

China's One-Child Policy: Population Control and Its Unintended Consequences

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Abstract: In 1979, the Chinese government established the one-child policy, the most severe state-mandated family planning policy in the world. This policy was intended to curb rapid population growth in China by prohibiting couples from having more than one child. The policy was implemented in varying degrees across provinces and affected urban and rural areas differently. China successfully lowered their total fertility rate and population growth but experienced significant unintended consequences, mainly an imbalance in the gender composition of the country. Families desired a son for labor, inheritance, and care in their old age, leading some parents to take extreme measures to ensure the birth of a son. The skewed sex ratio has affected all sectors of Chinese society, including marriage, the labor force, and educational opportunities for women. Today, China faces the aftermath of this birth quota that was in place for 35 years. China's one-child policy demonstrates the difficulties countries face with population growth. With the unexpected effects of the one-child policy, it is still unclear how the Chinese government should have managed their population growth to ensure economic expansion and a good quality of life for their citizens. However, it is evident that the one-child policy sparked a new feminist movement to emerge as Chinese women began to speak out against the consequences of state birth planning on women's lives and bodies.

Evolution of the One-Child Policy

Throughout China's history, families have placed more value on having sons compared to daughters since sons were expected to take on the family name, inherit family wealth, and provide care for their parents in old age. Daughters are seen as having "no value" to their parents because traditionally women in China, mainly in rural areas, marry into their husband's family and cannot inherit family land (Hesketh, Lu, and Xing 2011, 1377). Chinese parents worked to place their children in respectable positions in China, which they did by leaving their children inheritance and property. In return, children were expected to provide support for their parents in old age, and parents believed they would receive the best care from sons who could work on farms or in high-paying jobs (Hays 2015). In 1979, China introduced one of the most severe state-controlled family planning policies in the world to regulate population growth. This policy restricted all married couples to having only one child. Chinese culture that placed emphasis on having a son continued in conjunction with the policy, which resulted in a new social and economic structure for the country (Sudbeck 2012).

The controversial state-mandated policy restricting families from having more than one child was established in order to curb population growth and improve the economy. By the end of

1969, China's population had surpassed 800 million, and economic growth had slowed, resulting in a lower quality of life for citizens. China was not the only country focused on controlling rapid population growth (Zhang 2017). Global concerns about population growth were common in the 1970s and 1980s. India had its own fertility-control program and the United Nations awarded its first population award to the Chinese Minister for Population Planning in 1983. Overpopulation is "when there are more people than can live on the earth in comfort, happiness, and health and still leave the world a fit place for future generations"

(Population Reference Bureau 1988, 1). Problems that can arise from overpopulation include food shortages, spreading of diseases, water contamination, and tension between territories (Gavenus 2014).

In the early 1970s, Chairman Mao stated that "population growth must be controlled" (Zhang 2017, 143). In 1971, a popular propaganda slogan was, "one child isn't too few, two are just fine, and three are too many" (Zhang 2017, 143) The growing support for regulating the population led to the State Council creating the Leading Group for Family Planning in 1973. This group organized a national birth planning conference, which established the slogan, "later, longer, and fewer" (Zhang 2017, 143). "Later" referred to marrying later in life with a minimum age requirement of twenty-three for women and twenty-five for men before marrying. The word, "longer," referred to the birth planning rule that couples must wait more than three years between their first and second child. Finally, "fewer" implies that people were only allowed to have two children at most (Zhang 2017, 143). In the 1970s, birth planning enforcers recorded information on every woman of child-bearing age. This data included information on women's past births, contraceptive usage, and menstrual cycles. The beginning of China's family planning programs was mainly voluntary, but still had coercive elements, such as fines for parents that did not comply and even forced sterilizations and abortions (Pletcher 2015; Zhang 2017).

When Mao died in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping rose to power in 1978, family planning became more severe. Population control became an integral part of China's socialist modernization movement. Two-thirds of the population was under the age of thirty and those born in the 1950s and 1960s were entering their childbearing years. Xiaoping began to focus on birth control planning to regulate population growth, which was seen as fundamental for economic growth and improving living standards for the country (Zhang 2017). The new family planning measures taken by the Chinese government resulted in the official one-child policy in 1979 (Zhang 2017).

