

The One Child Policy:
Bringing triumph to the economy, but tragedy to the people.

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In the 1980s, the One Child Policy, designed to decrease China's burgeoning population, forever changed the shape of China's economy. By Slowing the rate of population growth, it was a triumph; however, it also brought tragedy to many families and homes. The policy continued to devastate many lives in China until it was ended in 2016.

Imagine living in a place where you can only have one child; where if you have two, you could lose your job, health care, and rights¹. This was China less than 35 years ago. Many women had to have forced abortions and were required to have IUDs. Millions of girls were adopted from China because their family hoped their one child would be a boy.²

In 1949, China had been through 20 years of war. A man named Mao Zedong and his group of Communists had gained total control over China. He saw that many people were starving and dying, so he created the 'Great Leap Forward' campaign. This campaign encouraged people to have more children, even though China was already severely overpopulated.³ He once said, "Of all the things in the world, people are the most precious."⁴ Zedong thought more children in the next generation meant more workers in the future to build the industrial China. He also moved people from farms and rural areas to the city.⁵ There was a dichotomy in China's economy. On one hand, the movement of people strengthened the business development in the city, but on the other hand, it negatively impacted the agricultural growth in rural areas of China. Zedong wanted to "catch up" with the wealthier countries like America and Canada. However, his policy caused major food shortages throughout China. With babies being born rapidly, there just wasn't enough food to feed millions of starving people. More than 30 million people died from starvation in the 1950s to the late 1960s.⁶

¹<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1879116/i-could-hear-baby-cry-they-killed-my-baby-yet-i-couldnt>

² scholar.harvard.edu/files/martinwhyte/files/challenging_myths_published_version.pdf

³ gai.uni.edu/sites/default/files/lesson_plans/9_12/roberts_mtpleasant_combined.pdf

⁴ http://www.notable-quotes.com/z/zedong_mao.html

⁵ gai.uni.edu/sites/default/files/lesson_plans/9_12/roberts_mtpleasant_combined.pdf

⁶ scholar.harvard.edu/files/martinwhyte/files/challenging_myths_published_version.pdf

China, the most populated country in the world in the 1940s, was losing people, but somehow the population kept growing. When Mao saw this, he realized what was happening, so he created the 'Late, Long, Few' campaign in 1970.⁷ This slogan encouraged people to marry later, wait longer to have children, and have fewer children. The average number of children per family went from 6 to 3.⁸ This campaign could have set China back on track, but instead Zedong decided to put the One Child Policy in place. This changed the course of China's economy.

The One Child Policy was put in place as a temporary hold on the population growth.⁹ It was, as Mei Fong, a Chinese American journalist, puts it, "the world's most radical social experiment."¹⁰ There were many regulations that applied to the policy, including pressure to use IUDs and forced abortions. Although these rules are objectionable, they saved and brought success to China. China triumphed by preventing a dangerous spike in the growing population.¹¹ For example, comparing India to China, from 1960 to 2010, the population of India has increased steadily, while China's population has started to even out.¹² From 1960 to 2015 China's population only grew by 40%, while India's went up by 55%. Today millions of people are homeless in the streets of India. While there are still homeless people in China, there are not as many as in India. More than 23% of India's population is in poverty while only 2% of the people living in China are in poverty.¹³

In 1979, the government made many new rules and regulations that affected the policy. The rules of the policy were not always enforced in certain situations. Many fishermen and miners were able to have two children if their first was a girl. This was because they had a high-risk job; one that was critical to the economy, or lived in a rural area.¹⁴

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors

⁹ brookings.edu/articles/the-end-of-chinas-one-child-policy/

¹⁰ npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors

¹¹ Personal interview: Nell

¹² <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/india-population/>

¹³ <https://www.quora.com/China-How-bad-is-homelessness-in-China>

¹⁴ npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors

Many people didn't know the rules of The One Child Policy, which created many problems for people. Countless numbers of couples have had a second child illegally by accident. They had their jobs, health care, and sometimes their children's educations taken away. ¹⁵

In the 1980s, ultrasounds had not been invented yet. This meant a woman couldn't find out the gender of her child. So, when the baby was born she had to decide if she wanted to keep the baby, give it up for adoption, or abandon it. But in the 1990s a new, and cheap way to find out the gender of a baby came out, the ultrasound. Many doctors would travel from town to town offering ultrasounds to women who were pregnant. The cost was only ten to twenty dollars. Now, women had the option of choosing what to do with their child depending on the gender. This encouraged abortions, the majority of which were girls. In many cases, when a woman became pregnant, government officials would come to her house and try to persuade her to have an abortion. They would tell her how and when she could have one. They might say there was a bus coming to take all the women to an abortion clinic the next day, and if she showed up, she would be fine. If she didn't get one, they would come back and threaten her. As Mei Fong puts it, "It was like a game of hide-and-go seek for some people." To force abortions, the officials might take something of value in the house, like a TV. If the family was poor, they might take a pig or clothes. In a serious situation they might take a relative, like a mom or sister of the pregnant woman, to jail. Until the woman got an abortion, the relatives stayed in jail. ¹⁶

