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understood almost purely in terms of expenditure—a more holistic understanding of welfare to present all its complicated dimensions beyond the financial would round off the analysis well.


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Though this book has been published for a number of years, the policy challenges it discusses remain relevant for Singapore and other modernizing Asian societies encountering decreasing fertility rates. After a successful family planning campaign in the first one and a half decades of Singapore’s independence, its total fertility rate (TFR) dropped below the replacement level of 2.1 in 1977. Despite an expanding slate of financial and non-financial pro-natalist measures to reverse this, Singapore’s TFR reached a historic low of 1.15 per resident female in 2010. Singapore’s inability to rejuvenate its aging population has severe implications for its social, economic and defense policies. Rising public disgruntlement in recent years over the influx of foreigners has also imposed political constraints on immigration as a strategy to meet the country’s manpower needs.

In this book, Sun draws on the qualitative data collected in 165 personal interviews and 39 focus group discussions with 221 Singaporean citizens to unveil a wide range of reasons behind some Singaporeans’ lackluster response to the government’s pro-natalist policies. Largely discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, these reasons include the perceived and felt inadequacy of existing financial incentives and institutional measures to offset the high financial costs and opportunity costs of living, childbirth, and childcare; the failure to communicate these initiatives and measures; and the divergences between the government and individual citizens over ideal citizenship rights and responsibilities, family sizes, and the roles of Singaporean women. Sun connects these explanations to the Singapore state’s expectation that its citizens remain economically productive and self-reliant. This emphasis on citizen responsibility, creates “population policies that reinforce social inequalities and ignore social diversities,” and thus remain ineffective (p. 127). Instead, some Singaporeans desire “a more supportive socio-economic environment as a precondition for having a child or additional child” (p. 17) through greater state provision of access to education, healthcare, and housing, as well as state guarantee of job security for working parents.

Sun’s reliance on the banal concept of Singapore as a “developmental state” primarily interested in developing and mobilizing its citizens for economic development leads to a reductive understanding of the Singapore government’s policy agendas. Singapore’s social policies serve another vital objective that do not quite fit the ‘developmental state’ framework—the socialization of Singaporeans in a common set of identities, values, and outlooks. The ideal citizen that the Singapore state tries to “make,” to invoke Sun’s attention-grabbing subtitle, is not only an economically productive and self-reliant one. The ideal Singaporean citizen is also one committed to fulfilling his or her civic responsibilities and playing his or her part to serve the national interest. This is where Sun’s interviews suggest that some Singaporeans do not see the “making of future citizens” as a citizenship responsibility. Instead, Sun provides plenty of quotations that reveal the self-centeredness and rational instrumentality with which some Singaporeans make decisions with regards to childbirth and childrearing, focusing on the costs and opportunity costs of childbirth and childrearing to their individual interests and aspirations. Therefore, even though this is not her primary purpose, her research also reveals the ineffectiveness of the Singapore government’s efforts to socialize Singaporeans in ideal citizenship responsibilities. Sun’s book therefore
exposes not one but two challenges for the Singapore state with regards to “the making of future citizens”—quantity as well as identity.

At the same time, Sun’s methodological approach—the use of interviews to uncover how Singapore’s population policies are “lived” and experienced by Singaporean citizens—presumes that the Singapore state makes policies at a distance from the lives of “ordinary citizens.” Singapore’s policy-makers and civil servants are after all themselves citizens, parents, fathers, and mothers bringing up children in similar material environments and structural circumstances as Sun’s interviewees. They would also strongly agree with Sun on “the importance of empirical engagement in social and public policy design” (p. 19)—the Singapore government has since the 1980s expanded its institutional capacity to study the effectiveness of its policies, and the consultation of citizens has become routinized within Singapore’s policy-making process. If Sun is to build on this research, including the policy-makers and civil servants tasked to revise and implement Singapore’s population policies among her interviewees would allow for a more penetrative and illuminating study of the constraints and conundrums of Singapore’s public policies.

Still, this is a revealing study of Singapore’s demographic challenges, contextualized within a historical survey of Singapore’s population policies and the aspirations, ambitions and anxieties of a small group of Singaporeans. Since the book’s publication, Singapore’s Total Fertility Rate has improved to 1.24 in 2015 (Singapore Department of Statistics), partly under the stimulus of expanded measures such as priority allocation of housing flats for couples with children and increased leave benefits and dismissal protection for working mothers. This is still far from the ideal replacement rate of 2.1. The issues Sun discuss hence remain salient for Singapore—while the size of its territory has not been Singapore’s destiny for the previous 50 years, for the next 50, the size of its committed citizenry will be.

Sex in China, by ELAINE JEFFREYS with HAIQING YU. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015. vi+ 232 pp. £50.00/€62.50 (cloth), £15.99/€20.00 (paper).

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Elaine Jeffreys and Haiqing Yu deliver a succinct yet in-depth exploration of sexual behaviors, discussions, and cultural transformations in the post-1980 People’s Republic of China (PRC). Strategically broken up into eight definitive and comprehensive chapters, the book addresses sex as it relates to marriage and family planning, youth sex culture, sexual identities, commercial transformations, public health, and educational institutions. It provides the academic and general reader alike with a clearly communicated overview of sex trends and attitudes in China. The book offers a thoroughly researched and refreshing PRC analysis, lending the reader an impression of sex within Chinese culture as an entity in itself—not to be compared with or examined through a Western lens.

Commencing with an historical tracing of major Chinese political shifts since the 1950s, including mobility restriction post-1958, China’s “opening up to the world” in 1978, and the one-child policy, the introduction serves to ground the non-expert in the socio-political atmosphere of present day China. Jeffreys and Yu dismiss the popularized idea that the Mao-era government actively repressed sex and sexual behavior. By eloquently interweaving examples of how explicit policies, and the political atmosphere at large, have influenced and in turn been influenced by sex and sexual culture in a rapidly transforming PRC, the authors argue that the introduction of sexual