

China's One-Child Policy Has Created Irreversible Damage: A Comprehensive Look at a Life Changing Issue

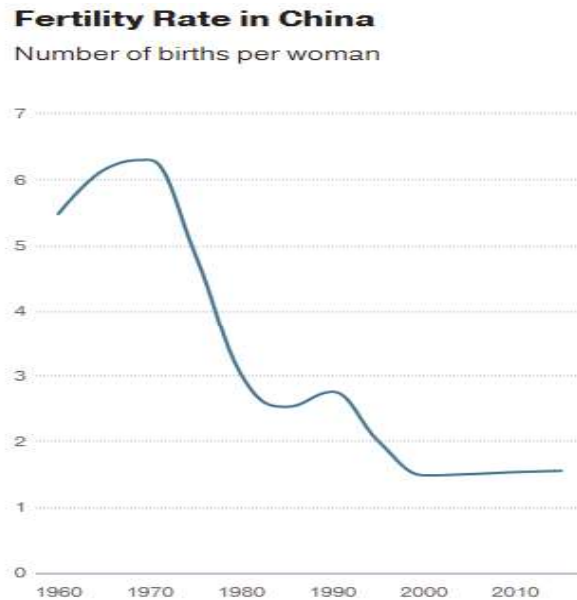
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The term one-child policy describes an important, but for many, dangerous policy in China. The Chinese government claims that 400 million babies were not born because of the social policy enacted, not mentioning how many of those unborn were forced abortions, sterilizations, infanticide, and unwanted baby girls. This policy caused many issues and it may therefore be too late for new policies to provide the positive change China is seeking. Throughout this essay, four aspects will be identified as to why the damage caused by the one-child policy in China has become irreversible.

BACKGROUND

There have been several accounts of misinformation about Mao Zedong. King et. al delves deeper into these myths in the article *Challenging myths about China's one child policy* and debunks many of the issues that have risen from these falsities (King Whyte, Feng, & Yong, 2015). Mao was recorded on several different accounts stating that he was proud of China's large population size. He was never recorded promoting population growth, simply stating that normal population growth is a good thing and that China will continue to find a way to support its population. By 1957, Mao was recorded stating that birth control was more urgent (King Whyte et. Al, 2012). He in fact, is the one who deemed a ten-year program promoting birth control and birth planning as essential before hitting the 800 million population mark. The following year, the Great Leap Forward began and Mao became less concerned with population growth mainly because of the surplus in food supply. Once the famine from the Great Leap Forward occurred, Mao went back to stating that birth control was necessary and went as far as providing many provinces with free options. He later complained to an American journalist that too few in the rural providences were using the birth control options (King Whyte et. Al, 2015). Although not many records exist of his explicit birth control plans, China did create their own version of the birth control pill that they were distributing in order to curb population growth from 2.5% down to 1% in cities and 1.5% in rural areas, then subsequently down again as part of the five-year plan in 1975 to 1% in rural areas and .6% in cities by 1980 (King Whyte et. Al, 2015). This plan was titled "later, longer, and fewer" (*Wan, xi, shao* 晚、稀、少) meaning: get married later in life, wait longer between approved births, and have fewer children (King Whyte et. Al, 2015). This coercive plan did in fact reduce population growth during the 1970's leading researchers to question why the one child policy was launched in 1980 and question why the policy has gathered so much credibility when research suggests the country's population was already in decline (as shown in figure 1). Mao Zedong passed away in 1976 and under the new rule of Deng Xiaoping, the one child policy was introduced in 1979 and passed into law September of 1980.

