

One child policy in china and its effect sociology essay



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As the most populous country in the world, the People's Republic of China has been adopting the One-Child Policy since 1979 in order to improve the problem of overpopulation which is seen as an obstacle of the growth and development of the country. While the Chinese Government emphasizes its achievements of population control in China, the controversial policy has been widely criticized for its negative influences. This paper presents the One-Child Policy's effects on the position of women. "Women's position" in this paper is basically defined by women's rights, freedom, respectability and social status. I will first briefly introduce the policy, then analyze both the positive and negative impacts with relevant data and statistics, and lastly come to a conclusion.

The Policy and Population Growth

Introduced in 1978 and implemented since 1979, the One-Child Policy is a family planning policy adopted by the Chinese Government in order to improve China's over-rapid population as to prevent its unfavourable effects on economic and social development of the country. (Information Office of the State Council Of the People's Republic of China 1995) The policy restricts married urban Chinese couples from having more than one child by imposing monetary penalties on families with extra children yet exemptions are allowed for couples who belong to ethnic minorities, live in rural area or do not have any siblings. (BBC News 2000) The One-Child Policy is considered successful in terms of its control on China's population growth as the birth rate in the county has been greatly decreasing since the introduction of the policy. (see Figure 1) " Compared with 1970, in 1994 the birth rate dropped from 33. 43 per thousand to 17. 7 per thousand; the natural growth rate,

from 25. 83 per thousand to 11. 21 per thousand; and the total fertility rate of women, from 5. 81 to around 2...According to statistics supplied by the United Nations, China's population growth rate has already been markedly lower than the average level of other developing countries." (Information Office of the State Council Of the People's Republic of China 1995)

Figure 1. Changes in the total fertility rate in China

Source: National Population and Family Planning Commission of China (2006)

Violation of Women's Reproductive Rights

Despite its success in population control, the One-Child Policy gives rise to criticisms among which one lies in its violation of women's reproductive rights. Reproductive rights are a subset of human rights first recognized at the United Nation's International Conference on Human Rights in Teheran on 13th May 1986. According to the 16th article of the Proclamation of Teheran, " Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of their children". Dixon-Mueller (1993: 12) suggests that reproductive rights can be defined as three types: " 1. the freedom to decide how many children to have and when (or whether) to have them; 2. the right to have the information and means to regulate one's fertility; 3. the right to control one's own body". Reproductive freedom is " the core of individual self-determination". The One-Child Policy does not only violate women's rights by limiting the number of their children but also leads to forced abortions in the country. Under the enforced policy, every 2. 4 seconds there is a woman undergoing a forced abortion in China and this makes a total of about 35, 000 abortions per day. (Phillips 2010: 1) Abortion

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is legal in China and 13 millions of abortions are performed in China every year, which largely exceeds those performed in other countries such as the United States and Canada. (see Figure 2). There is a direct relationship between the One-Child Policy and China's high abortion rate. Posten&Yaukey (1992: 290) point out that the abortion rate in China increased by nearly 50% between 1978 and 1979 when the policy started being implemented. It is widely known that abortion is harmful to women's body, not to mention its negative impacts on their emotional and mental health. Ms. Reggie Littlejohn, president of Women's Rights Without Frontiers, criticized that "The one child policy causes more violence toward women and girls than any other policy on the face of the earth." (Jiang 2009)

Figure2. Abortion statistics in China, U. S. A., U. K., Canada and Australia

Source: Jiang (2009)

Unwanted Daughters and Sex-Selective Abortions

A saying among peasants in China goes like this: "The birth of a boy is welcomed with shouts of joy and firecrackers, but when a girl is born, the neighbours say nothing" (Westley&Choe 2007: 2) In spite of China's modernization over the past decades, it is still common for Chinese people to traditionally prefer sons to daughters. (Wang 1999: 197) Such a preference indirectly leads to sex-selective abortions as female fetuses are usually considered less precious than male ones, especially if the couple is allowed to have only one child. With fetal screening technologies such as ultrasound, amniocentesis and chorionic villi sampling, the sex of unborn fetuses can be recognized before their birth. Such technologies and available abortions

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result in the possibility that couples selectively abort female fetuses in the hope of having a son instead.(Westley&Choe 2007: 3)

Beside sex-selective abortions, China's infant mortality rate is another thing to look into. Generally the mortality of male infants is expected to be greater than that of female ones as male infants are biologically weaker than female infants.(Li, 2007: 2) This assumption is also proved by the world's infant mortality rate by sex.(see Table 1) However, as shown in Table 2, China goes in the reverse direction. It is believed that this unusual tendency is caused by female infanticides and daughter abandonments resulting from the combination of the One-Child Policy and son preference.