The official start of the one-child policy is associated with a letter issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on September 25, 1980 that mandated adherence to the new policy for all Chinese citizens (Pletcher 2015). The policy was enforced in various ways throughout the next several years. At first, incentives were given to those who promised to not have more than one child. Couples received one child certificates, which came with benefits such as health subsidies or priority in education, job placement, and public child care for those living in urban areas (Parkinson 2015). People with three or more births were punished, typically with a fine. From 1980, to the end of the policy, the Chinese government collected two trillion yuan, or \$315 billion, in extra-child fines (Parkinson 2015). The amount each family had to pay varied depending on income and the highest fine was 7.5 million yuan, or \$1.2 million, from the filmmaker Zhang Yimu and his wife after having a third child (Parkinson 2015).

In 1981, couples were restricted from having more than one child, and by 1983, forced IUD insertions, abortions, and sterilizations were reported. The total fertility rate decreased from 2.4 in 1989 to 1.9 in 1993 (Fengying and Short 1998). Total fertility rate is the average number of children that a woman would have if she bore children according to the given fertility rate at each

age of her childbearing years (Central Intelligence Agency 2017). The one-child policy was the largest and most stringent state-mandated family planning policy in the world and while it lowered China's fertility rate, it produced many inadvertent effects and changes in society.

Implementation of the Policy

Although the policy restricted couples from having more than one child, some families received exceptions depending on their situation. Some couples were allowed to have more than one child if their first child was a girl, their first child was disabled, or both members of the couple were only children (Fengying and Short 1998). The implementation of the policy also differed in urban and rural areas. In the mid-1980s, many rural families were strongly against the one-child policy, especially if their only child was a girl. Rural residents had more of a need for a son to carry out their agricultural work. During 1984 and 1985, the government was more considerate towards people living in rural areas and eased enforcement of the policy. However, this resulted in the country's fertility rate increasing again from 1984 to 1986. The State Council responded to this rebound in population by reinforcing the one-child policy. After 1990, the policy reached a level of stability that persisted for the next couple decades (Zhang 2017).

The government was better able to control the actions of citizens in urban areas as opposed to those in rural ones. The one-child policy affected urban residents more directly than rural residents since they were more likely to work in state-owned corporations and could lose their jobs or social welfare payments for having more than one child. However, urban residents could comply with the policy more easily than rural residents. Those in urban areas had better access to sex-selection technology if they wanted a son and they had less need for sons to work their farms. A common punishment for couples having more than one child in rural areas was a one-time fine, but most families were too poor to pay the fine (Zhang 2017). The enforcement of the one-child policy differed from province to province depending on the level of the government's control in the particular region and the resources available to couples.

Common methods for enforcing the policy and its goals included expanding access to contraceptive methods, providing financial incentives and preferential employment opportunities for couples who followed the policy, putting economic sanctions on those who did not comply, and performing forced sterilizations and abortions (Pletcher 2015). Throughout the time the policy was established between 1980 and 2013, Chinese doctors performed over 330 million abortions and inserted 403 million intrauterine devices in women. One man describes the forceful measure taken against his wife who was seven months pregnant with their second child when a group of people entered their home and took her to the hospital where they stabbed a needle into her stomach: "They grabbed my wife's body like they were grabbing a pig, four or five people holding her hands and legs and head, and injected a shot into her belly...Neither my wife nor I signed any consent form" (Denyer 2015, n.p.) Ten hours later, she gave birth to a baby boy and the doctors put the dying baby into a plastic bag and ordered him to pay a cleaner a small fee to bury it on a nearby hill (Denyer 2015). Stories like these were not uncommon in China once the government started strictly enforcing the policy.

