

### **The One Child Policy: China's Solution**

With a population of over 1.2 billion people, one-fifth of the world's total population, it is no surprise that overpopulation has become a concern for the Chinese government. China's land mass is similar to that of the United States, but China has 4.5 times more people, ninety-four percent of which are concentrated in the south eastern part of the country. They only have seven percent of the world's arable land, seven percent of the world's fresh water, three percent of the world's forests, and two percent of the world's oil to support them (Six Billion and Beyond 1). With the rapid growth of China's population the economy was falling, poverty was rising, and a surplus labor force left countless unemployed. The Chinese realized something needed to be done. Deng Xiaoping, the leader of China, implemented the One Child Policy in 1979. "Use whatever means you must to control China's population. Just do it" (Mosher 50). The One Child Policy put strict family planning rules on the Chinese people and destroyed their right to privacy, for the government had a hand in every bedroom in China. It did, however, lower the poverty level and improve the economy and living conditions all across China. The One Child Policy has had many positive and negative effects on China, but has the policy caused more problems than it has solved? The facts need to be known before a hasty judgment is made.

The policy changed the Chinese way of life by allowing each couple to have only one child, compared to thirty years ago, when the average family had six children. The policy promoted delayed marriage and childbirth and provided free birth control, sterilizations, and abortions around the country. The One Child Policy's restrictions

helped lower the skyrocketing population. The birth rate slowed from 33.43 children for every thousand people in 1970 to 17.7 children for every thousand people in 1993, and the population growth rate dropped from 25.83 per thousand to 11.3 per thousand. In 1970 a women's average age at first marriage was 20.2 years and in 1993 it increased to 22.67. Since 1980, 250 million births were prevented and the population rate became lower than average developing countries. Without the implemented policy, the population would have been over 1.5 billion by now (Family Planning in China 3).

The One Child Policy did not affect the population growth alone. Living standards and the economy are also on the rise. Education and women's rights began to improve. Illiteracy has decreased because each family has to pay for the education of one child instead of many children. Now, ninety percent of three to five year olds attend kindergarten (Richards 9). It is also becoming more common to educate women as well as men. Women can now receive jobs and health care more often, when this was unheard of in the past. Although there are very few, the Chinese have slowly opened up more opportunities to women as the years have passed.

To make the One Child Policy appeal to citizens, the government has set up a system of incentives for couples that have one child. A couple that has only one child is greatly rewarded by receiving beneficial treatment over families with multiple children. A woman can receive paid pregnancy leave for up to three years, couples can get a five to ten percent salary increase, the entire family is given free health care, the child's education is paid for, the family is placed in preferential housing, and the couple receives higher retirement pensions.

Families with multiple children, however, must pay the penalty. The government can penalize families with extra children just as easily as they reward families with one child. These families are slapped with heavy fines and raised taxes and they no longer receive free health care because defying the One Child Policy is considered a criminal act. In the Henan province, if you have a second child you will be forced to pay the government twenty percent of your annual income for seven years. If you have three children you will have to pay thirty percent of your income for fourteen years (Richards 6). In some cases a second child cannot be registered and so it doesn't legally exist. This child will have difficulty attending school or marrying without government intervention.

Yet there are ways to get around the One Child Policy. If one or both members of the couple belong to an ethnic minority, they can be allowed to have multiple children and so can couples that are both only children. Men who remarry can also be allowed to have a second child. It also may be possible to have a second child if the first-born is handicapped, especially if the handicapped child is female. A wealthy family can get a second child registered through the bribing of officials. Those who can't afford to pay bribes and are found pregnant with a second child are often forced to abort. To avoid a forced abortion, a pregnant woman can sometimes have a second child by going away to stay with relatives until she gives birth, or the woman can claim that the child is adopted or belongs to a friend or relative.

Doctors often push patients toward abortions and sterilizations, receiving consent by threatening the patient. Abortions are performed throughout the entire nine-month period, even up to the point of childbirth. Infants can be given lethal injection while they are making the descent down the birth canal while the mother is in labor. The head of a

large military hospital in South China once admitted that his facility alone performed over four hundred abortions a year. In the mid 80's Chinese government statistics showed that birth control surgeries – abortions, sterilizations, and IUD (Intrauterine Device) insertions – were running at a rate of approximately thirty million a year (Mosher 51-52). In 1997 the Mobile Abortion Unit was introduced throughout the country. The Mobile Abortion Unit was a van equipped with a bed, surgical instruments, and a body clamp to hold unwilling patients down during the procedure.

There were also groups of officials called abortion gangs who would capture women who were pregnant for the second time and arrange for them to have an abortion. If a woman does not cooperate, they would cut off their water or electricity and in some cases, houses would actually be burnt down. The abortion gangs would at times beat a woman's husband until the woman gave consent. In one case, a woman who was seven months pregnant was forced to have an abortion. Her husband was so upset, he went on a rampage and killed the official's two sons and then committed suicide (Mosher 52). These officials enforced the One Child Policy with no regard to human life. Other countries were shocked when hearing of the brutality and disregard for human life, for "Confucius never said, 'Thou shalt not kill'" (Mosher 53). Even though forced abortions were brutal, the real problem was the frequency of sex-selective abortion.

