

***The abolition of the One Child Policy in 2015;
Does this signifies admission of failure?***



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¹ China scraps one-child policy: Xi Jinping axes one-child for two-child, problem solved -TomoNews
<https://goo.gl/images/IFkLUC>

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Introduction

In my work, I have analyzed whether the policy was a success or a failure by judging the policy's outcome. In order to do so, these are the following steps I had taken to analyze my subject. First, I will start by a rapid overview of China's historical background before the "One Child Policy" was enforced. I will explain the policy's implementation, (how the methods and conditions were applied) what were the government's motives at the time. I will also talk about the policy's reform in 2013 and abolition in 2015.

Secondly, I will explain the consequences (good and bad) created by the policy in different areas such as demography, economy and society.

Finally, I will come to a factual and personal conclusion on whether the "One Child Policy" can be considered to be a success or a failure based on its outcome.

This paper will reveal some of the policy's darker sides, its violation of human rights and several of other unforeseen negative consequences. Finally, yet importantly, I shall also explain how the Chinese citizens are reacting nowadays after the abolition of the policy. The new population policy in China allows all families to have two children.

My personal interest in this subject is to compare the "One Child Policy" with alternative solutions to lower the fertility rate without imposing drastic measures. Overpopulation is a worrying fact that must not be ignored. However, the study of the history of 'the 'One Child Policy" may provide us better knowledge and experience in addressing the problem. Rather than through measures of involuntary population control, can the same goals be achieved through informed, voluntary family planning? Our answer to this question may provide a convincing lesson on what to do better and what not to repeat in the future.

1. Historical background

To understand how it was possible to implement such a radical policy, it is important to understand the history of modern-day China. China became a communist country in its variant of Maoism, at the end of a civil war in 1949 with the leader Mao Zedong.



In spite of a century of wars, China was having a population boom thanks to the improvement of medical care and sanitation. In addition, during Mao's early rule, China had also prohibited contraception thinking that a larger population symbolized a greater nation.

As early as the mid-1950s the government noticed that this increase in population size without a simultaneous increase in agricultural and industrial production was pushing the Chinese people and the country deeper into poverty. Therefore, the Chinese government changed its policy of one fostering population growth to one providing access to family planning. The use of contraceptives was encouraged within a voluntary birth control program that also provided for voluntary abortion services throughout the nation. Officials of the Chinese Communist Party, also known as the CCP started propaganda campaigns with the famous slogan "*late, long, few*" that advocated delaying marriage, having long healthy life and fewer children by increasing the number of years in between siblings⁴. The propaganda promoting the policy had a huge success in influencing the people. Through it, the subject of family

² Mao Zedong reviewing troops at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, August 1966 (encyclopedia Britannica) <https://media1.britannica.com/eb-media/25/91425-004-67859D05.jpg> **Consulted 1st Feb.2016**

³ Advertisement and propaganda promoting Deng Xiaoping, father to China's reforms (Les Yeux du Monde) http://les-yeux-du-monde.fr/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/deng_xiaoping.jpg **Consulted 1st Feb.2016**

⁴ GREENHALGH, Susan. *Just One Child* :University Californian Press 2016

planning lost its taboo with general opinion moving in its favor. As a result, the average fertility rate plunged by more than half from having six births per woman to three.⁵

The leader of China, *Mao Zedong* died in 1976 and *Deng Xiaoping* inherited his position after a heavy but brief internal power struggle with Mao's widow and the so-called "*Gang of Four*" wanting to continue the radically communist policies of "Maoism"⁶. Deng's opposite policy was to relax the economic restrictions of communism to allow to modernize China and end its poverty. Deng's new "capitalist-like" freedoms allowed privately owned investment outside of Mao's rigid centrally planned economy while providing political stability by safeguarding all political power under the Communist party.⁷ The Deng's Government knew how weak their country was economically at the time, compared to China's compatriots living in Taiwan and Hong Kong and to neighboring countries such as Singapore, Japan, South Korea and Thailand who were all undergoing a period of rapid economic expansion⁸.

China's economic opening coincided with that of the "One Child Policy". At the start of both policies the Chinese leadership could not know how rapidly new economic liberties would lead to economic success. Instead, they feared, that all gains could be lost unless measures were taken to lower population growth under that of economic growth. This fear was of an ever-growing population that would at some time no longer be able to sustain itself may be at the origin of the radical step to decide on and to enforce the "One Child Policy". If sacrifices had to be made, they should be made in advance of a situation that might otherwise someday run out control and remove the Communist Government from power. This is where we may find eventually the central motive for the government to establish this policy.