While most people abided by the one-child policy or suffered the consequences, some found ways to avoid the policy all together. Families moved out of Mainland China to other nations or other Chinese territories like Hong Kong of Macau, so the policy would not apply to them. Hong Kong and Macau had a 50-year grace period after the transfer of colonial rule to Chinese rule, allowing these territories to have their own government and policies independent from those of China's (Sudbeck 2012). Hong Kong and Macau have never implemented any version of family

birth planning policies and these cities have very low fertility (Griswold 2015). Having a birth of multiples was another exception to the one-child policy. Because of this, the use of fertility drugs rose, which increased couples' chances of having multiple births within one pregnancy. In 2005, a hospital in the eastern city of Nanjing reported a significant rise in the number of twins and triplets delivered, from a yearly average of 20 sets to 90 sets (Sudbeck 2012).

Some parents went as far as to kill their baby girl, or girls, right after birth, so they could try for a son (BBC 2014). In an anonymous interview to Roseann Lake, author of *Leftover in China: The Women Shaping the World's Next Superpower*, a Chinese girl from the Anhui province, tells her story for the series, *Women of the World*, of how her grandma's parents killed their first two daughters and also almost killed her grandma. Right before throwing her into the river, her parents got scared and sent her to be raised by a couple that did not have any children of their own. In the interview, she goes on to talk about how her own parents were compromising when they decided to keep her instead of trying for a son. One day she overheard her mother say, "marrying off a daughter is like pouring water out of a jug" (Lake 2018, n.p.). It was as if raising a daughter was a waste (Lake 2018). Although families found various ways to bypass the one-child policy, most couples complied or suffered the repercussions of having more than one child.

Effects on Fertility Levels

The Chinese government's main reason for establishing the one-child policy was to curb population growth. After the policy's official start in 1980, the country did experience a significant decrease in their fertility rate. China's total fertility rate was around 6 during the 1950s and 1960s but had declined to 1.22 by the end of the 1990s. The annual growth rate of China's population also declined from over 2.5% in the late 1960s to 0.5% in 2010. The Chinese government has estimated that the one-child policy prevented 400 million births (Goodkind 2017; Wang, Zhao, L., and Zhao, Z. 2016).

People have different views on whether it was the one-child policy or socioeconomic development that played a more decisive role in lowering the fertility rate. Some say that the one-child policy accelerated the decline in fertility rate, which had already been dropping for the previous few years, but that economic development played a key role in the long-term for keeping China's fertility rates low. Socioeconomic developments like women's education, household income, and the transformation of the labor force from agricultural work to industrial production are responsible for a significant portion of the drop in fertility rates (Wang, Zhao, L., and Zhao, Z. 2016). The drop in China's fertility rate cannot be attributed to one specific source, but it is a combination of the one-child policy and socioeconomic changes in the country.

The effects of the policy on fertility levels varied by region. Urban families were generally less likely than rural families to have more than one child. This gap between the sizes of urban and rural families increased after the one-child policy. In urban areas, the probability that couples would have a second child fell by 50% in Habei and 86% in Shanghai. People in urban and rural areas experience different levels of education, which may affect their feelings towards traditional family values of having multiple children (Li, Xue and Zhang 2015). A negative correlation exists between the level of education women have and the average number of children they have (Kuang and Lan 2016). Women with higher levels of education tend to marry later and are more knowledgeable about birth control methods (Kuang and Lan 2016). Larger cities in China provide better social and medical services, which help with birth control and infant mortality.

Additionally, the rise of a capitalist economy in China has increased the standard of living, leading families to be satisfied with fewer children. Starting in the late 1970s, China opened their

economy to foreign investment and privatization. Since 1980, China's economic growth has increased by an average of 10% since 1980 and China is now the biggest economy in the world. Many Chinese people now feel more optimistic about the future and their economic situation with this significant economic growth (Simmons 2014). On the other hand, rural residents have less access to the benefits of capitalism and are less educated and are mostly farmers, so they are more likely to stick with their traditional values and oppose population control programs (Hsu 1985). Overall, cities and urbanites are in a better position to enforce and comply with the one-child policy (Hsu 1985). Couples in urban areas were more likely to comply with the one-child policy than people in rural areas because of their higher education levels, adaptability to changes, access to medical services, and because they do not have a need for a large family to carry out agricultural work.