Adoption is something that comes to mind when a lot of people think about China. It has the highest amount of adoptions in 2018 of any country in the world. CCAI (Chinese Children Adoption International) is an adoption program that has placed more than 12,700 children from China in 2018. In 2017 China had over 80,000 adoptions, more than any other country in the world.¹⁷

¹⁵<https://www.npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors>

¹⁶bid

¹⁷CCAI magazine

In 1992 the government passed a law allowing foreigners to adopt children out of China. This has saved its growing population rate. Over 3 million girls have been adopted by US families since 1999.¹⁸ China's adoption program is the safest international program in the world according to New Beginnings, a program that helps separated families.¹⁹ This is because Boys were much more wanted. They could help on the farm and could support their aging family. From 1992 to the 2000s more than 95% of the adoptions out of China were girls. Families would give up their first born girl so they could try to have a boy.²⁰ The year 2005 had the most adoptions in one year; 8,000 children were put up for adoption,²¹ 95% of them were girls. Since many girls were adopted, it will cause a major gender imbalance in China in the future.²² In 2017, 97% of the adoptions were children with special needs or medical disabilities, like heart defects, cleft palates, down syndrome, and many other conditions.²³

With only one child allowed, many single women gave up their children by abandoning them. Thousands of children were abandoned in alleys, vacant houses, and many other locations. There are many different reasons for abandoning a child. In many cases, the mother simply can't take care of them. Sometimes it was because the woman remarried and wanted a child with her new spouse.²⁴ But in many situations couples would try to have a second child (a boy) and already had a girl so they gave her up for adoption.

Kay Ann Johnson, a professor at Hampshire College, did a 10 year research project in which she surveyed and asked couples what it was like to have to give up their second child. They all said it was heartbreaking; they stated that the pressure of the government and society to keep the boys and give up the girls was unbearable. Many couples tried to save their second and third born girls by sending them to distant family and friends, who lived in rural areas, hoping to rescue them from being sent to

¹⁸ https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/adopt_ref/adoption-statistics.html

¹⁹ britannica.com/topic/one-child-policy

²⁰ wbcommunity.org/the-changing-face-of-chinas-orphans

²¹ https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/adopt_ref/adoption-statistics.html

²² npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors

²³ wbcommunity.org/the-changing-face-of-chinas-orphans

²⁴ <http://www.allgirlsallowed.org/poverty-china-statistics>

orphanages.²⁵ The question being asked was, are forced abortions ethical? There was a lot of disagreement between the people and the government. Many wondered whether it was okay to tell couples who were expecting another child that they had to abort it.²⁶ Over the years, 400 million births were prevented in China due to abortions.²⁷ Some women that were desperate to know the gender of their child would send their blood samples overseas. "This has further exacerbated the gender imbalance in our country's birth structure," said the National Health and Family Planning Commission.²⁸

There has been a lot of controversy about what to do with the overpopulation in China. Some people say just don't have another child by using birth control, others say have an abortion; a third option would be adoption.

After the 1980s a couple was required to use birth control after the first child was registered with the government.²⁹ The main method used was sterilization, which was permanent. This caused many complications for the women. In the 2008 earthquake many families lost their only child and couldn't have another. Many families worried about the future and how they were to support each other with no one to care for them.³⁰ Women who had little money couldn't afford a regular checkup.³¹ Ai Xiaoming, now 63, said, "I was forced to have an IUD fitted, but then left with it for decades with no further check-ups."³²

There are positive and negative aspects of abandonment. It depends on if the child can be found and saved. For example, when I was abandoned, I was in a brown sack. I had no letter or anything that could define where I was from. The only piece of evidence was a string that was tied around my waist. No one knew why it was there. When the police searched the area to find who put me there, they could not find anyone. My biological parents left me in the open, in front of a hospital. I was lucky.

