

# China's One-Child Policy: The Party's Rationale and the People's Response

Emma Thomas  
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China's One-Child Policy has been scrutinized by many people from different countries since it was established by the Chinese Communist government in the late 1970s. The outside countries see only the fact that a husband and wife are allowed to have just one child and not the crisis that the Chinese government wanted to alleviate. Since this subject tends to be presented in different written works with a biased perspective, it can be difficult for an outsider to get a true understanding of the policy. People do not see what events in China's history may have been the reason for the establishment of the policy, what China's government wanted to gain from the policy and how it has changed China's population for (what seems to be) the better. The One-Child Policy prevented economic problems for the people of China because a large number of the people were persuaded to follow the policy.

### **Recent History**

To start off, it is better to look further into the background of not only the reason for the policy but the changes in China that led to the introduction of the Communist government. In *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* I was able to see that one of the first incidents that occurred in China involved the influence of the British. Since the British wanted to increase import of Chinese silk from China, they introduced the drug opium as an alternative way of trading for silk instead of buying it with silver coins. The only way for the Chinese to get ahold of this drug, was to exchange their silver coins with the British. This trade policy eventually got out of control and led to the Opium War of 1839. The Chinese fought to get rid of the negative influence of the British, but at the same time it was clear to see that the British were more advanced with their weapons and the Chinese would not succeed. The war eventually ended in 1849 to a great cost for the Chinese in territory, indemnities and honor.

After this experience, it was clear to China that other countries were more advanced. This led to the Hundred Days Reforms in 1898. These were established by Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Emperor Guangxu to put “China into a constitutional monarchy, guarantee civil liberties, root out corruption, remodel the education system, encourage foreign influence in China, modernize military forces, and stimulate economic development.”<sup>1</sup> The reason why the reforms only lasted a hundred days was the imperial family, especially Empress Dowager Cixi, did not like these reforms since they would bring the end to the imperial family’s power. Instead of allowing this to occur, the Empress got rid of them.

The Empress Dowager Cixi did not stop there; she also became a leader and supporter for the Boxer Rebellion. The Boxer Rebellion was described as a “violent movement spearheaded by militia units”<sup>2</sup> to get rid of the “foreign devils,”<sup>3</sup> but to the people of China it was a liberation effort from a foreign existence. The Boxers caused so much destruction that when they were put down by a “heavily armed force of British, French, Russian, U.S., German, and Japanese troops,”<sup>4</sup> Empress Cixi was blamed for allowing the destruction to occur. That, however, was not the end of the dynasty; in 1908 the Empress Cixi’s last act was to appoint her two-year-old son, Puyi, to be emperor.

In 1911, the revolution occurred that finally ended the imperial throne and brought in a chance to change the government. Since China was free to form its own governmental system, the people established the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. After Sun Yatsen died in 1925, Jiang Jieshi took over. In 1927 he “unexpectedly turned against his former communist allies”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert F. Ziegler, *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), C: 899.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 899.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 899.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 899.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 1011.

and attacked them with nationalist forces that were occupying Beijing. Seven years later the communist party “took flight in October 1934 to avoid annihilation... [which became known as the] Long March.”<sup>6</sup> This was also the moment that Mao Zedong became a prominent leader for the Chinese Communist Party.

After Mao had become leader of China, he began several programs to develop China into a new nation. One of his major efforts (even if it was a failure) was The Great Leap Forward (1958-1961). This program was meant to be “a way to overtake the industrial production of more developed nations.”<sup>7</sup> Basically, Mao wanted to “collectivize all land and to manage all business and industrial enterprises collectively.”<sup>8</sup> This went horribly wrong and many people died from starvation. The other program that Mao tried to establish was the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. This one ended in destruction as well because it accused people of being against Mao, especially those who were “intellectuals, teachers, professionals, [and] managers.”<sup>9</sup> It was not until Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1981 that things in China began to look better. Deng saw the problems that had developed (i.e. over population) and sought ways to fix them.

### **The Research behind the Policy**

Leo F. Goodstadt is a scholar who looks at the One-Child Policy with a mathematical and historical perspective. By looking at other’s research, Goodstadt sees the statistical probabilities that were calculated by Chinese specialists to determine the future population of China if the population kept rising at the rate that it was going in the late 1960s and early 70s. What was discovered by “[Chinese] cybernetics specialist, a [Social] Scientist, and two engineers,”<sup>10</sup> was

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1012.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 1113.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 1113.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 1113.