Marriage behavior is connected with the timing and number of births among women of reproductive age. Over the years, the Chinese government has set a late ideal age for women's first marriage. Women who marry before the age of 18 are considered early and those who marry after age 23 are considered late. Early and late marriages differ in urban areas from rural areas. Rural women are less receptive to the government's request to delay marriage. In 1982, 38.9% of all marriages in rural areas were late, compared to 81.6% of late marriages in urban areas. Women in urban areas marry and have their first child two to three years later than those in rural areas (Hsu 1985).

The Chinese government originally expected to apply the policy evenly across the country and limit every family to one child. However, the government quickly realized it was not feasible to restrict couples living in rural areas to only have one child because of their reliance on children to work their farms (Goodkind 2017). The one-child policy demonstrates the difficulties of implementing a family planning policy nationwide, as people live differently, both socially and economically, across regions. Even though disparities exist between the declining fertility rate in urban and rural areas, China achieved their overall goal of lowering the total fertility rate. The one-child policy prevented millions of births from taking place, which drastically changed the country's social and economic life (Goodkind 2017). With the rise of a capitalist society and economic growth, the values of Chinese families changed, and many urban families became satisfied with fewer children (Simmons 2014).

Feminist Movement

The first phase of the feminist movement in China started decades before talks of the one-child policy and is said to have lasted from 1949 to 1966 during the early Mao era. The policies during this period were influenced by the classical Marxist theory that society is centered around work and is a fight for power. In an effort to contribute to this power struggle, women became involved in the collective production. Mao stressed the importance of women's participation in work and saw their place in the family mainly in terms of their contribution to economic activities. Women turned their attention away from the individual self to focus on the collective. In order for Chinese women to achieve full liberation, certain conditions needed to be met, such as abolition of private property, increased participation in social production, and more opportunities for paid labor (Leung 2003). The Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976, brought in the second phase of feminist development in China. During this decade, women participated more in the workforce in order to counter the customs of the feudal society. Women were even encouraged to be active members in politics and to denounce family members for their "wrong-doings" (Leung 2003, 366). Although women's participation in the labor force increased, this second phase of the feminist

movement was only aimed at the working class who felt disenfranchised in the capitalist system. The first two feminist movements in China, prior to the one-child policy, focused mainly on economic and labor rights for women. These movements made no effort to stop the suppression of women's rights in the enduring patriarchal society and improve social justice for women, such as reproductive rights (Leung 2003).

The year 1978 brought in Deng's reform and a period of cultural revivalism, which led to drastic changes in all sectors of Chinese life. One of the biggest effects of this reform is the shift of "iron" women during the Cultural Revolution to "socialist housewives" (Leung 2003, 368). In 1990, the Labor Prohibition Regulations was passed, which increased discrimination against women in the labor force. Specific jobs, such as construction, were clearly designated as being unfit for women. Women were classified with "the elderly and the young," as weak and individuals who need special protection (Leung 2003, 368). In essence, this regulation prevented women from obtaining equal working conditions and wages as men. In 1995, state figures showed that 63% of the employees who were laid off by state companies, were women, and only one-third of these women had a chance of finding a new job (Leung 2003, 367). The majority of men did not support gender equality because women's participation in the workforce may be a threat to the traditional, patriarchal power. Women in the middle class were satisfied with their own cultural reforms and those women with little to no political education, were not interested in taking part in these gender struggles. On the other hand, some Chinese feminists perceived the new opportunity given by economic reforms as a positive that will allow women to advance (Leung 2003). Deng's reform still focused on Chinese women's economic role in the country, and not social and human rights. It was not until the one-child policy that women began working to improve their health and reproductive rights.