FIGURE 1
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE (CLARKE, 2015)



Scutti (2014) unearths several problems with the one child policy in her article *One Child Policy is One Big Problem for China*. She similarly agrees that problems within China will not be solved easily. After several issues with the newly passed one child policy (such as “forced late-term abortions and involuntary sterilization, as well as the “neighborly” snitching on pregnant couples who dared to conceive a second child” in rural communities), certain people, depending on living conditions and whether they lived rurally or suburbanly, were allowed to have a second child but only if their first child was a female or disabled (Scutti, 2014). She writes that this wording comparing girls to disabled peoples is not a mistake. Men in China have always been favored in society in order to carry the last name and exude masculinity. This terminology however, aided the society in the thought process that led the people to further believe that male children were preferable to female children. This reasoning has led to China’s population having thirty-two million more boys than girls under the age of twenty (Scutti, 2014). In order to achieve this outcome, parents have completed some atrocious acts on their girl babies. Medical advances in China have allowed couples to determine their child’s sex in utero making aborting the girl child much easier than before. Not all missing girls are the victims of abortion though. Many of them were born and left for someone else to find, left to die, or killed by their parents in order to make way for the hope of a boy child (Scutti, 2014). If a couple had an unapproved second child, forced sterilizations and abortions were the punishment. Even though the policy was recently relaxed to now allow two children per couple, Nee (2015) states that “the move to change China’s one child policy is not enough. Couples that have two children could still be subjected to coercive and intrusive forms of contraception, and even forced abortions – which amount to torture.”

Even before the policy change for 2016 to two children per couple, in 2013, China announced that any parent that was a single child themselves was allowed to apply for a second child. Walsh (2014) stated that “of the 11 million eligible citizens, only 1.5 million have applied to do so.” In fact, “a poll by China’s family-planning commission in 2008 found that just 19% of the people surveyed wanted more than one child” (Walsh, 2014, p.24). “Everybody wants just one” said Green Chrysanthemum in Mei Fong’s book titled *One Child: The Story of China’s Most Radical Experiment* (2016). This is a serious problem for China and with couples continuing to have only one child, this mindset will continue. These problems will be further reviewed in the following sections.

GENDER GAP

As stated previously, there are roughly thirty-two million more men than women in China. Men are expected to care for their parents and carry on the family line; whereas women are married off and become part of the husband's family responsible only to them. This mindset plus the one child policy does not create much love for daughters. Scutti (2014) states that "survival depends on sons, and daughters are only a burden" (p.2).

"It's clear to me that having two x chromosomes is being processed in this culture as akin to having the most severe type of birth defect and you would be better off not carrying that pregnancy to term," Valerie M. Hudson, a principal investigator of the WomanStats Project, told Newsweek. She argues that a long-standing devaluation of the lives of females coupled with the one child policy has helped to create an abnormal gender imbalance in China -- a dystopian nightmare manufactured by the state" (Scutti, 2014, p.2).

Because of this mindset, it is expected that the excess in men will only increase, leaving twelve to fifteen percent with no hope of marriage in a society where a family is expected. These men have been termed "bare branches" which denotes that these unmarried men will be ending their family lines signified by bare branched family trees (Scutti, 2014; Walsh 2014). This not only leads to deep feelings of shame, but also creates other social and emotional issues such as aggression, depression, loneliness, and suicide threats.

As these mental health issues skyrocket through Chinese society, unmarried men have begun paying for sex. Scutti states that "more likely to engage in commercial and unprotected sex, these men are likely the drivers of a growing market for female trafficking" as well (p.4). In growing numbers, women from around the world (mainly in the surrounding countries such as Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Singapore, North Korea, Mongolia) are being trafficked into China and exploited and kidnapped for marriage (Nakra, 2012; Scutti, 2014). On page four of Scutti's article, U.S. Representative Chris Smith, R-N.J. states that "China has become the sex- and labor-trafficking capital of the world."

Another issue that has resulted in the lack of women is the ever-rising bride price for women that are 'available' (Worrall, 2015). Whereas in the past, bride prices were anything from linens to animals, bride prices now are handled in cash and the price can be upwards of \$30,000.