²⁵China's hidden Children

²⁶Ramona May Interview/10/16/19

²⁷<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34666440>

²⁸ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/china-says-its-gender-imbalance-most-serious-in-the-world/>

²⁹ britannica.com/topic/one-child-policy

³⁰<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/10/world/asia/china-sichuan-earthquake-thanksgiving.html>

³¹ npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors

³² <https://www.rfa.org/english/women/onechild-iud-01132017173100.html>

Many children are left in the dark alleys of China were never found and brought to orphanages.³³

Statistics show that is more likely for parents to abandon a second girl than a first. It was very dangerous to abandon a child. The police had to investigate.³⁴ With the abandonment rates so high, many new orphanages were built. But this meant less money to go around to support all the orphanages.³⁵ Hundreds of orphanages barely got enough money from the government to support all the babies.³⁶ Recently, many adoption programs have donors that provide living necessities. CCAI, an international adoption program, has countless donors that supply thousands of dollars in essential living items, including, food, cribs, blankets, and much more.³⁷

When the One Child Policy ended in 2016 the number of girls being adopted out of China decreased and the number of children put up for adoption with special needs and medical problems increased. From the 1970s to the 2000s, 95% of the children being adopted were girls, but that changed when the policy changed. Now, 98% of the adoptees are children with disabilities, such as cerebral palsy.³⁸

Some couples found a way around this objectionable policy. Women would take fertility drugs that enhanced the possibility of having more than one child at a time. They had found a loophole. Nowhere in the policy did it say that couples couldn't have twins and keep them both. The average amount of twins doubled. One hospital recorded 90 sets of twins and triplets. Previously, the average was only 20. In 2005 the government passed a law that said fertility treatments would no longer be sold to anyone.³⁹ In 2016, when the policy was lifted, the government decided that they would give women free removal of all IUDs. Even with this new statement, many women didn't qualify for the free removal. There were many reasons to not be eligible for the process. One was if the woman was too old. The government didn't want to waste their money on people

³³ Ramona May Interview

³⁴<http://www.allgirlsallowed.org/poverty-china-statistics>

³⁵<http://www.allgirlsallowed.org/infant-abandonment-statistics>

³⁶ Ramona May Interview 10/16/19

³⁷ CCAI magazine

³⁸ wbcommunity.org/the-changing-face-of-chinas-orphan

³⁹ chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2006-02/14/content_520025.htm

that were too old to have more children.⁴⁰ "Many are enduring another painful process trying to have the device removed in order to have more children under the new policy," the Global Times newspaper said in a report.⁴¹

The One Child Policy put stress on millions of people and caused devastation all over Asia. The culture of China was a huge part of their life. With only one child many parents worried about what would happen if they lost their child. In fact, many couples did lose their only child. This meant no one was there to support them in the future.⁴² Countless were too old to have another child.⁴³ In the Chinese culture, children were a status symbol; if you had a lot of children, you have enough money. "When you lose your only child, it is like going down the totem pole," said Mei Fong. Because of this some neighbors would shun the family because they thought they would have to start borrowing money. This hurt countless communities in Asia.⁴⁴

Due to the desire for boys, a severe gender imbalance developed.⁴⁵ The ratio of boys to girls was 16 to one.⁴⁶ In present day China, it is hard for men to get married because there are just not enough women to be able to marry. This demonstrates how the One Child Policy caused additional tragedy.⁴⁷ With more men than women, jobs that were gender specific either had too many men or not enough women. The fight for jobs grew for men. "Our country has the most serious gender imbalance that is most prolonged and affecting the most number of people," stated The National Health and Family Planning Commission.⁴⁸ Men who could not find a woman to marry were called *guang guan*, or broken branches of the family. This meant they were the dead end of the family. Currently in China there are around 30 million bachelors.⁴⁹

Even though the policy brought tragedy and devastated many people, it was a triumph and benefited China's economy. Girls who were born in the late 1980s and

⁴⁰ <https://thewire.in/books/too-many-men-too-few-women>

⁴¹ www.rfa.org/english/women/onechild-iud-01132017173100.html

⁴² npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors

⁴³ <https://www.cnn.com/2013/12/28/world/asia/china-one-child-policy-official/index.html>

⁴⁴ npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34666440>

⁴⁷ npr.org/2016/02/01/465124337/how-chinas-one-child-policy-led-to-forced-abortions-30-million-bachelors

⁴⁸ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/china-says-its-gender-imbalance-most-serious-in-the-world/>

⁴⁹ *ibid*

1990s had a greater chance of going college because the parents did not have to worry about who would go.⁵⁰ They had one child to focus on. This meant that even though there was a gender imbalance, the amount of women working at a high skill level was elevating.⁵¹

The One Child Policy greatly changed China. It brought triumph to a growing population by slowing the rate of growth. It allowed thousands of girls to go to college and work as skilled members of society. But it also was a tragic time for many families. It changed family life in a negative way. The drastic measures taken were risky and personally devastating to many, but they saved China.

⁵⁰ ibid

⁵¹ Interview with Nell Paul: 12/4/18

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