

China – the aims and effects of the one child policy

Government



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A variety of social policies aimed at controlling population change have been established around the world. But in this answer I will be evaluating a very controversial example of a policy that aimed to tackle rapid population growth by reducing fertility rate (also known as anti-natalist) - China's One-Child Policy.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the Chinese government became concerned about the population growth; this is mainly due to the philosophy of the government under Chairman Mao, in the mid-twentieth century, which was that 'a large population gives a strong nation' and so the government encouraged people to have more and more children. This consequently led to an increase in population of 55 million every year and a famine in 1962 which caused nearly 30 million deaths.

This massive growth in population forced a policy change in 1974, in order to avoid a Malthusian-type disaster in the future (The theory that population increases more rapidly than the food supply leading to famine and, inevitably, death). It encouraged the country to reduce the birth rate by the slogan 'wan-xi-shao' which called for later marriages, longer gaps between children and fewer children. However, this policy was not effective enough, and the population continued increasing and did not follow the pattern of the DTM (demographic transition model).

This then led the government to introduce the one-child policy in 1979, which set strict limits on the number of children that a couple were allowed to have. In order to further enforce this policy; strong pressure was put on women to use contraceptives (e. g. contraceptive pills) which were more

widely available. Special family planners and 'granny police' were introduced in order to make sure that women were practising contraception and were instructed to report any pregnancies. The government also introduced incentives like; free healthcare and education for one child and then fines for more than one child. Also, more controversially, enforced late abortions and sterilisation became common, which mainly human rights activists heavily criticised and opposed.

However, the policy had very negative effects on the country.

Firstly, it led to female infanticide; where couples preferred sons, and baby girls were killed so they could have another chance of getting a boy. This occurred more often in rural areas, where there was less control from the government, and also where traditions were most important. This was mainly because male descendants were preferred as they can carry on the family name from generation to generation. This male dominance led to an imbalance in male to female sex ratio, where the number of men far exceeded that of women. This then further lowered fertility rates as there weren't enough women 'to go round'.

As well as an imbalance in the sex ratio, there was also an imbalance in the age ratio, as the policy vastly increased the dependency ratio and the country suffered from an ageing population. This was mainly due to the '4-2-1' situation, which meant that '1' child had to look after their '2' parents and '4' grandparents all at the same time and because of the increasing life expectancy.

The policy also led to social implications on the child itself, such as the spoilt 'little emperor' syndrome where the attention of the family fell on one child. It is also suggested that it had a negative effect on the child's social skills, as they grew up with no other siblings, therefore found it harder to integrate into society and led to poor communication skills.

However, from 1990 onwards, the policy was slightly relaxed in order to combat some of the problems.

For example, only-child couples were allowed to have two children, in order to relieve some of dependency on the children and also because they were concerned about the economic implications of an ageing population. In addition, the policy became harder to enforce for reasons such as the revolution in global communication and socialisation, which opened up the country to much greater social influence from the west. However, in more remote parts of the country, the policy is still encouraged. For example, the authorities in Guangdong (state capital) ordered 20,000 abortions and sterilisations by the end of 2001.

Despite all of the negative implications, the decrease in overall population growth has had some positive effects, such as the positive economic growth. This was mainly due to the major decrease in demand for resources to support the needs of the population, which in turn led to a reduction in the stress placed upon the environment. There was also a drop in unemployment due to labour surplus and more disposable income being available due to less money being spent on children.

In conclusion, I believe that the one-child policy was a very brutal policy that disregarded the basic human rights of people and that a more gentle approach should have been taken. However, there is no argument that population management was inevitable in order to maintain a high standard of living, and that the one-child policy has avoided a Malthusian-type disaster (e. g. famine and war) and has better stabilised the population of China. This is because 400 million births were prevented and the annual growth rate had fallen to 0.6% as well. It is also clear that the policy is evolving for the better, as by 2006 the Chinese government moved towards a more health-orientated policy and committed itself to implement international agreements, promoting mother and child welfare.