The one-child policy expanded the feminist movement in China to discussions on the consequences of state birth planning on women's lives and bodies. Feminists around the world have been critiquing family planning practices since the mid-1980s. Women saw family planning measures as being implemented with a top-down method that controlled women like objects rather than individuals with their own bodies and needs. China's one-child policy was a prime example of a top-down, demographic-targeting program to control population growth. Officials in the government created population control targets that were "then sent down the administrative hierarchy to the community, where they were enforced, at times harshly" (Greenhalgh 2001, 853). Starting in the mid-1990s, a group of feminist scholar-activists has been voicing their opinions on the consequences of the one-child policy on women's health and well-being.

Women were prompted to begin speaking out because of the growing connections to transnational organizations and feminists and reproductive health networks. Feminists had to be careful in criticizing the state-mandated policy as to not defy the government. These new global connections to outside feminist organizations gave feminists in China new ideas, political support, and resources to pursue their goals. Although groups of feminists in China remained small and unorganized, and cautious of the government's tolerance for feminist movements, these women were a new voice for the nation with the ability to transform the population control policies that had been in place for the past few decades (Greenhalgh 2001). The one-child policy opened up the discussion of population control in the feminist movement as women within the movement were encouraged to speak out on the harmful effects of the one-child policy on their lives.

Today, China's attitude and response to human rights is seen as a concern to many abroad. Strict measures are undertaken by the country to control the freedom of expression and association of Chinese citizens (Leung 2003). On March 6, 2015, two days before International Women's Day,

five young women in Beijing were arrested by the police for protesting sexual harassment on public transportation. These women, Li Maizi, Wei Tingting, Zheng Churan, Wu Rongrong, and Wang Man, became known as the “Feminist Five” (Zheng 2015, 476). The month-long detention of the Feminist Five transformed the feminist movement in China by creating a global response for their release. Over two million people signed petitions demanding their release. Even feminist organizations in South Korea, India, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Japan staged demonstrations to challenge the detention. The reaction to the Feminist Five is one of the most recent examples “of a successful feminist response to authoritarianism” (Zheng 2015, 476). Young feminists in China have taken up different measures to achieve gender equality than their predecessors. Often seen as the “princesses” of their one-child families with big desires, these young feminists eventually learn the truth about the patriarchal world we live in. Activists today stage public demonstrations about gender inequality that are aimed at garnering publicity from the media (Zheng 2015). Although China still suppresses activists’ movements and freedom of expression, the young generation of Chinese feminists is starting to emerge with new plans to achieve gender equality.

Long-Term Consequences

In addition to achieving their goal of curbing population growth, the one-child policy acutely altered Chinese society. Chinese families experienced the “4-2-1 problem,” in which four grandparents and two parents looked to a single child for care and support (Fung 2014, 2). The biggest result of the one-child policy today is the imbalance in the sex ratio of boys and girls in the country. Sex ratio is the number of males per 100 females. The sex ratio at birth increased from 108.5 in 1982 to 117.96 in 2010, which is substantially different from the biologically stable range of 103 to 106 (Wang, Zhao, L., and Zhao, Z. 2016). The Chinese culture fosters the idea of “son preference,” which resulted in families wanting and keeping sons and not daughters. During the 1950s and 1960s, girls were called “die di” which translates to “bring a younger brother.” Infertility or not having a son was viewed as a “curse in life.” Son preference is defined as “incentives to have sons, which stem from patriarchal institutions and practices” (Loh and Remick 2015, 307). These incentives that contribute to families’ desires to have a son are related to “labor, ritual, inheritance and property ownership, and old-age security” (Loh and Remick 2015, 307). Chinese culture that places a higher value on sons than daughters existed prior to the one-child policy and continued to be prevalent after the implementation of the policy, which resulted in the imbalance in sex ratio that China has today.

One of the biggest consequences of the imbalance between boys and girls is marriage and reproduction for the present and future generations. China’s population is 1.4 billion, and the country has 34 million more males than females. It is estimated that by 2020, China will have 20 million more men of marriageable age than there will be women. At age 30, Li Weibin has never had a girlfriend and he lives in a small dormitory with five other men. Boys have always outnumbered girls in the mountain village he grew up in and the factories and construction sites where he worked. Weibin said, “I want to find a girlfriend, but I don’t have the money or the opportunity to meet them...Girls have very high standards, they want houses and cars. They don’t want to talk to me” (Denyer and Gowen 2018, n.p.). Today, women “marry up,” as they look for husbands with a higher education, in a good financial situation and social status (Denyer and Gowen 2018, n.p.).