<sup>10</sup> Leo F. Goodstadt, “China’s One-Child Family: Policy and Public Response,” *Population and Development Review* 8, no. 1 (1982): 39.

the projected future of China's population with different possibilities. What these specialists predicted was that "a three-child family would produce a population of 1.414 billion by the year 2000; of 2.923 billion by 2050; and of 4.260 billion by 2080. A two-child family would produce a population of 1.217 billion by the year 2000; peak at 1.539 billion by 2052; and stabilize at 1.472 billion. A population generated by an average family size of 1.5 children would number 1.125 billion in the year 2000; peak at 1.172 billion in 2027; and fall to 777 million in 2080. The introduction of a one-child family by 1985 would produce a peak population of 1.054 billion by the year 2004. By 2028 the population would fall to 960 million...and then decline to 370 million by 2080."<sup>11</sup> These numbers show that the Chinese government could see what would happen if families had more than one child. The population would eventually become enormous; the idea of limiting the number of children each family could have would help slow down the growth.

Through further research it was also projected that the rate of population growth was going to cause future problems for education and housing. In education, "China has an estimated 140 million illiterates among those aged 12 and older... and suffered a sharp fall in school standards after 1966."<sup>12</sup> From these figures, the government used "the argument... that the school system can only be improved if the numbers seeking an education can be reduced."<sup>13</sup> The other foreseen issue in this section was the probability that families may have a difficult time finding a place to live. "By 1977, the average living space per capita in the urban population had fallen to 3.6 square meters from 4.5 square meters in 1952."<sup>14</sup> The rate that the population was predicted to grow proves that there would be future problems in both rural and urban areas.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 41.

Unemployment was the last issue that Goodstadt brought up. This one is important for the government to be concerned about because “the shortage of arable land and the failure of grain production”<sup>15</sup> meant that agricultural production would not keep up with the number of people to feed. Even the manufacturing sector was going to run out of jobs if the population kept rapidly getting larger.

All these different circumstances put pressure upon the Chinese government to do something about the situation. The major problem then became how to get the populace to want to use the one-child guidelines. Goodstadt found that the “initial local-level response... indicated cooperation with the government’s program.”<sup>16</sup> However, when he looked at the rural communities it was not as easy. Goodstadt stated that the government had problems “establishing efficient incentives to increased productivity for the individual farm worker.”<sup>17</sup> What the families feared with the one-child policy was a decrease in production if they were unable to have as many children as they wanted because their children were the ones that worked with them on their farms.

### **Early Family Planning Campaigns**

Y. C. Yu looks at one of the earliest stages of family planning when the Chinese Communist party was in power. This program was established in the 1960s “to achieve ‘late, thin, and few’”<sup>18</sup> amongst the Chinese people. The idea was that “‘late’ means postponement of marriage until after the age of 23 for women and 25 for men. The word ‘thin’ means spacing the births of children at intervals of three to five years. The word ‘few’ means to have fewer

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Y. C. Yu, “The Population Policy of China,” in *Population Studies* 33, no. 1 (1979): 139.

children; two children per family is recommended.”<sup>19</sup> The program was made easily available to the Chinese population because contraceptives such as intrauterine devices and birth control pills were easy to obtain through their local cadres and free for the public’s use. Y. C. Yu also points out that the primary purpose of family planning was to educate “women of childbearing age, for older women, and for men”<sup>20</sup> through meetings and use of mass media such as posters, pamphlets, and films. It seems that without this government funded program, the people of China would not have understood what was required from them for the one-child policy, and they would not have easy access to contraceptives to prevent pregnancies that would result in multiple children through the years that a couple was married.

Judith Banister goes more in depth with the Family Planning Campaigns and explains that there were two different ones in *China’s Changing Population*. The first one occurred in 1957 as a way for the government to suggest using birth control to limit the number of children a family had, instead of forcing the population to take birth control. The second Family Planning Campaign occurred in 1962 and was to offer more birth control methods and also to suggest later marriages. Neither of these campaigns was successful, but they did pave the way towards a successful One-Child Policy.

The first Family Planning Campaign occurred in 1957 with the intention to help families limit how many children they had. The campaign failed after a few years because the Chinese government did not see “how difficult and complex fertility reduction would be.”<sup>21</sup> Some of the difficulties were “poor local leadership and to traditional reluctance to discuss sexual matters.”<sup>22</sup> It is understandable that the government would not have success with this Family Planning

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>21</sup> Judith Banister, *China’s Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 149.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 148.