Table 1. World's infant mortality rate by sex 1980-2010

Source: United Nations Population Division (2010)

Table 2. China's infant mortality rate by sex 1980-2010

Source: United Nations Population Division (2010)

Gender Imbalance – Blessing or Curse?

Together with the increasing female infant mortality, there is a rising trend of the sex ratio in China since the implement of the One-Child Policy.(see Figure 3) It is estimated by the State Population and Family Planning Commission that there will be 30 million more Chinese man than Chinese women in 2020. (BBC News 2007)

Because of the supply-and-demand law that when supply decreases the value of supply increases, it is assumed that if there are fewer women in China , their “ values” and social status should naturally raise. However, this

law would make sense only if the “ demand” of women was high. Poon(2008) points out that if women become the minority of a male-preponderant society(like China), they may face “ a period of unprecedented male aggression, which would likely render women as victims and women’s status even more precarious and vulnerable to subjugation.” because a rise of women’s values would benefit men around them rather than women themselves and they would be even more controlled by men, hence their position would be even lower.

Figure 3. Rising sex ratio and excess female infant mortality in China

Source: Sun (2005)

Women’s Empowerment – The Mistaken Focus

It is always emphasized by the Chinese Government that the One-Child Policy helps promoting women’s empowerment and improving women’s position as they are “ freed from heavy burdens brought about by having many children”(National Population and Family Planning Commission of China 2006). This claim contains two causal relations:

- 1) Because of the One-Child Policy women have fewer children.
- 2) Women have fewer children so they can spend more time on their career.

Both of them make sense in a large extent, but is the One-Child Policy a must to control the number of women’s children in today’s world?

Despite that Hong Kong is a special administrative region of the PRC, the One-Child Policy is never implemented in the city, where the social position

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of women is relatively high. As shown in Figure 4, the fertility rate of Hong Kong kept dropping even and was even lower than that of China. Of course one can argue that there are various factors contributing to Hong Kong's low fertility rate, yet one can also question whether the One-Child Policy is the only factor causing the decline in fertility rate and the rise of women's position.

Figure 4. Fertility rates from 1960-2005 in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and East Asia & Pacific

Source: The United Families International (2010)

The Single Child Generation

The One-Child Policy does not only aim to decrease the birthrate but also to improve the quality of the new generation, the future pillars of China. It is commonly believed that having single daughters will raise the position of women as their parents provide them with better and more concentrated resources such as education and materials. It may be true in some ways, but Greenhalgh(2007.) points out that the One-Child Policy has produced " the most materially and educationally privileged generation of young people in Chinese history" who are spoiled and egocentric. " Having been the focus of attention from the family throughout their growing-up years, these children are more dependent on others and easily hurt psychologically."(China Daily 2005) The Post-80s (people born in 1980-1989) is labeled as " the Strawberry Generation(草莓一代)" by the press in China. The term refers to youngsters who look attractive but are unable to stand any pressure and cope with failures (People's Daily Online 2010). It is especially

linked with the single-child generation as they are usually over-protected by their parents like strawberries in greenhouses. This new generation has already aroused concerns and worries from the society. Do better resources necessarily create a better generation? If the whole generation is getting worse, how can we expect better position of women?

Conclusion

The One-Child Policy was claimed to be “ a short-term measure” when it was first introduced in China.(Hesketh, Li& Zhu 2005) Now that the policy has already been implemented for three decades, although it does have certain advantages, its negative consequences also eventually appear and have aroused worries from the society. The inhuman policy generally worsens women’s position by violating women’s rights and enhancing the existing favoritism towards males – and these are not coming to an end yet.

According to the deputy director of the National Population and Family Planning Commission of China, the country’s family-planning policy will remain unchanged until at least 2015. (Kumar 2010) How much longer do Chinese women have to suffer for their country? Only the government can tell.

(1720 words)