

CHINA'S POPULATION PROBLEM

There has never been a people who did not delight in living under peaceful rule, nor a people not happy about living under peaceful rule that has lasted for a long time. Peaceful rule that lasts more than one hundred years is considered to have lasted a long time. But in the matter of population, it may be noted that today's population is five times as large as that of thirty years ago, ten times as large as that of sixty years ago, and not less than twenty times as large as that of one hundred years ago. Take, for example, a family that at the time of the great-great-grandfather and the great-grandfather was in possession of a ten-room house and one hundred *mou* of farmland. After the man married there were at first only the two of them; they lived in the ten-room house and upon the one hundred *mou* of land, and their resources were more than ample. Assuming that they had three sons, by the time the sons grew up, all three sons as well as the father had wives; there were a total of eight persons. Eight persons would require the help of hired servants; there would be, say, ten persons in the household. With the ten-room house and the one hundred *mou* of farmland, I believe they would have just enough space to live in and food to eat, although barely enough. In time, however, there will be grandsons, who, in turn, will marry. The aged members of the household will pass away, but there could still be more than twenty persons in the family. With more than twenty persons sharing a ten-room house and working on one hundred *mou* of farmland, I am sure that even if they eat very frugally and live in crowded quarters, their needs will not be met. Moreover, there will be great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren — the total number in a household will be fifty or sixty times that in the great-great-grandfather's or great-grandfather's time. For every household at the time of the great-grandfather, there will be at least ten households at the time of the great-grandson and great-great-grandson. There are families whose population has declined, but there are also lineages whose male members have greatly multiplied, compensating for the cases of decline.

Someone may say that at the time of the great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather, not all uncultivated land had been reclaimed and not all vacancies in housing available on the market had been filled. However, the amount [of available farmland and housing] has only doubled or, at the most, increased three to five times, while the population has grown ten to twenty times. Thus

farmland and houses are always in short supply, while there is always a surplus of households and population. Furthermore, there are families who [have bought up or otherwise] appropriated other people's property — one person owning the houses of more than a hundred, one household occupying the farmland of a hundred households. No wonder, then, that everywhere there are people who have died from exposure to windstorm, rain, and frost, or from hunger and cold and the hardships of homelessness.

Question: Do Heaven-and-earth have a way of dealing with this situation? Answer: Heaven-and-earth's way of making adjustments lies in flood, drought, and plagues [which reduce the population]. However, people who unfortunately succumb to flood, drought, and plagues are no more than 10 or 20 percent of the total population.

Question: Do the ruler and his ministers have a way of dealing with this situation? Answer: The ruler and the ministers may make adjustments in the following ways: pursuing policies to ensure that no farmland will remain unused and that there will be no surplus labor. Migration of farmers to newly reclaimed land may be organized; heavy taxes may be reduced after a comparison is made between past and present tax rates. Extravagance in consumption may be prohibited; the wealthy household's appropriation of the property of others may be suppressed. Should there be floods, drought, and plagues, grain in the granaries may be made available, and all the funds in the government treasury may be used for relief — these are all that the ruler and his ministers can do in the way of adjustments between population and productive land.

In a word, after a long period of peaceful rule, Heaven-and-earth cannot stop the people from reproducing. Yet the resources with which Heaven-and-earth nourish the people are finite. After a period of peaceful rule, the ruler and the ministers cannot stop the people from reproducing, yet what the ruler and the ministers can do for the people is limited to the policies enumerated above. Among ten youths in a family, there are always one or two who resist being educated. Among the idle people in all the empire, how can it be expected that all will accept control from above? The housing for one person is inadequate for the needs of ten persons; how can it be sufficient for a hundred persons? The food for one person is inadequate for ten persons; how can it be sufficient for a hundred persons? This is why I am worried about peaceful rule.

[Hong, *Yiyan*, in *Juanshi geji* 1:8a–9b — KCL]