Campaign because it was the first time that they tried to do something like this. At the same time they were able to learn what needed to be improved for the next attempt.

The government learned “that a national and provincial apparatus was required to promote birth control and conduct the campaign, that popular resistance was deep, and that new birth control techniques were needed.”<sup>23</sup> In order to try to Family Planning again, these things needed to be addressed. At the same time there were some successes, for example, the laws that banned “birth control had been repealed”<sup>24</sup> and “in 1957 both abortion and sterilization were legalized.”<sup>25</sup> Both advanced the rights that individuals had for their bodies.

The second time that Family Planning Campaign was undertaken was in 1962 with an emphasis on marrying later in life. In order to get the people to want to marry later, propaganda was used to warn young couples what might happen if they had sex early on in their lives. “Young men were told that too much sex too early would dissipate their vital body fluids and cause numerous physical ills. Young women were warned of the dangers of early and frequent childbearing to their own health and that of their children.”<sup>26</sup> The government also “promoted the ideal of a two-child family with the two births spaced three to five years apart.”<sup>27</sup> Along with this kind of propaganda, birth control methods were provided, similar to the first Family Planning Campaign. It seemed likely these methods were actually going to accomplish their goals to help control population growth. The problem was that they did not campaign in both urban and rural areas of China.

During the second campaign, the main areas that the government campaigned in were urban because “conditions were more conducive to fertility decline in cities than in

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



countryside.”<sup>28</sup> The reason behind this belief was that the government could threaten “loss of a job or privileges, to forbid students, apprentices, factory workers, and government personnel to marry before mid-twenties or to bear more than the permitted number of children.”<sup>29</sup> If the government was able to get support from the rural populations, they might have had more success. The problem was that the rural people had resisted and “the rural network of contraceptive supply and medical skill for birth control operations was too weak.”<sup>30</sup> After this failure, improvements were needed again to be more successful in both urban and rural areas and convince more people to have fewer children. Once the improvements were made the One-Child Policy would become the success the Chinese government was looking for.

The biggest problem was to get families to change their cultural and family traditions. Elisabeth Croll’s “Fertility Norms and Family Size in China” provides a background on what a typical family size was in China before the policy. The normal family size was between 5 and 6 children and there was emphasis to have sons over daughters. The reason to have a son over a daughter was that “they continued the family line; on marriage they remained within the parental household and supported the older generation and finally they tended the ancestral shrines.”<sup>31</sup> If a family had a daughter but not a son the foreseen complication was that it would lead to the end of the ancestral line if the family followed the one-child policy.

Croll explains how new families were introduced to the One-Child Policy of China through family planning. The goal of family planning was to educate “those who were at the height of their fertility and especially those who could be expected to space their children

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid 150-151.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Croll, “Introduction: Fertility Norms and Family Size in China” in *China’s One-Child Family Policy* eds. Croll, Elisabeth, Delia Davin, and Penny Kane (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 11.

adequately and those who already completed a two- or three-child family.”<sup>32</sup> The idea was that if education was available to the new (or possibly old) families then there would be more families who would obey the new policy.

### **The One-Child Policy in Effect**

Tyrene White’s book *China’s Longest Campaign* shows methods that were used between the years of 1979 and 2005 to make sure those families would adhere to the idea of limiting the number of children they conceive. This source started off with background on the Mao regime and the concept of birth planning. The family did not necessarily need to restrict the number of children they had to two children or less, but they had to be reasonable in the number they would conceive. The other issue seemed to be that Mao did not “fully repudiate either birth control or birth planning, just their anti-natalist goals.”<sup>33</sup> Basically, Mao did not refuse the idea of birth planning, but did refuse the idea of limiting population growth. So instead of sponsoring the concept of late, thin, and few, Mao was only concerned with late and thin.