⁵ FONG, Mei. *One Child, The Story of China's most radical experiment*, pages xiii; 2016

⁶CHANG Jung. *Wild Swans, Three Daughters of China*, p. 650-656

⁷ Ibid. p. 654

⁸<http://www.e-ir.info/2014/10/16/the-asian-tigers-from-independence-to-industrialisation/> **Consulted on 26th Oct. 2015**

MARSHALL, B : CHANG J.; *The Asian Tigers from Independence to Industrialisation, E-International Relations 2014*

1.1 Justification of the “One Child Policy” (OCP)

As already mentioned, the main justification was to elevate the standards of living of the population of China by restricting population growth not to outgrow economic development. Otherwise, the Government feared overpopulation within a situation of finite and rapidly reducing natural resources. The policy was initially intended to be a temporary measure only, but in the end it lasted more the 35 years.⁹

At first, the leaders of the communist party and *Deng Xiaoping* had publicly justified the “One Child per Couple” policy concept purely for above reasons of modernizing China and reducing poverty. However, the government knew that it would not succeed in convincing their people of such a controversial law if its only purpose was to serve the country’s economy. Therefore, in anticipation of widespread opposition against the new law, the government called on scientist to contribute additional arguments. Through these, government was hoping to convince Chinese citizens that the establishment of the new policy was grounded in indisputable scientific reasoning and fact.¹⁰ In mid-1979, the leadership group invited scientific specialists from all over the country to discuss and share ideas about the future of China through the effects of population growth. The purpose of the conference was to come up with the most accurate results of what could occur if the birth rate stayed the same and the bad consequences that would come with it. The conference offered a prize to the scientists who would find the most approximate results¹¹.

At the same time, the Chinese government felt competition from other countries to develop in order to keep up with these countries economically.¹² One of the scientific means was to create the “one child policy “. The statistics provided showed that uncontrolled population growth negatively affected the economic growth too, as it increased the size of the unproductive part of the population i.e. children. It thus established a policy that prevented in the end 400 million new mouths to feed.¹⁸

⁹FONG, Mei. *One Child, The Story of China’s most radical experiment*, 2016; prologue

¹⁰ GREENHALGHT, Susan. *Just One Child* University Californian Press 2016; p.58 and 129

¹¹ Ibid. p.58 and 129

¹² Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, South Korea and Thailand

¹³ GREENHALGHT, Susan. *Just One Child* University Californian Press 2016; p.58 and 129

1.2 Implementation of the policy

As other social, economic and political decisions were implemented in the Peoples Republic of China, the “One Child Policy” (OCP) was applied with systematic rigor throughout the entire country, with the sole exception being in areas with ethnic minority groups and some extremely remote rural areas. The rules of the OCP were as follows: Couples were allowed to have no more than one child and were forced to employ effective birth control measures to prevent a second pregnancy, such as IUDs¹⁴. In the event that a second pregnancy occurred, it was the duty of the pregnant women to alert family planning authorities and to have the pregnancy terminated by an abortion. In the event where the pregnant women wanted to keep her second child, a heavy fine applied. If this fine could not be paid, the only other option to her was to hide away her pregnancy and her child, in the hope not to be found out. However, the likelihood of this succeeding was low as the family planning services kept a watchful eye on all childbearing women resorting to regular menstruation and pregnancy checks. In case a second pregnancy was detected, the penalty was a forced abortion regardless of the age of the pregnancy ¹⁵ combined with a forced sterilization in case of repeated “offense”.

Consequently, 13 million abortions were performed each year in the People’s Republic of China totaling 336 million by 2013¹⁶. An estimated 55% of Chinese woman have had an abortion at least once in their lifetime and 70% of these woman claim of having wanted the second child but not being able to afford to pay the fine or permit.

¹⁴The New York Times; *After One-Child Policy, Outrage at China’s Offer to Remove IUDs*
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/07/world/asia/after-one-child-policy-outrage-at-chinas-offer-to-remove-iuds.html?_r=0 **Consulted 10th Jan.2017**

¹⁵ Forced Abortion until the 9th month of pregnancy
<http://www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org/blog/stop-forced-abortion-in-china/> **Consulted 11th Jan.2017**

¹⁶ Official statistics of Government of PRC as quoted by Michael Moore in The Daily Telegraph on 15 March 2013 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9933468/336-million-abortions-under-Chinas-one-child-policy.html> **Consulted 24th Mars.2017**

1.3 Adjustment and final abolition of the policy

Starting in 2013, families whose parents were single children themselves were allowed to have a second child. The OCP was fully revoked in October 2015, after 35 years of enforcement¹⁷.

