopulation would be entirely irrelevant under the "rectified relations of production" under the communist order. Hence, his solution consisted not in population control but in a revolutionary transformation of the social organization of production in China. As in other socialist countries, this effort generated many of the desired outcomes, particularly in early stages of post-revolutionary development. In subsequent stages, however, China's socialist economic systems were not immune to economic stagnation and social dissatisfaction, the tendencies which have plagued most other socialist countries (DuRand 1990; Bettelheim 1988). The post-Mao leadership thus decided to redress the symptoms of *subjectively felt overpopulation*, however, only by combining two seemingly opposed theoretical (or ideological) positions — transform the basic mode of production (through institutional decollectivization) and check population growth (through the one-child family policy).<sup>9</sup>

In rural China, as it has turned out, this combination appears fundamentally contradictory because since the one-child family policy tends to undermine the organizational foundation of family production. In each family's demographic decision-making, the labor deficit at the household level weigh much more importantly than the national problem of population surplus. On the surface, staunch resistance to the population policy illustrates the state-family confrontation concerning family autonomy in reproductive decision-making. More fundamentally, it attests to the internal contradiction of the current reformist regime in simultaneously pursuing rigid family planning measures and rural economic policies which favor large families.

To overcome this dilemma, the Chinese state needs to justify its birth control efforts not only in terms of the macro-economic criterion of land-labor balance but also in terms of the social and economic viability of one-child families. As has been documented in this paper, Chinese families with abundant adult labor have strategic advantages in improving agricultural production and income and in economically diversifying into rural industrial and tertiary sectors, the two central areas of rural reform in which the state-family symbiosis has been forged. In a sense, the immediate success of rural reform has been buttressed more by the economic achievement of larger families than by that of smaller ones. Furthermore, the increasing emphasis on family self-support in rural social security is largely incompatible with the one-child

<sup>9</sup>In a sense, both agricultural decollectivization and population control are manifestations of the same *liberal* position (*vis-à-vis* earlier Maoism) of the incumbent Chinese regime.

norm because the number of children — in particular, the number of sons — is still the most essential indicator of secure life in middle to old age. In contrast to the evident advantages of larger families, the Chinese state could argue only vaguely for the supposedly harmonious internal relations of smaller families, a proposition clearly difficult to substantiate in a peasant society.

While the Chinese state has failed to present any convincing theoretical justification of the one-child norm to each peasant family, it has tried to alter peasants' perception about ideal family size by dispensing various social and economic benefits to couples pledging to have only one child. In other words, the Chinese state has attempted to affect the cost-benefit balance of reproduction by offsetting the *economic disadvantages* of smaller families with *political rewards* for compliance to the state-led birth control plan. But the full effect of these rewards has been curtailed somewhat by, among other problems, varying local economic conditions and the deteriorating financial and organizational capacity of the Chinese state. Consequently, the Chinese state has had to resort to stringent policing of reproduction and even outright coercion for abortion and sterilization.

Although the original target of limiting China's population to 1.2 billion in 2000 is suspected to be hardly achievable, the one or two-child family has nonetheless become a modal family form among young people. Facing this demographic situation, the peasant population must restructure its living arrangements and effective family relations and/or adapt its present and future economic undertakings and social choices. As observed by Tien and Lee (1988), Hareven (1987), and Croll (1987), Chinese peasant families have devised various mechanisms for maximizing economic cooperation and support relations among close kin members and even among neighbors. Thus, in many cases, old family forms and kin networks are now "reconstituted" (Hareven 1987) in the Chinese countryside. Another consequential adaptation is proletarianization (or, more correctly, depeasantization) of small peasant families. The economic transformation experienced by smaller peasant families — in particular, out-migration and non-agricultural employment — is likely to be much more fundamental and permanent than the same experienced by larger families, because the former's departure from peasantry usually leads to a more complete severance of social and economic ties to remaining villagers. In a sense, the ordinary proletarianization-family nucleation sequence has been reversed in rural China such that politically created small families opt to proletarianize themselves as a way of coping with family labor deficit. Thus, sustained industrialization with high labor absorption appears to be the ultimate solution for the burdensome contradiction between the two most important state policies of economic institutional reforms and population control.

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