

Response to One Quarter of Humanity

In their book *One Quarter of Humanity* such and such go over the last 300 years of Chinese demographic history. I felt the authors did a good job catching major facts and key points that helped explain why Chinese populations increased in certain places, such as rural areas, as opposed to the growth of Western populations which was general focused around cities. The authors also made nice comparisons and contrasts between the Chinese and the developed western countries. They did a good job showing how the Confucian principals relating to family life and personal interactions prevented the Chinese from developing the nuclear family unit when the west did. This is essential to their arguments because they use Malthus to state that this nuclear family unit, consisting of just parents and children as opposed to also having more extended family, is one of the key preventive checks to population expansion. The key to the Chinese not moving to the family unit was their belief in honoring their elders. This caused families to keep grandparents as well as aunts, uncles, and other relatives living together in a big collect. The book also sites that Chinese collectivism, which contrasts western individualism, allowed the increases in production of food that made it possible to sustain the Chinese population. The book extensively looks at the different government controls on population and how these impacted such things as infant mortality, through infanticide, and gender balances, through the extermination of female babies. One concept that I thought was extremely interesting was the idea that even when born a baby is not really alive. That the child does not fully gain life until it has been alive for around six months.

This is a very interesting contrast to America which constantly bickers over abortion and whether the fetus is alive or not.

In general I was rather disappointed by the book. I felt as though the authors did a terrific job assembling the facts but failed to extrapolate as much as they could have from those facts. Even though the last few chapters discuss implications, such as the family structure, collectivism, and cultural history, I thought the book really lacked a strong thesis and thus a point. The implications the book gave really lacked any novelty as they were pretty much the basic conclusions that anyone could draw looking at a few of the charts in the book. I was looking for more interesting conclusions that really struck at the heart of how the Chinese became one quarter of the worlds population. My other major complaint about the book was the way the authors chose to display their charts. The chart on page six which compares the Chinese population to the world population really irritated me. I did not agree with the authors' choice to use a logarithmic plot because it makes the Chinese population look much larger than it actually is. Also many of the charts that are used to show trends, particularly growth trends, do not start at zero, but only show the relevant window, which always exaggerates the amount of growth that has occurred. These types of charts usually indicate that the point that is being proved is weak, because of the need to distort figures in such a way. Overall, the book had good facts, but simply lacked a point.