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Family Dynamics in China: A Life Table Analysis. By Zeng Yi. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991. Pp. xiii + 197. $37.50 (cloth); $15.95 (paper).

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Written in English by a Chinese scholar, *Family Dynamics in China* is one of those rare books from which anyone with an interest in the family, contemporary China, or formal demography will learn something. In the book, Zeng Yi skillfully combines his penchant for multistate life tables with an attempt to understand the Chinese family. As a result, the book is not only a solid contribution to family demography and family sociology but also a well-executed exercise demonstrating the usefulness as well as the limitations of the life-table technique.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part depicts the demographic profile of the Chinese family. The second documents the author's extension of Bongaart's family status life-table technique to studying three-generation families. The third presents and analyzes numerical results. Some readers may find it easier to read the third part before the second part, which is full of technical derivations. This shortcut can be justified by the fact that many key qualitative conclusions of the book are insightfully drawn from observed data and logical reasoning without recourse to simulation analysis.

Zeng's argument is a simple and unmistakable one: demographic forces such as changes in fertility and mortality should have a profound influence on the structure of the family. For example, Zeng argues that, controlling for "the desirability of coresidence," the dramatic fertility decline in China since the 1970s should reduce the proportion of nuclear families because lower fertility means fewer offspring available per elderly couple (pp. 138–50, 166). The book's main findings consist of a series of simulated statistics concerning the characteristics of the family and the family experiences of the individual. By varying the input for family-status life tables, Zeng ascertains the effects of the demographic changes between 1950–70 and 1981 and of the demographic difference between the city and the countryside in 1986.

Zeng defines "family dynamics" as the creation of a family, a change in family size, and the dissolution of a family as well as changes in family characteristics" (p. xix). By this definition, the title *Family Dynamics in China* may be misleading, for the book does not adequately address the processes and the determinants of such vital events in family dynamics as marriage, childbearing, divorce, and household separation. Many issues of sociological import (e.g., mate selection, gender roles, intergenerational relationship, and the significance of education and occupation) are overlooked. Instead, the book concentrates on simulating the impact of demographic rates. The analysis relies heavily on Bongaart's method introduced in *Family Demography: Methods and Their Applications* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) edited by John Bongaarts, Thomas K. Burch, and Kenneth W. Wachter. Unfortunately, the author does not respond to Nathan Keyfitz's and Norman Ryder's critiques collected in the same book. Hence, the following weaknesses of the book reflect the inherent limitations of the method more than the author's application of the method. First, aside from a very limited number of variables such as age and parity, all individuals within a classification are unrealistically assumed to be homogeneous. Furthermore, events are assumed to be independent of each other. Finally, only *females'* family experiences are considered.

Zeng's macrosimulations are essentially deterministic and concerned only with statistics pertaining to the *central tendencies* of the marginal distributions of relevant variables rather than the variations and covariations of the variables in a multivariate and stochastic context. This feature undermines some of the basic strategies adopted in the research. For example, central to Zeng's simulations is the identification of a senior female "marker" for each family, which enables Zeng to conveniently equate a three-generation family with a "nonmarker" with at least one surviving child. Yet, the procedure dictates a narrower definition of three-generation families in excluding families with a lone grandfather and a narrower definition of nuclear families in excluding families with a lone father (p. 58). Even though Zeng is correct in arguing that *on average* a female "marries earlier and lives longer than her husband" (p. 56), it is untenable to assume that a female *always* outlives her husband. Also problematic is Zeng's measure of "the desirability of coresidence" by the proportion of parents willing to live with married children. A better measurement should take into account the proportion of married children willing to live with their elderly parents. Whereas the parents' desire dominates under a high fertility regime, children's desire is more important under a low fertility regime.

By distributing the overall sex ratio (105 males to 100 females) to all families, Zeng also ignores the sex composition of children within a family, which is further complicated by Chinese parents' general preference for sons over daughters. For a fixed number of children in a family, the number of sons varies. For example, for families with two children, the probability of having zero, one, and two sons is respectively about 25%, 50%, and 25%. Given the patrilineal tradition in China, having no son is associated with an elderly couple's lower likelihood of living with a married child. Having multiple sons does not improve the likelihood much beyond that of having a son because parents normally do not live with more than one married child; and the book does not consider the coresidence of married siblings. Therefore, the net result of the random distribution of the sex of children, as compared with the uniform distribution, leads to a lower proportion of parents living with their married children. This effect will become more pronounced as children born during the one-child-per-couple campaign beginning in 1979 reach their prime ages of marriage and childbearing. For this reason, I wonder whether Zeng's conclusion that "the proportion of nuclear families would be brought down by about 20 percentage points under the 1981 rates compared with what would be found under the 1950–70 rates" (p. 166) is an overstatement.