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[Sociology](#), [Population](#)



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Introduction

This research paper examines China's national policy of restricting families to producing only one child, using research based on credible internet sources. The paper includes discussion of why and when the policy was implemented, its effect on the people of China and China as a nation, and whether it is a policy that should be or will be continued.

The Research

Kane and Choi (Oct. 1999) provide a comprehensive overview of China's "One Child Policy" in their paper published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ). They report that it was a government policy first introduced in 1979; because the Chinese government was concerned that rapid growth of the already huge Chinese population would compromise the country's development, because of the consequences - both social and economic - of the population growing out of control, including the threat of future famine. As background to the decision to implement the policy, Kane and Choi report that since 1953, the Chinese government had made family planning facilities available to the general population. However, in the subsequent years, a

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combination of falling death rates and following a century relatively free from conflicts including rebellions and any major epidemics, the population had risen rapidly, in contrast to the earlier times when the annual increase was probably way below one percent. At the time, Chinese rulers saw this increasing population as “ part of China’s new strength.” Indeed, Mao Zedong (better known by some as Chairman Mao) is said to have quoted an old Chinese proverb: “ Of all things in the world, people are the most precious.” However, that growth began to cause the regime difficulties in meeting the needs of its people, so in 1970, when the fourth Five Year Plan was introduced, a new inclusion was a series of targets to limit population growth. Also abortion and contraception facilities were expanded to cover rural as well as urban areas, and there were government campaigns to persuade people to get married later, to have smaller families and to increase the intervals between the births of successive children. By 1975 the annual population growth rate had dropped to below two percent, but the target set was to reduce the rate further to just one percent by 1980. As described by Kane and Choi, in order to achieve that, each of China’s government administrative units set targets and discussed with and tried to influence families in its region. Also, at the more local levels, couples were made to understand and appreciate the effects of them having children by being part of collective funding for health and schools, etc. That process also facilitated the community applying persuasive pressure on couples who wanted to produce more children than suggested in the official plans. Greenhaigh’s book: “ Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng’s China” (2008) provides an in depth study of the policy, which she claims came

about in response to the need to reduce the excessive burden on the state of the ever-increasing numbers of its citizens, and which was implemented by “ a unique invention of PRC statecraft” (p. 46). She reports that the policy came into being after Mao’s death on the basis of “ modern science” (p. 50). In spite of the population targets having been set and actively pursued, Kane and Choi report that the campaigns as they existed did not achieve the reduction required, and were clearly unlikely to achieve the projected zero growth set for 2000. The population studies discontinued in the 1950s as part of Marxist doctrine were reintroduced at universities in 1975, when the statisticians involved soon realised that with half of the then population being younger than 21, growth would continue even with relatively small family sizes. The 1982 census reported a Chinese population of over one billion, projected to reach 1. 4 billion by the turn of the century at the current growth rates. It was therefore decided to provide incentives for families to limit the numbers of children. The hope was that many couples would be persuaded to have less than three children and for at least 30 percent to have only the one child, arguing that the policy was to benefit the generations of the future. The incentives put in place included “ preferential access to housing, schools, and health services” and the imposition of financial levies on each further child. On top of all that, there were even suggestions of reduced career prospects for people in government employment. Details of the measures varied between the different administrative units. Interestingly, as reported by Kane and Choi, “ minorities were excluded from the policy.”

Bringing those population figures more up to date, “ China Population 2013”

published by the World Population Review, gives an overall number as at September 2013 of just over one billion 370 million, including Hong Kong and Macau (but excluding Taiwan). The article states that almost half of them live in cities and other urban areas (China has 90 cities with populations of more than one million) and that by 2035 that proportion is predicted to rise to 70 percent by 2035. As shown in the population density map (Figure 1), the population is very unevenly distributed (including extensive uninhabited areas) and the majority of the population is concentrated in the eastern parts of the country. The overall density is circa 360 people per square mile (about 140 per square kilometer) although in Shanghai - China's and the world's biggest city - the density is almost 10, 000 per square mile (3, 700 per sq. km.).

As far as implementing the "One Child" policy is concerned, Kane and Choi note that in the larger Chinese cities such as Shanghai, most typical couples had already elected to have one child maximum, because they were both in full time employment, lived in very small apartments, and without modern appliances like refrigerators were obliged to frequently spend time shopping for food. In addition, because in many instances at least one partner was employed by the government and therefore subject to pressure from that direction, it was soon the case that most urban couples were restricting themselves to a single child only. However, the situation was different in the villages, where peasants with little money behind them and no pension to look forward to regarded children as their means of support in their latter years. Most rural couples regarded having at least one son as essential for that reason (because daughters move away when they marry). By resisting

the government edicts and making life difficult for those assigned to implement the one child policy at local level “ a process of negotiation and compromise” resulted, so that the numbers of rural women having a second child was still at around 90 percent by 1990.