Next, White discusses on the campaigns that went on in order to inform the population about the One-Child Policy. The first kind was called “transformation campaigns”<sup>34</sup> that were established to either have something negative to say about the policy before others could or they were about the positive benefits of the policy. There were also campaigns with both positive and negative ideas about the policy combined into one. The second kind of campaign was the “routine production campaign.”<sup>35</sup> This one was similar to the first kind of campaigns, but it did have its differences. It was different because it “was devoted to the achievement of material production targets or concrete administrative targets in a predictable fashion and on a reliable

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Tyrene White, *China’s Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People’s Republic, 1949-2005* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 71.

timetable.”<sup>36</sup> To achieve greater success in their campaigning, both of these campaigns were combined in order to spread the word faster and cover more regions of China; especially in the rural areas. The reason why they were covered more in rural communities was because the rural people were the hardest to convince. In the rural communities it was better to have more than one child so that they could work on the farm when they were of age. Also it was more important to have sons because having a daughter is “less economically valuable than sons.”<sup>37</sup> A daughter’s responsibility was to get married and live with her husband’s family, which meant a loss of a worker on her parent’s field. A son would stay on the land even after he was married.

White also points out that “propaganda and education were important not only for establishing and publicizing the party line on the issue but were also designed to increase pressures for action throughout the political system and to communicate the rewards and sanctions to be used to garner compliance.”<sup>38</sup> This was a smart idea from the campaigners because this meant that they were able to reach a vast majority of people. It also enforced it upon people whenever they saw a poster, heard a commercial on the radio, or a television commercial of the one-child policy. This became a constant reminder for the rural residents because the campaigns would not allow them to ignore the policy.

Penny Kane’s “The Single-child Family Policy in the Cities” shows how easy it was for the urban areas of China to accept the idea of the One-Child Policy and the reason why this was so. Having just one child in the family seems to help with the “efforts to raise the status of women and to bring more of them into the workforce.”<sup>39</sup> Instead of the wife staying at home and taking care of the children, a wife would have the freedom to work away from the house because

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>39</sup> Penny Kane, “The Single-child Family Policy in the Cities” in *China’s One-Child Family Policy* eds. Croll, Elisabeth, Delia Davin, and Penny Kane (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 89.

they are only responsible for one child and not several. Believing that this could happen allows women to acknowledge that having a single child would work. As Kane puts it; “these new roles for women offered greater opportunities and were taken up more swiftly.”<sup>40</sup>

Kane noticed that before the one-child policy was officially established, “the ratio of one-child families had passed 50 per cent: before the regulations had been introduced and incentives or disincentives proffered.”<sup>41</sup> For those who had not begun using the policy, the incentives to have one child varied from “5 yuan a month subsidy for health care,”<sup>42</sup> “priority in housing and the allocation of private plots,”<sup>43</sup> or “provision for additional maternity leave.”<sup>44</sup> If the incentives were not offered, people living in the urban areas of China may have still considered only having one child. This was because it would allow the wife to work outside of the house while their child was in school or daycare.

There may have been difficulties in rural areas, but the urban residents were more accepting towards the One-Child Policy. It is almost like they saw it as a savior, because it got them out of a tough situation. Housing was becoming limited, women were starting to work, and unemployment was getting worse. By following the One-Child Policy, small families are able to save money in order to buy necessities for their family to survive.

Yunxiang Yan’s book *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village 1949-1999* is a personal project because the town that is the main focus of this book is his home village. Yan was taken in by Xiajia Village during the famine years of the 1960s. He lived there until a year after the One-Child Policy was put into effect when he left to go to college. He was not necessarily around when the policy had made an actual impact on

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 99.

the people of the village instead of the initial uproar of disapproval, but through interviews, he was able to understand how the people felt about the policy. When Yan was in the village the year that the policy was introduced in 1977, he witnessed “the villagers assembled at the educational meetings in the headquarters of production teams to learn the three-point program ‘wan, xi, shao’ meaning ‘late births, large spacing, and fewer births.’”<sup>45</sup> Yan also noticed that “most villagers could not accept the argument that having fewer children would benefit their own families and the country.”<sup>46</sup> The villagers were set on their familiar traditions and were not ready to change their lifestyle in order to please their government. There were two individuals who fully believed that the government could not control what they chose to practice: Mr. Zhao and Iron Pole.