Soon after the initial relaxation of the policy, the government realized that it was to face unintended and dire consequences: these included a rapidly aging population with many retirees without adequate numbers of youths to replace them on the labor market¹⁸. In addition, this general problem was aggravated by substantial gender disparity. Given that the optimal fertility rate for stable demographic replacement is 2.1 children per couple the one child per couple policy had far exceeded what was required to keep Chinese population stable and became a source of future socio-economic instability.

To make matters worse many modern couples have now become hesitant to have two children. Studies conducted in early 2015 showed that out of 11million couples entitled to enlarge their family, only 1million had made an application.¹⁹ Experts suspect that after thirty years of social conditioning, families are unwilling to take on the additional financial burden and responsibility of having a second child. ²⁰

¹⁷China, to end one-Child policy and allow two 29 October 2015

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34665539> **Consulted 17th Nov.2015**

¹⁸ There are currently six workers to every pensioner, the country's one child policy means the number of people providing for the old will rapidly collapse. 21st Sept.2012

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-19662365> **Consulted 10th Nov.2015**

¹⁹<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/new-policy-will-chinese-families-choose-second-child/>**Consulted 17th Nov. 2015**

²⁰<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-34682199> **Consulted on 17th Oct.2015**

2 Consequences of the OCP

2.1 General effects on Demography

The OCP succeeded in preventing the overpopulation of the country. However, China's population still increased from 980million in 1980 to 1.3billion people by 2015. Without restriction and a maintained fertility rate²¹, the population size would have more than doubled during 35 years of the policy's existence. The main reasons why the overall population size did not shrink, as could have been expected, is that average longevity increased from the 1980's to 2015 by about 8 years.²²

Gender imbalance:

Consequently, allowed to a one and only child, parents tended to choose strategically the gender of their future child. Following China's old tradition a daughter has to live with her husband's family and cannot support her biological parents physically or financially.²³ Social security and pension funds in China being close to nonexistent, parents are more secure by having a baby boy rather than a girl. There is also a common stereotype and prejudice that boys are more useful for the family business than girls.

All this led to selective abortions of female fetuses in illegal clinics, female infanticide or the abandonment of baby girls leaving their fate to chance²⁴. Over the years, this cumulated in a serious gender imbalance of 118 boys for 100 girls born. Normal gender balance birth rates are of 103 to 107 boy births for 100 girls with both sexes being equal at reproductive age due to higher all-cause child mortality rates in boys, including by accidents.²⁵

²¹ 3% in 1980

FONG, Mei. *One Child, The Story of China's most radical experiment*, pages xiii; 2016

²² <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN> **Consulted 30th Jan.2016**

<<life expectancy in 1980 was an estimated 67 year old, nowadays it is estimated to be 75 year old>>

²³ FONG, Vanessa L. *Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China's One Child Policy* p.137

²⁴ JOHNSON, Kay Ann. *China's hidden children*, Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2016

²⁵ REUTERS *China says its gender imbalance 'most serious' in the world* 21 January 2015

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-onechild-idUKKBN0KU0V720150121> **Consulted on 1st mars.2016**

It is evident that the consequences of these gender preferences lead to massive gender imbalance in China. The Social Academy of Sciences has estimated that by 2020, there will be more than 24 million men, of marrying age who might find themselves without spouses.²⁶ This could contribute to a further decline population growth and continued unhappiness due to the OCP long after its abolition, especially in poor rural areas, further aggravated departure of the already fewer women to richer areas, including by criminal means such as by human trafficking.

Unregistered people:

Due to China's strict population control laws, couples that had not received a permit to have a second child, i.e. being unable to pay the fine , were forced into family planning clinics to abort the child at times combined with forced sterilization. However, some families managed to escape from family planning's regular checkups and give birth to a clandestine child. This newborn child would have no right to a birth certificate thus would not be registered as a legal Chinese citizen. As a consequence, these hidden children, also known as "black children" could neither access public education, nor medical care or any official jobs. A survey carried out in 2010 estimated 13 million of "black children" to have to live under such cruel discrimination.²⁷

²⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8451289.stm> **Consulted on 26th Spet.2016**

BBC China faces growing gender imbalance BBC News Jan. 11th 2010

²⁷ <http://thediplomat.com/tag/one-child-policy/> **Consulted on 14th Nov.2016**

2.2 Economy



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In the aftermath of the new policy implementation China faces a rapidly expanding aging population. By 2050, more than a quarter of the Chinese population will be over 65 years of age.²⁹ The Communist party of China is now facing a new crisis caused by the one child policy, consisting of a decline in workforce, leading to lower productivity combined with higher labor cost. Both have a negative impact for Chinese exports in quantity as well as competitiveness of goods.³⁰ The Chinese government tried to mitigate this problem by continued internal economic migration to replace these lost city workers by youths from rural areas shifting rather than solving the problem.