China is progressing quickly on the global stage, but traditional norms surrounding marriage still exist and women are becoming less willing to give up their careers for marriage. Single men in China must now compete to build the best houses and offer the most money to pay

the “bride price,” what the groom’s family pays the future bride’s family, to gain their future in-laws’ blessing (Denyer and Gowen 2018, n.p.). The rise in gender imbalance has increased the “bride price” from a few hundred dollars to nearly \$30,000 in some parts of the country (Denyer and Gowen 2018, n.p.). Women from other countries are also taking advantage of the skewed sex ratio by moving to China for marriage. Chinese men look for foreign brides online and pay thousands of dollars to participate in marriage tours to search for a wife (Denyer and Gowen 2018). The one-child policy has left millions of men without a chance of finding a wife because too many families had sons for their one child. This trend is disrupting the traditional norms of Chinese culture that urges men and women to marry and start a family (Denyer and Gowen 2018).

The one-child policy also had unintended consequences on Chinese social structure and the value placed on women. Prior to the policy, parents were unwilling to invest money in their daughter’s education because attention was placed on their sons. However, once daughters became a couple’s only child and their only chance to have support in old age, they were encouraged to strive academically and obtain better careers (Sudbeck 2012). Christina Zhang, a Chinese student in Beijing, recalls that she had a private tutor who taught her how to draw, which allowed her to attend the best secondary school in her hometown. Similar to Christina, many other children were involved in various extracurricular activities to further develop skills that would help them gain entrance into more prestigious high schools (Fung 2014). Although the policy controlled and restricted women’s reproductive rights, it allowed women to thrive in areas they did not have access to before and come closer to social equality with men. After the establishment of the policy, the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party worked to educate families about gender equality and the role of women. People in China began to examine their attitudes toward women and daughters, and women were granted more opportunities to redefine their role in society (Bailey 1984).

Children in one-child households experience greater academic opportunities compared to those living with siblings. Children without any siblings earn higher academic scores than children with siblings. Parents of single children are less limited financially, and have more time and energy, and are therefore better able to invest more resources in their one child than parents with multiple children. As a result, only children receive more attention and investment in education, leading to an increase in intellectual development and probability of school enrollment and completion (Yang 2006). If the child is both an older child and a son, he will receive both benefits of being the eldest and a son, and the family will place more value on his education. Younger sons are also highly valued, but parents may be restricted financially to invest as heavily in their education as they did in their first son’s schooling (Yang 2006). The one-child policy increased women’s access to education if they were the only child because it was up to them to support their family. Another unintended consequence of the one-child policy is the shift in the focus of education for families.

In addition to transforming women’s education attainments, the one-child policy affected the Chinese labor market. If the policy was not established, the country’s working-age population would not be as small as it is today. The working-age population, defined as those between 15 and 64 years old, was at its peak in 2010 with 973.3 million people, accounting for 74.5% of the total population (Wang, Zhao, L., and Zhao, Z. 2016). Since 2010, the working-age population has been in decline and has resulted in labor shortages and increased wages. The shortage of labor has created an imbalance in age between rural and urban areas. People of the working-age population have left the rural and inland areas for the urban and coastal regions. Now, as the population in rural and inland areas ages without a large workforce, communities are challenged to continue

supporting themselves in the context of lower economic development and less resources for social security and support for the elderly. This creates a positive feedback loop, causing younger generations to continue migrating to urban and coastal areas. The internal migration of young rural workers to urban areas has led to the population working in the agriculture sector to age quickly, while the workers in the manufacturing and service sectors are becoming younger (Wang, Zhao, L., and Zhao, Z. 2016).