"According to sociologist Zhang Yi (张翼), who was interviewed by CCTV, rising bride prices have three major reasons. The first is China's gender imbalance that has caused a surplus in men, making it statistically more difficult for them to find a wife. The second reason has to do with the population division in China – the majority of China's single, young men live in the rural areas, whereas the majority of China's single young women live in the bigger cities. It has caused a highly competitive marriage market, where the bride's families can ask for a high price. The third reason is the growing trend of the so-called "bride price culture", where many families now feel a low bride price means losing face – if one's daughter or future wife is 'too cheap' it is generally seen as a bad thing, both by the bride's side and the groom's (Judah & Wendling, 2016, p.3).

As the bride price continues to rise, so do burglar brides; women who set high bride prices, get married, then disappear leaving the man broke, lonely, and humiliated. With men outnumbering women, the parents of these men are actually taking expensive steps in order to assure that they are able even to have the opportunity to find a woman. Parents are purchasing apartments in the cities, buying their sons cars, and shelling out a lot of money for the bride price. This has led to *bai jin nu*, or gold diggers. In a Yahoo conducted survey, Ma Nuo has gone on to become one of China's most recognizable *bai jin nu*. Marry for love? Fat chance, said the material girl: "I would rather cry in a BMW than smile on the back of my boyfriend's bicycle" (Pierson, 2010).

SOCIAL ISSUES

Currently in China, one out of five marriages end in divorce. Professionals called marriage doctors have been called in to help troubled marriages, but 2.87 million couples have still divorced (Banschick, 2014). Banschick (2014) states that there are five reasons for the rising divorce rate in China. The first reason is accessibility. It has simply become easier to get a divorce. The second reason is money. There are fake marriages and ‘setups’ by parents occurring which entail no love and typically end in divorce. Thirdly, mindset: the ideas and attitudes are changing and many people have been raised as the only child in their family which has led to spoiled behavior and uncompromising spouses. The fourth reason is the advancement of women. In the past, if women were divorced, they were shunned and became financially unstable and unwanted. Today, divorced women are seen as independent and able to take control of their lives (Banschick, 2014). And finally, infidelity. In Chinese society today, loyalty remains an important reason to stay together. It seems, however; that infidelity ties better with the number three reason which was mindset. If only children are being raised with spoiled behavior, then when one wants something, one will get it regardless of marital status.

This generation is fast becoming known as the “me” generation with men being called “little emperors” based off of their self-centered, immature, and excessive behavior. This generation has been found to be more risk averse, less trusting, and pessimistic (Worrall, 2015). Not having a sibling means no one to speak with about stressors. Chu, Junqing Khan, Hossain, Heiko, and Kraemer (2015) also research into the non-only children families stating that these children with siblings, though better off socially among themselves, have a difficult time in society because it is less common and more socially unacceptable to have a sibling. Only child families receive certain privileges that non-only child families do not receive which adds stress and less satisfaction to their lives. This exemplifies the “me” generation and that single child families are raising more selfish children that have only had time and money focused on them (Chu et. Al, 2015). Hernandez and Qinnoy (2015) have found that “China’s one child generation is far different from the generations that have preceded it. It is unusually well educated, with more than eighty five percent of children born in the 1990s having attended high school. They generally have more intimate relationships with their parents, who doted on them for much of their lives but also imposed high expectations”. Yet another term being used is the ‘the loneliest generation’.

While performing interviews, Hernandez and Qinnoy found that the policy change in 2016 has reawakened feelings of regret and loneliness that this generation was not able to have any siblings. Many people are struggling to understand why they were forced to participate in one of the world’s largest social experiments. This generation is still left wondering how they will be able to perform the duties of several siblings by themselves, known in Chinese society as the “4-2-1 phenomenon” (Walsh, 2014). This refers to four grandparents, two parents, and only one child to care for them all. This added stress leaves couples wondering whether they want to take advantage of the two child policy. Only children look back to how lonely they were and want to have another, but with the 4-2-1 phenomenon and other financial burdens, most couple’s mentality is to continue with one child. As women become more educated, urbanized, and wealthy, they choose to have fewer children realizing that it is less economically stressful to rear one child versus two or more. The one child policy has trained the Chinese people into believing one child is the perfect number of children to have. Global aging has in fact become the larger problem and countries all over the world are “implementing policies meant to increase their birthrates” (Walsh, 2014, p.24). According to Walsh (2014), the Chinese are going to soon find out that it has become more difficult to coerce women into having more children than it is to prevent them.