Mr. Zhao was a father of three daughters when the policy was put into effect and he “openly challenged the state policies and confronted the birth control workers”<sup>47</sup> because he felt that it was his right as a husband to impregnate his wife. A few years after Mr. Zhao had confronted the local officials, he and his wife had a fourth daughter and then a fifth daughter. They were “fined for having two more daughters; then [he] had to abandon his hopes for having a son when his wife was sterilized during the harsh birth control campaign in 1983.”<sup>48</sup> After this action was taken as a result for disobeying the policy, Mr. Zhao had then “become an alcoholic, often tearfully complaining about his bleak future as a man without a son.”<sup>49</sup> Years later, Yan met again with Mr. Zhao and learned that he “had actually benefited from his five daughters, all of whom were hard workers in factories outside the village. More important, he had not spent

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<sup>45</sup> Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life Under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village 1949-1999* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 190.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

much for their marriage and had been enjoying care and help from his daughters and sons-in-law.”<sup>50</sup> Mr. Zhao was living a very good life and possibly one that was better than if he had the son that he had wanted. If he did have the son that he always wanted, then it is likely that the care that he would have received from his son would have been less than the care of his five daughters. Mr. Zhao’s daughters were also able to care for themselves financially instead of their father making sure that they would be set financially with a dowry. The next example was not as successful as Mr. Zhao was but did have the son that he wanted.

Iron Pole was married soon after the policy was in effect and their first child was a daughter. This did not satisfy Iron Pole for the possible reason that he was raised to believe that having a son is better financially than having a daughter. Since this was in his nature, Iron Pole and his wife had a second child, hoping to have a son, but ended up having a girl. For having a second child, no matter what sex, they were “fined 1,400 Yuan for violating the birth control regulation.”<sup>51</sup> If they had “waited two more years and applied for a permit for a second try because their first child was a girl”<sup>52</sup> then they may have not been fined. The problem was that “Iron Pole had been so eager to have a son that he could not wait.”<sup>53</sup> When they had a third child in 1992, they had a son, but were still fined 6,000 Yuan. Iron Pole was excited that he finally had a son, but years later he was not as thrilled because “in 1997 Iron Pole... and his wife had been experiencing economic hard times in raising their three children”<sup>54</sup> and even “openly admitted the mistake of ignoring the birth control regulations”<sup>55</sup> in a meeting between Yan and Iron Pole. Iron Pole did the same thing that Mr. Zhao did, but he was not living a good life like

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

him. Iron Pole was having economic troubles because he had to pay for the extra expenses that come with children and there was also no guarantee that he was going to be taken care of well in his old age. It might be possible that he could have had a better economic outcome if he did not have another child, but he did and had to face the problems that the Chinese government was trying to help prevent for the people.

Both of these individuals were fined for having another child, which was a common practice to prevent families from conceiving more than one child. In the village of Xiajia, the people would face “a fine of 700 yuan [that] was imposed on any couple who had a second child (or more) after April 1, 1980.”<sup>56</sup> The people of the village also had to go through methods of prevention with medication. It had become a requirement that “married women of fertility age were required to use contraceptives.”<sup>57</sup> Other medical procedures were taken as well to prevent parents from having a second child.

After the initiation of the policy, it was a requirement that all women have “the insertion of intrauterine devices (IUDs) and female sterilization (tubal ligation)”<sup>58</sup> after certain points in their marriage. The idea was that “women of fertility age who had a son... were required to be sterilized, except those with serious health problems. Women whose first child was a girl were required to get an IUD.”<sup>59</sup> Men did not have to receive any medical treatments to sterilize them but they were affected by their wife’s sterilization. The husbands “for a short period of time... were commonly seen drunk on the streets [and] two men cried out loud in the hospital while their wives were undergoing the operation.”<sup>60</sup> The reaction that men had could have been

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 194.

from the fact that their wife would not have any more children. They no longer had control over when their wife could conceive; the government now decided what was going to happen.

After 1994 the policy became more relaxed. “Women with a son no longer have to be sterilized; instead they are allowed to use an IUD or to take birth control pills.”<sup>61</sup> Also if a couple’s first born was a girl they could have a second child as long as “the wife was 28 or older and the interval between her first and second birth was four years or more.”<sup>62</sup>

It was also becoming apparent by the summer of 1999 that the “fifty-nine couples who were parents of an only daughter [and] were eligible to have a second...had not done so”<sup>63</sup> and were not planning on having another anytime soon. Parents did not mind that they were only going to have a daughter because it had become more important that their child would be “a filial child.”<sup>64</sup> If their child was not going to be filial, then they may have tried to have a second child. At the same time having a single child was economically better for them because they would only have extra expenses for one child instead of multiple children. If the villagers did happen to have another child, they did it within the regulations and did not care about the sex of the second child as much. Most parents who chose to have a second child wanted their first child to have a sibling.