In addition, the next generation of Chinese workers will have to carry the burden of more personal responsibility, having to care for their parents and in some cases for their grandparents. The increase in dependency rate is illustrated by the picture above symbolizing the “four to one effect”.

²⁸http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/world/asia_pacific/12/china_ageing/img/parents.gif Consulted on 5th mars.2017

²⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-19630110> Consulted on 5th mars.2017

³⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-35208488> Consulted on 5th mars.2016

In hindsight, the Chinese government's claims to have managed to put to 400 million people out of poverty³¹, which is coincidentally the same estimated number of births that are said to have been prevented by the One Child Policy. Consequently, one could suppose that the lower birth rate resulted in giving family more possibilities to buy goods and created more job opportunities (with women having less children thus were more flexible for work hours) within a smaller population (less competition between fewer workers for the same number of vacancies). Research showed however, that the increased benefit for the single children was modest³² that the

In addition, the family planning committees were in themselves an economic factor given the large numbers of medical consultation, contraceptives, abortions, pregnancy licenses, and sterilizations it generated.. For example, the Chinese families had to pay for the family planning program to have a child(permit), to not have a child (pay for contraceptives/abortions), to have more than one child (pay fine to have a permit approving the second child). It has been estimated that the committee employed more than 300 thousand officials and 83 million supplementary staff to enforce the policy³³. This in itself created many Government jobs that will now become mostly redundant.

³¹FONG, Mei. *One Child, The Story of China's most radical experiment*, pages xiii; 2016

³² <https://academic.oup.com/restud/article-abstract/76/3/1149/1592252/Do-Population-Control-Policies-Induce-More-Human> Consulted 11th Feb.2017

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf-asj-46Y0> Consulted 14th Sept.2016

2.3 Social impact:

Violation of human rights:

China's One Child Policy has been continuously criticized by many foreign countries, specifically by the United States.³⁴ These criticisms were mainly about its human rights abuses such as forced abortions and sterilizations. Unlike in most other countries, Chinese families were denied the right to decide freely how many children they would have. This was enforced by regular family planning checks, where they investigate whether the family has already a child and if contraception were used, thus gravely affecting the right to privacy and dignity of women³⁵. Even worse was the abuse caused by the denial of the right to bear an identity for the millions of hidden children.

Loneliest generation:

It is true that the "One Child Policy" led to a generation that was more materialistically privileged and highly educated than any previous one. Thankfully, the biggest increases in standards of living and education benefited the girls, compared to the way they used to be treated. Previously, throughout Chinese history, girls did not receive much of an education, let alone the esteem they receive nowadays. As parents had only one child to care for, they spent all their attention, focus and resources on this only precious child. This phenomenon is also known as the "little emperor syndrome"³⁶ among only-children that have been overprotected and poorly disciplined by their parents. This syndrome consists of a lack of social skills including egocentricity and difficulties in empathizing and feeling compassion for others. Only children may have also difficulties in sharing, while being very demanding and jealous of other person's attention.

³⁴ <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/35th-anniversary-one-child-policy-campaigner-challenges-xi-end> **Consulted on 24th Feb.2017**

"Rights Activist: China's One-Child Policy 'Greatest Human Rights Atrocity on Earth'" CNS News

³⁵ <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/dateline/story/chinas-family-planning-army> **Consulted on 14 Feb.2017**

³⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LokGjrnPec> **Consulted on 11th Feb.2017**

CNN Beijing - *China's New Generation, Little Emperors,*

Since they are the only descendent of the family, enormous pressure is put on them to succeed in order to be able to support not only the parents but even the child's grandparents, previously mentioned as the 4 to 1 effect³⁷. Many children feel forced to study excessively in order to be accepted into a renowned school or university as competition in China is very high. This heavy pressure has pushed many teenagers to fall into depression, have anxiety disorders and even as far as committing suicide in extreme cases. Chinese officials really alarmed by suicide and mental illnesses caused by overwhelming pressure to succeed in the educational system. They decided to expend education do decrease competition. In addition, it would modernize China more thus increasing general education levels. Consequently, it will promote economic by encouraging parents to spend unconditionally great amount of money on their child's education³⁸.