Yet another problem plaguing Chinese society are the “empty nests” of the one child parents. Feng et. Al (2014) believe that the children have become the family focal point whereas it used to be the elderly. It has also been stated that parents spend less leisure time alone or with other adults and more with their children making a definite assumption that Chinese families are becoming more child centered (Feng et. Al, 2014). Because these one child families are putting all of their resources into their only child, when parents lose that child, parents are devastated and this has led to an increase of suicide rates (Fong, 2016).

WORKFORCE

Once the one child policy was passed, the workforce boomed because fewer parents were taking time off from work to have children (Walsh, 2014). However, now that the one child policy has come into fruition, there are not enough children coming up to take over the workforce. Walsh found that by “2050, 1 in 3 Chinese will be older than 60, a 430 million–strong cohort larger than the entire U.S. population” (Walsh, 2014, p.24). He suggests that China is facing a major aging crisis with fewer young people to take over the workforce. This problem cannot be curtailed by the two child policy. In fact, “the reform will slightly slow down China’s aging society, but it won’t reverse it,” said Peng Xizhe, a population professor at Fudan University (Denyer, 2015, p.4). This shortage of workers is a concern and there will rapidly be a large generation of elderly with only one child to care for their parents (Hernandez & Qinnoy, 2015).

ELDERLY

Elder care is supported by Chinese law and people can be imprisoned for up to five years for neglecting to take care of their elderly parents. A law was passed in 2013 that requires adult children to return home “frequently” to visit with their parents (Gustafson & Baofeng, 2014). In the past, elderly lived with their children and were taken care of by them. However, with the new 4-2-1 generation, this is increasingly more difficult and elderly have been living nearby, but not with their children since homes are not always an option. Elderly people in China are only placed in homes paid by the government if they face the ‘three noes’; no ability to work, no children, and no income (Gustafson & Baofeng, 2014). This is most important in rural elderly populations because as the population ages, fewer “services are available and they are less well-funded in rural China” (Gustafson & Baofeng, 2014, p.27). As an example, the gap continues to grow between urban and rural pensions due to unequal investments from the government (Gustafson & Baofeng, 2014). Through Gustafson’s research, he has found that there is also an increased need for more elderly facilities, because “as the elderly population grows, the traditional model of co-residence with grown children has been jeopardized by the strict national family planning policies, shrinking family size, increased mobility and the changing role of filial piety” (Gustafson & Baofeng, 2014, p.26). Of course, couples can always relate back to their grandparents and the stresses of caring for their elderly parents and state that that is yet another reason they do not want to have more than one child.

CONCLUSION

The one child policy has changed the mindset of the people in China and has created irreversible damage. Wang stated that the one child policy was “a textbook example of bad science combined with bad politics” that was morally questionable and primed a demographic time bomb by driving down fertility rates further (Denyer, 2015, p.4). The passing of the two child policy is thought to increase birth rates in China, however; the mentality of the Chinese people will take much longer to modify leaving the original policy irreversible regardless of those changes. These alterations will also not reverse workforce issues because of the rapidly increasing elderly population.

The one child policy mentally changed the population to only wanting one child. These children are doted on by their parents and given everything they want and more causing the ill effect of being spoiled which causes more social issues, such as: depression, aggression, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and increased divorce rates. The gender gap is an ever increasing one with there being roughly thirty-two million more men than women and in populations with a higher male to female ratio, societies can become unstable and lead to internal or external violence as per Scutti (2014). With only 1.5 million out of 11 million applying to have their second child, China’s lack of children will not be quickly solved by adding a two child policy. Change must occur now in order to influence future transformation.

Applications for having a second child should be eliminated immediately in order to ease the process of change.

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