A more recent phenomenon has arisen as a result of the economic reforms in China (Kane and Choi). Because businesses in the towns and cities desperately needed more workers, restrictions on movement from the country into the towns were relaxed, and the government has lost control of regulating that migration, with an estimated 150 million people moving from place to place and working for cash. As a consequence, population statistics have become unreliable. Hence the published official birth rate for the period 1990 to 1995 was 1.92 children per couple but it could well be that the real figure is slightly over 2. It is believed the figures are further distorted by the tendency to not report the birth of a girl. Female and unreported babies are often passed to relatives or even given to overloaded orphanages, and there is even an increasing tendency to abort the baby when its sex has been determined by (illegal) ultrasound testing.

As far as the outcomes of the One Child policy are concerned, and in particular its effect on the ordinary Chinese people, Kane and Choi note that the parents of many of these single children “ spoil” their children by being excessively generous to and overprotective of the child, so parent education classes have sprung up to educate such parents. However, and more importantly, Kane and Choi highlight that the policy has stimulated sex discrimination in China. Due to the perceived need to have at least one son, girl children are considered very much secondary and if not aborted are

often hidden away and have less chance of proper education and health care.

As a consequence, there are now twenty percent more single men than women, a differential that is projected to be magnified fourfold by 2030, which will create social problems (“China Population 2013”). Extracted from the same article, Figure 2 is a chart illustrating projected populations up to the year 2100 (which shows a decline after around 2030 or so), and table 1 shows the Population History and the Population Projections.

That imbalance of the sexes resulting from the three decades of the One Child policy is also discussed by Ebenstein (Sep. 2007) in his paper: “The “Missing Girls” of China and the Unintended Consequences of the One Child Policy.” He puts the blame for that imbalance squarely on pre-natal selection of a child’s sex by means of infanticide and abortions – both widespread throughout those years. Ebenstein notes that the imbalance increases for the second birth in a family, especially where the parent are wanting a son, and that subsequent births following the birth of a daughter have been after a longer interval, which he finds as “clearly consistent with parents’ practicing sex-selective abortion and infanticide” (p. 3). He also finds that the imbalance is highest in areas where the fertility limits are most strictly enforced, adding credence to his argument (p. 3). He does mention that the policy has already been modified somewhat on a geographical basis. For urban couples comprising circa one third of the population the One Child policy remains unchanged; in most rural areas (just over half the population) there is a “1.5 child” policy – one additional birth per couple; and a two or three child policy in certain of the more remote provinces (p. 4). Certain

groups are excluded from all restrictions. Those include minorities of Chinese ethnic origin and parents employed in dangerous occupations. Today's limits are in stark contrast to the unrestricted times of the 1960s, when the average was in excess of six births per mother. (p. 4). An interesting point made by Ebenstein is that once a couple have produced a son, they prefer that a second birth produces a daughter, because (in some parts of China) a second son is referred to as "a heavy burden" because in the years ahead he will require a new house when he marries, which can cost the equivalent of 10 years earnings.

Traditional Chinese culture is also affected by the One Child policy in other ways (Law, Nov. 2013). She reports that the traditional extended family is disappearing and being replaced by a "4-2-1" family structure where there are 4 grandparents, 2 parents and just 1 child. As a consequence, the traditional naming system that can in part identify seniority is no longer viable. Law also believes that the increased focus on the one child by parents and grandparents is creating youngsters who are less independent, and lack the interaction and communication skills of children with siblings. There is also likely to be a higher expectation on that child from parents and grandparents, making the pressure on the child excessive. Another consequence of the policy highlighted by Law is that with fewer children having been born over the last thirty years or so, China has an increasingly aging population, as shown in Figure 3. That is now becoming a problem as with China's increasing economic growth and prosperity, more workers are needed, whilst at the same time there are fewer grown up children to look after the aging parents. The combined effect could be to slow China's rate of

growth.

According to Das and N'Diaye (Jan. 2013), the impending shift of China's demographics to an all-time population peak changing to a steep decline has caused economists and others to ask if China has reached the Lewis Turning Point -a situation in which their traditional surplus of cheap labor disappears and is replaced by a labor shortage. Das and N'Diaye predict this point will be reached between 2020 and 2025. They concede that other factors such as increases in numbers of births (relaxation of the One Child policy), fiscal reforms, and greater productivity may affect the date when that turning point is reached, but maintain that demographics will be the major influence.