Domestic violence against women is nothing new to China. It began with the binding of a woman's feet to make them smaller but also resulted in crippling them for life. Now couples are more commonly turning toward the infanticide of female children because of the desire to produce a male. Male children are preferred over female children because the male will carry on the family name and provide security for his parents when

they are older. Females marry away from the family and are less valuable in Chinese society. In fact, families sometimes nickname their daughters “maggots of the rice bowl” (Richards 7). Because the One Child Policy allows each couple only one child, it is common for female infants to be disposed of, either by sex-based abortions, abandonment, or other methods of infanticide. It is not uncommon in rural areas to hear of a farmer who drowned his female child in a bucket of water, or a woman who chooses to abort her first child once an ultrasound shows that the baby will be born a girl. Sex-based abortion is against the law. However, many officials will look the other way as long as the couple meets the standard of having one child.

These cases of infanticide are quite common. In fact, that is why 1.7 million females are unaccounted for each year. These numbers have unbalanced the sex ratio between the number of males and females in China. This leaves 118.5 males to every 100 females (Richards 7-8). There are a total of over 60 million more males in the country. The imbalance between the male and female population is causing problems of its own. Many males are left without a wife, which led to an increase in human trafficking. Abducted brides have become more common and in 2000, one hundred ten thousand women were freed during a crackdown in human trafficking. Unfortunately, most abducted women will never be found (China’s Lifestyle Choice 32).

Female and handicapped children are also being dumped off in orphanages. Wang Rui Quiong, the director of the Shenzhen Society Welfare Centre in southern China said, ““Because Chinese law allows couples to have only one child, everyone wants a good one. Parents do not want to be burdened with a stupid child”” (Richards 8). Regrettably, because of the high numbers of children being abandoned, approximately forty percent of

orphans die in state-run welfare centers and as many as eighty percent die in smaller, less equipped ones. A British documentary recorded in 1995 showed large numbers of orphans that were neglected and left to die in what the British described as “dying rooms” (China’s Slaughter of Innocents 136). Orphans were placed in a back room in the orphanage and left to die alone in the dark. The mass of unwanted babies that are neglected in China are left to rot to make room for new children to fill the orphanages. Orphans are considered to be a surplus in the population, so if the child dies, it is a step toward slowing the population increase. It is unfortunate that it is so difficult to adopt from China if you are from another country. Children are left in orphanages to die instead of allowing them to be adopted by people from other countries.

There is also a concern in China with having a generation of spoiled only children. The “4-2-1 syndrome” is where four grandparents and two parents give all of their attention to only one child (China’s One Child Policy 1). These children become pampered, over-indulged children who have to grow up in a society that condemns individuality. The government is concerned that these spoiled children will grow up only to embrace individuality and democracy and oppose communism and the Chinese way of life. To address this problem, the government set up daycare and early education so that children are exposed to group influence at an early age. Also, Chinese tradition doesn’t commend pampering their children in any way.

Does the One Child Policy cause more problems than it solves? As a whole, it has been successful. Population growth has slowed, poverty is down, the quality of life has improved, health services have become more readily available, and illiteracy has dropped because of the rise of education. However, with great benefits come problems.

Everyone's sex life is open to government scrutiny. Women are forced to have abortions or become sterilized without their consent, the infanticide of baby girls has led to an imbalanced sex ratio and bride abduction, and the abandonment of children causes many deaths within orphanages. Are these horrific scenes of death and injustice a small price to pay for economic well being? If the Chinese are truly unhappy with the policy, why haven't they protested? Many Chinese citizens are unhappy with the law and the strict enforcement, but to them it has become a necessary evil. The Chinese would rather be forced to have one child than to be in poverty. "The restrictions of childbearing have been balanced by economic bounty. The Chinese people have accepted that trade-off" (Mosher 53). Those who decide to oppose the policy are punished by the government, so the people who wish to speak up are too afraid of the regime to do so. To oppose the government is treason.

The government has strongly enforced the policy. However, it has caused many adverse effects, especially against women and their female children. Hopefully, with the improvement of the economy, the status of women will improve. The imbalance between males and females in the country has caused awareness that more female children are needed to rebalance the sex ratio. The infanticide of females has been on the rise, but with new knowledge and a new generation being produced, perhaps the way the country looks to women can also be changed. As views change, there will be fewer negative effects resulting of the policy. The Chinese government took on the problem of overpopulation and reacted against it. The policy was drastic and very severe, but so was the problem.

To completely solve the population problem a closer look must also be taken at developing the economy, getting rid of poverty, protecting the environment, developing and utilizing resources, and popularizing education. Without taking a closer look at these things, population reduction would not have the desirable impact on society. Population reduction cannot benefit society without looking at all aspects that affect it. The One Child policy is successful in reducing the population growth, but it cannot become completely successful until the negative effects it causes in the process are reduced.

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