

consciously encouraged population growth. Mao wrote "of all things in the world, people are the most precious. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be performed."¹⁹ After the failure of the Great Leap Forward and the accompanying famine, Mao thought otherwise. The rate of future Chinese population growth is a matter of speculation. Depending on assumptions made, such as contraceptive use and the average age of marriage, a wide range of potential populations may be generated for any future date.²⁰ In 1949, the population of China totalled 540 million; it currently has a population of about 1.22 billion, with estimates of 1.39 billion by 2010 and 1.53 billion by 2025.²¹ This is an enormous population base, and population stabilization is a pressing concern for the Chinese leadership.²²

China's family planning policy has had a significant impact on demographics. Since the adoption of a population control policy in the 1970s, it has been estimated that 300 million fewer people than otherwise would be the case have been born.²³ This is more than the current population of the United States. Family planning policy includes access to birth control, encouraging late marriages and child bearing, and since January 1979 the advocacy of one child per couple - the "one-child policy."

Many incentives promote having only one child. These include subsidies and favourable treatment in the provision of housing, child care and schooling. Coercive action, such as forced sterilization or abortions are not advocated by the state. The policy is also flexible and allows for exceptions, such as excluding minority nationalities. However, it is readily admitted that officials in the family planning

¹⁹Quoted in Vaclav Smil, China's Environmental Crisis: An Inquiry into the Limits of National Development, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993, p.14.

²⁰The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, September 1994, considered many factors that have traditionally not been taken into account, such as women's access to education and political rights, and the potential relationships between these factors and demographic change.

²¹United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects: The 1994 Revision, ST/ESA/SER.A/150. p.105.

²²One favourable consideration for China is that unlike some other developing countries, China has moved from the initial demographic stage of high fertility and high mortality, through high fertility and declining mortality rates, to the low fertility and mortality rate stage typically associated with the developed countries.

²³Wang Xin, "Population vs Development: Challenge of the New Century", Beijing Review, May 1-7, 1995, p.12.