The Lewis Turning Point issue is also discussed by Fang (2010), in his paper published in the China Economic Journal. Fang sees the imminent arrival of the Lewis Turning Point as not being an issue that should be a cause for concern. It should instead be used as important information to help inform government decisions on economic policy, as well as commercial decisions by business and even to help make future employment plans by individuals. Fang sees China's longer-term future after reaching that Lewis Turning Point as including a greater dependence on advances in technology and higher productivity. The process of changing to that model needs to be accelerated.

The effect of the policy on those single children should be considered. What has it been like for a generation of children to grow up without siblings, when traditionally Chinese families averaged four children prior to the One Child policy being implemented in 1979? Hatton (Nov. 2013) describes a recent

visit to Gansu province by Fan Shi San - an art photographer - and studies by Vanessa Fong, a sociologist, to find answers.

Hatton reports that Fong - on an annual basis - interviews and surveys between 600 and 1300 members of a group of almost 2, 300 " singletons" (as she calls them) who she began studying in 1997. An important point made by Fong is that Chinese have difficulty with the precise concept of a sibling, in part because the Chinese tend to use " brother" and " sister" when they are discussing cousins. Hence, while many would say that they have numerous brothers and sisters, they actually mean cousins. Fong also notes that most families had more to spend on just the one child, so that this generation of singletons tends to be better educated. According to one 32-year old woman brought up as a single child, that focus on just the one child was a mixed blessing, because Chinese parents tend to apply considerable pressure on their children to follow a career path that they choose. As a result, she claims she might have chosen some other path in life had her parents had other children to consider. Also, she feels that being the only child, she is obliged to stay near her parents as it will be her responsibility to look after them. Conversely, she likes the idea that she does not have to " share my parents with others" and has their undivided love. Hatton's article also touches on the possibility that sole children would be spoiled by doting parents. She reports that studies have thrown up mixed opinions on this issue that some refer to as the " Little Emperor Syndrome." A study by Australian researchers from the University of Melbourne found these single children to be " significantly less trusting, less trustworthy, more risk averse and less competitive," but another study by Chinese researchers found such

children to be no different than children from families with more children.

Another influencing factor is the increased amount of mobility in employment and migration within China, meaning that children are growing up with less close family ties and fewer long-term friends.

So, in the light of a projected decline in population from around 2030 onwards, coupled with economic growth that requires an ever larger national workforce, is it likely that the One Child policy will be continued in the future? Not according to a Reuters report quoted in an article published in the Guardian on 24 December 2013, entitled "China's relaxation of one-child policy to begin rolling out early next year." According to the article, this radical change in government policy - which is expected to be rolled out in some parts of China as early as the first quarter of 2014 - will "allow millions of families to have two children" and has come about because of the increasing financial impact on China's economy of a population that is aging rapidly. Further, according to the report, China anticipates scrapping its family planning limits altogether but not in the near future. A government spokesman confirmed the One Child policy had - since 1980 - "averted 400 million births."

That same government motivation for relaxing the One Child policy (the need for more workers) was the view of Mosher (2011), writing for the Population Research Institute. He cites widespread human rights violations since the policy was implemented, claiming that "mobile abortion squads" hunted down pregnant women who had ignored the single child rule, arrested them and compulsorily aborted and sterilized them - an act that was imposed on between seven and ten million Chinese women annually.

Mosher's opinion is that rather than admit the One Child policy was a mistake, the communist leaders in China have introduced the Two Child policy, but that the arrests and abortions will continue - this time for women pregnant with a third child. In other words, the right of Chinese people to decide how many children they want continues to be violated by their rulers.

Conclusions

As to the future of the One Child policy, the government has already relaxed it in certain areas of the country and is introducing a general relaxation to make it a Two Child policy from this year, in the light of an impending labor shortage as China experiences significant economic growth and rising prosperity. Some predict a further relaxation as the labor shortage "bites" and as the problems of an increasingly aging population become more marked.

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Figure 1: Population Density Map of China. Source: http://jb-hdnp.org/Sarver/Maps/WC/wc19_popdensitychinam.jpg

Figure 2: China Population Chart Source: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/china-population/>

Figure 3: Graph: China Population Aged 65 and Over Source: <http://sites.psu.edu/comm410girlspower/files/2013/11/1369801801.png>

Figure 4: Gansu Province Location in China. Source: <http://china-journeys.com>

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com/travel-guide/provinces/gansu

Table 1: China Population History and Projections Source:

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/china-population/>