Finally, the one-child policy has had a global impact through the increase in international adoptions of children from China. Son preference led to many couples to give up their daughters and tens of thousands of these babies were adopted by individuals and couples around the world. The United States adopts more children than the rest of the world combined and adopted the majority of these girls from China. Over 85,000 children were adopted from China and raised in the United States since China officially opened its doors to international adoption in 1992. Nearly 90% of those adopted between 1999 and 2013 were girls and the few boys that were adopted almost always had special needs (Ziv 2019). The one-child policy not only transformed China's society, but it changed many of the family values in the United States. Today, people understand the word "family" as more than bloodlines, and children realize they do not have to look like or be biologically related to the parents that raise them (Pertman 2016). The one-child policy had far reaching effects through the rise in adoptions that altered how families around the world view what it means to be a family.

Although China's one-child policy had unintended consequences throughout all sectors of society, it successfully lowered the country's fertility levels. However, since the establishment of the policy in 1980 and during its entire implementation, China received criticism from across the globe for restricting women's reproductive rights. With the world population at 7.7 billion, and China accounting for 1.4 billion of these births, how can a country faced with these challenges respect women's autonomy while addressing the national and global consequences of overpopulation?

Epilogue

On January 1, 2016, China's one-child policy was repealed and replaced with a two-child policy 35 years after the original family planning policy was established. The process began on October 20, 2015, when the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Communist Part of China Central Committee announced the comprehensive implementation of a new family planning policy that permits couples to have up to two children. Two months later on December 27, 2015, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress approved the "Amendment of the 'Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China.'" This amendment became effective on January 1, 2016 and supported two births, but still restricted couples from having three or more children. This new policy eliminated the benefits couples previously received for having a late marriage. However, the policy ensured that couples who voluntarily had only one child during the original policy would still be rewarded and subsidized (Wang, Zhao, L., and Zhao, Z. 2016).

The new two-child policy was implemented as the government faced growing concerns about the diminishing workforce that could slow the economy and the skewed sex ratio that could create social problems (Haas 2018). This policy is still too new to measure the total effects it may have on population growth, but most evidence indicates that the policy will have very minimal effects on fertility rates. Fertility rates may increase in the first several years before continuing their decline. In 2016, China saw 18.5 million births, which was an increase of over two million from 2015, though the average number of births per woman over a lifetime was still 1.7, which is

below the 2.1 necessary to ensure a steady population (Bloomberg News 2018). It is estimated that China's population will peak at 1.45 billion by 2030 and then stay around 1.4 billion until the middle of the century (Bloomberg News 2018). The International Monetary Fund stated that the number of people in the working-age population could fall by 170 million during the next thirty years. Many couples do not want to have more than one child anymore because of the emphasis placed on small families for the past three decades. Additionally, many couples cannot afford to have multiple children because of high living costs and expensive child-care services (Bloomberg News 2018).

The two-child policy has already had a significant impact on the labor force for women. Now that women are permitted to have two children, 75% of companies are more hesitant to hire women because they do not want to pay women maternity leave twice. In job interviews, 55% of women have reported being asked personal questions such as: "Do you have a boyfriend?" or "When do you plan to have children?" After giving birth, one-third of women declared that their wages fell and 36% of women said they were demoted. Although China has laws against sex discrimination, including forbidding that pregnant women be fired until their child is at least one-year-old, these laws are not strictly enforced (The Economist 2018).

In addition to determining what birth quota, if any, to have in place, China must take measures to overcome the imbalanced gender ratio. Since son preference is the main reason for the sex ratio imbalance, society must break from their traditional beliefs to place more value on women. In an effort to control population growth, China created new problems for the country and will have to test different solutions until they reach economic and social stability. The consequences of the one-child policy prompted a new group of feminist activists to speak out and perform demonstrations against restrictions on women's reproductive and health rights. China's family planning policies reinvigorated the women's movement in the country with a new focus on social justice and human rights for women. After analyzing the effects of China's one-child policy, other countries must decide if they want to pursue a similar path or find a new one of their own. If women want to prevent future restrictions on their reproductive rights, they must continue to fight and let their voices be heard.

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