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Lost and Found: The “Missing Girls” in Rural China. By John James Kennedy and Yaojiang Shi, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 227 p. \$37.79 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

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The news that the One Child Policy has resulted in 20 million females “missing” from the Chinese population census shocked many worldwide. Hitherto, academic scholarship and newspaper articles have argued that the skewed sex ratio of 118 men to 100 females 20 million females is due to either sex-selective abortion or infanticide. The book *Lost and Found: The “Missing Girls” in Rural China* by John James Kennedy and Yaojiang Shi presents a different interpretation of this phenomenon. As they argue, only 10 million Chinese females are truly missing from the population census. The remaining 10 million are in fact alive and remain hidden from public view due to village leaders and families’ mutual non-compliance with the One Child Policy.

Kennedy and Shi’s work constitutes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the “missing girls phenomenon”. Building on Lipsky’s (1980) work on *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, the authors explain how after 1978 village leaders were faced with contradictory policy incentives: On the one hand, the One Child Policy introduced in 1979 stipulates that each family may only have one child, punishing additional births with heavy fines. On the other hand, the household responsibility system established in 1981, which allowed families to farm and lease their own land, created the incentive of having more children as land was allocated according to family size and children were needed as labour. As the authors contend, village leaders used their local autonomy to turn a blind eye to villagers’ violations of the One Child Policy by underreporting population births to higher government authorities. During “policy pushes” village leaders were under extreme pressure to implement the One Child Policy, at times with draconian measures such as forced abortions and sterilizations. In between these policy pushes, however, both families and village leaders engaged in mutual non-compliance. Consequently, children’s births, often female, were registered either late or not at all, leading to incomplete national statistics. For this reason, around 10 million females in fact “appear” in older cohorts of subsequent population census. The authors therefore conclude that only 10 million of the supposedly 20 million “missing” girls are truly missing either due to sex-selective abortions or infanticides.

In the following chapters, Kennedy and Shi substantiate this claim by first introducing the reader to Lipsky's work and how it supports their argument of mutual non-compliance (Chapter Two). The authors then outline how underreporting has occurred throughout Chinese history, and examine population census data to demonstrate that underreporting has resulted in 10 million females not appearing in population census data (Chapter Three). They subsequently turn to the challenges arising with birth registration across time in Chapter Four, before presenting in-depth qualitative interviews with cadres (Chapter Five) as well as families and missing girls (Chapter Six). The main findings of the book are summarised in a brief conclusion.

The book has many key strengths. First, the book makes a very convincing case that fewer females are in fact "missing" than assumed due to mutual non-compliance. In each chapter, the authors meticulously contrast their findings to other scholarly work to demonstrate how the current perception of the "missing girls phenomenon" needs to be corrected.

Moreover, their focus on local governance processes not only contributes to our understanding of the "missing girls phenomenon" but of village politics as a whole. The authors' use of Lipsky's work on Street-Level Bureaucracy is an excellent choice as the application of the theory sheds light on the many contradictions any grassroots bureaucracy needs to resolve when implementing national policy, regardless of the country or time under study. Secondly, while the focus of the book is on the 1980s to 2000s, their work is embedded in a thorough historical analysis of local registration and reporting procedures, including birth and marriage registration, as well as over- or underreporting of grain, land and household size. The authors' focus on local governance therefore showcases the difficulty of compiling national statistics in general.

Finally, the combination of qualitative with quantitative data is a key strength of the book. While the analysis of population census data in Chapter Two convincingly demonstrates that a large number of females re-appear in later cohorts, the historical analysis of local procedures combined with in-depth interviews sheds light on why and how females are hidden from the population census. As the book includes interviews with family planning and public security bureau cadres at the village, township and county levels, the book speaks to larger political dynamics and issues such as the cadre management

system and bureaucratic coordination problems. The interviews with family members and a missing girl, newspaper reports and survey data moreover provide a fascinating glimpse into family decision-making, gender preferences and measures taken to hide members of the family from higher authorities.

Despite its many strengths the book also demonstrates a few shortcomings. Firstly, the book's main contribution, to me, is firstly the finding that local non-compliance has resulted in as much as 10 million "missing girls" and secondly the in-depth interviews of actors discussing their non-compliance. It however appears as if the authors claim that the finding of mutual non-compliance as such is novel and of theoretical significance (p.13-14). Yet the finding that local leaders use their autonomy to underreport or not comply with central policy is well-documented in the scholarly literature, in relation to the underreporting of births (e.g. Daniel Goodkind, "Child Underreporting, Fertility, and Sex Ratio Imbalance in China," *Demography*, 48 (1), 2011), as well as in regards to other policy areas (Kenneth Lieberthal and Michael Oksenberg, *Policy-making in China*, 1988).

Secondly, the data presentation in Chapter Five and Six appears eclectic. In Chapter Five each interview is summarised in form of a report and presented one after another due to which the chapter is rather repetitive. The presentation of interviews with family members in Chapter Six is more accessible as it is structured along the different reasons for families to hide their children. In this chapter, however, the reader finds four sub-sections: interview material with family members, survey data demonstrating preference for sons or girls, one in-depth interview with a missing girl and newspaper reports on missing girls presented. While all of these data illustrate interesting findings, the reader might find their presentation somewhat heterogenous.

Finally, the book feels repetitive in parts. For instance, while the history of local registration and reporting procedures is outlined in Chapter Three, many findings reappear in Chapter Four, which again details in great depth how local reporting of birth registration has operated since imperial times. While the issue of birth registration is important for understanding the "missing girl phenomenon" in China, other significant factors identified in Chapter Two such as fines or elementary school reforms (p. 88-89), do not receive as much attention. They appear mostly within the discussion of the interview material in Chapter Five and Six.

Despite these minor shortcomings, Kennedy and Shi's work presents a valuable in-depth analysis of the "missing girls phenomenon". By focusing on the role of local governance, it contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon as such as well as Chinese grassroots politics. It is therefore a must-read for anyone interested in the One Child Policy, population control, and local governance in China.