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³⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5yeL-MiaPE> Consulted on 21th Dec.2016

Painful legacy of China's one-child policy and Impact of One-Child Policy in China CCTV Global Business

³⁸ FONG, Vanessa L. *Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China's One Child Policy*, p.87

³⁹ WorldPressWeb, Market insight in China's One Child Policy, 2013 (cartoon caricature illustrating the 4 to 1 effect)

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/64/Burdened_Children_effect_of_One-Child_Policy.png
Consulted on 27th Feb.3017

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Chinese “One Child Policy” was an overall failure for the following principal reasons:

First of all, it is known that the worldwide phenomenon of a slowing down of the fertility rate is largely attributed to higher child survival rates combined with higher literacy rates and educational standards for women in a society.⁴⁰ It is strongly accelerated by rapid industrialization creating employment opportunities for women if childcare facilities for children are lagging behind. Given the “Industrial Revolution” that occurred in China since 1980, it is very doubtful whether the “One Child Policy” had been really needed to reign in excessive population growth. If China had stayed as poor as in the 1980s maybe yes, but it did not for reasons that have nothing to do with the demographic policy but are essentially due to a radical opening of China for domestic economic opportunities and international investments.

Secondly, even at the level having prevented 200 million births, the OCP overshot the useful limits of its initial goals of stabilizing the society demographically. By doing so, it created the massive long-term problem of a too rapidly aging population mixed with the immediate problem of a gender imbalance due to selective abortions and female infanticide of girls.

Finally, even if the government is now headed back in the right direction; many critics such as Liang Zhongtang ⁴¹believe that the new policy will still not be enough to satisfy the Chinese people because it will still be the Chinese authorities who control the birth rate and not the right of the individual. Families will still be limited, women are still being told when they can or cannot reproduce. ⁴²In addition, it will still take many more decades to rebalance the country demographic problems.

In summary, one can conclude that the biggest problem with the “One Child Policy” was not the initial decision in favor but that it was maintained for almost two generations while the decreasing necessity and the increasing negative side effects accumulated year by year. This shows that the One Child Policy was just a symptom of

⁴⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4255510/> **Consulted on 5th March.2017**

⁴¹ Liang Zhongtang, a demographer from the Shanghai Academy of Social Science.

⁴² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/23/china-may-adopt-two-child-policy-this-year-as-demographic-timebomb-looms> **Consulted on 5th March.2017**

the underlying problem of system of Governance that does not allow open debate (authoritarian rule).

I personally believe that every human being has the right to choose how many children they would want to have. I do believe that the policy was not appropriate in order to protect neither the whole of Chinese society nor the individual. Much to the contrary it has made it even both more fragile. At first, (before I began to work on this subject) I thought that the “One child policy” was a policy that could solve overpopulation problems. However , as I studied the problem with time while writing this essay my opinion changed because I had not known about the secondary effects and also the hidden, dark part of the policy(“black children/human trafficking”).

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Consulted on 27th Feb.3017

Annexes:

China's historical background:

At the end of the Second World War and the defeat of the common Japanese invader, China entered a civil war between two forces that had previously be united against the Japanese: the Communist army under the leader *Mao Zedong* against the army under Chiang Kai Chek, the leader of the anti-communist party *Kuomintang*. The civil war ended in 1949 with the defeat of the anti-communist party. The communists had conquered all of continental China and created the People's Republic of China. The *Kuomintang* retreated to the island of Formosa or Taiwan and called itself the Republic of China.⁴³ China has at present (2015) a population of 1.374 billion⁴⁴ up around 40% from the population of 982 million in 1980. According to the worst fears of the scientists China's population would have passed the 2 billion mark in the early years of 2000, if the "One Child Policy" had not have been implemented. From that point of view, it could have been hailed a success as having contained population growth by around 70% of what it would have been otherwise or roughly prevented 700 million births. However, if one compares the population growth slowdown that occurred in the neighboring countries of China that had a similar, if somewhat earlier economic success but that did not pursue the policy such a Taiwan, Korea and Thailand, the estimate prevented births is around 200'000.⁴⁵ The world-wide phenomenon of slowing down of fertility rates is largely attributed to higher child survival rates combined with higher literacy rates and educational standards for women in a society. It is strongly accelerated by rapid industrialization creating employment opportunities for women if child care facilities for children are lagging behind. Given the "Industrial Revolution" that occurred in China since 1980, it is very doubtful whether the "One Child Policy" had been really needed to reign in excessive population growth. If China had stayed as poor as in the 1980s maybe yes, but it did not for reasons that have nothing to do with the demographic

⁴³ **CHANG J.;** *Wild Swans, Three Daughters of China*, Flamingo, Harper Collins Publishers

⁴⁴ China National bureau of statistics

⁴⁵ **Mei Fong** *One Child* page XIV, HMM 2016

policy but are essentially due to a radical opening of China for domestic economic opportunities and international investments.