

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

China's current population of 1.27627 billion make it the most populous nation in the world representing one fifth of the total world population. This figure has grown significantly from 541 million when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was first formed in 1949. Such massive growth is likely to place a significant burden on the infrastructure of any nation and so in the early 1970's the state moved to arrest the population growth. Official hopes are that the population will be limited to 1.4 billion by 2010.

Many of the family planning policies utilised by the PRC to constrain population growth are in line with those adopted by other nations facing similar difficulties. These methods include greater access to contraception and sterilisation, increased public education on the population problem and contraceptive methods, and also good prenatal and postnatal care. Other methods promulgated by official policy in PRC are not commonly seen outside China in recent times and may be viewed by many as controversial. The heart of the controversy lies in the aims of the state policies, which aspire not only to reduce the population numbers but also endeavour to improve the quality of the population. This aim is carried out through a number of methods. These include premarital health checks, late marriage and late pregnancy, a one-child policy in urban areas, a requirement for a permit to allow a pregnancy where pregnancy is limited to those considered healthy, and widespread prenatal screening. Official information is clear

that family planning policies 'combine government guidance with the voluntariness of the masses' and that since the introduction of these policies, most people in China have found these guidelines acceptable. However for many outsiders, invariably questions will be raised about the policies. Some object to the coercive measures of the state, the idea of eugenics, and the possible discrimination against people with disabilities.

In this issue we are fortunate to have two articles that examine reproductive ethics in China. The first of these is an article by Professor Kailin Tang from Hunan Normal University in China. Professor Tang explores the concept of eugenics or *yousheng* (good birth) from the perspective of a Chinese ethicist. Professor Tang first presented this paper at the New Zealand Bioethics conference held in February 2002.

The second article by Dr Jing-Bao Nie, who was born in China (currently a staff member of the Bioethics Centre at the University of Otago), takes a historical look at Chinese ethical attitudes toward abortion and foetal life. This article uses research conducted in China as part of his doctoral thesis. Dr Nie will publish his findings on Chinese views and experiences of abortion in a forthcoming book.

Lynley Anderson
Editor