The people of Xiajia Village are similar to those of other rural areas located in China. The people first felt that the One-Child Policy was an inconvenience, but were able to see why it was necessary later on. Some of them also realized that if they had not been so determined to disobey the policy, then they might not be in the economic crises that they were in when interviewed by Yan. But the people are also not at fault because they felt that their personal

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 202.



power over their family was being taken away and wanted to maintain some degree of control. In doing so, they may have realized that it is possible that their government had the best intentions in mind with the policy and that they also had the right to decide what method is the correct one now that more options are available to them.

### **Women and the One-Child Policy**

Margery Wolf looks closely at women's roles in China. Her book *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* takes interviews that Wolf had collected in 1980-81 from Chinese women (and some Chinese men) living in places like Beijing, Shaoxing, and Shijiazhuang during the beginnings of the birth limitation program and One-Child Policy. Wolf's goal was to look at "the change socialism had brought to the different parts of the country and between city and countryside"<sup>65</sup> among women. She took a close look at how women functioned in different societies in China as well as the birth limitation program that aided in making sure the One-Child Policy was obeyed.

Wolf approaches the birth limitation program by first looking at the reason behind it. Wolf mentions that the first time that birth planning was implemented was in 1956, after the 1953 census showed that there was a large increase of people. Since this increase seemed dangerous, it was important to get a handle on the problem of the growing population. The birth planning campaign was "terminated in 1958 when Mao launched the Great Leap Forward."<sup>66</sup> Wolf then mentions that there was another campaign in 1962, but it was "terminated again in 1968 when the activities of the Cultural Revolution [disrupted] production"<sup>67</sup> and distribution of

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<sup>65</sup> Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 34.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

contraceptives. The last campaign that Wolf includes was “the ‘later, longer, fewer’ campaign”<sup>68</sup> in 1972. The idea was that the Chinese people were supposed to have “later marriages, longer intervals between births, and fewer children.”<sup>69</sup> Eventually, as Wolf points out, this campaign became the One-Child Policy in 1979 when “the postwar babies began to reach marriageable age.”<sup>70</sup> Since the younger generation was reaching this point, China’s government officials realized that a drastic plan was needed to prevent “another giant upsurge in the population.”<sup>71</sup> By implementing the One-Child Policy the government would try to make sure the population did not grow excessively.

Wolf then looks at how the government made the policy effective with the birth limitation program. This program offered easy access to resources, such as contraceptives, and made sure that each woman used them to their full advantage. Wolf says the program “literally delivers contraception to every fertile married woman in rural and urban China.”<sup>72</sup> She also mentions that “each [Chinese] woman is in the charge of a birth limitation worker who checks with her regularly to make sure she is using the contraception provided and to discover early if she has begun an unauthorized pregnancy.”<sup>73</sup> It seems that the birth limitation program puts a lot of pressure on the wives of new families in China. The women are the ones who are responsible to use contraception and are the ones who are monitored by the people who work for the birth limitation program.

Another historian who mentions the effect of the one-child policy on women is Laurel Bossen, in her book *Chinese Women and Rural Development: Sixty Years of Change in Lu*

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 241.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 242

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

*Village, Yunnan*. Bossen received her information the same way as Wolf did, through interviews and various secondary sources that speak of the birth policy programs in China. The difference between these two studies is that Wolf focuses on what motivated women to stick to only having one child and Bossen turns her attention to the gender preference of families when only allowed to have one child.

Bossen discovered that “beneath the family planning policy lie important questions about gender, about women as reproducers, and about girls as the less-desired sex.”<sup>74</sup> In Lu Village Bossen saw that the village had “lopsided sex ratios.”<sup>75</sup> Within several years it appears that there were more boys born than girls. The difference varied with each year “for a birth sex ratio of 116 boys to 100 girls”<sup>76</sup> in 1995 to a ratio of 141:100 in 1998 which caused Bossen to explain why there was an imbalance.

The imbalance of the sex ratios can be difficult to understand because there are many different reasons that can vary from “a gender bias”<sup>77</sup> for their unborn child to “child survival”<sup>78</sup> to explain the reason why there are more boys than girls. Bossen also explains that there has been a practice of pregnant women going “to the town hospital where, for a fee, they can inspect their fetus using ultrasound technology”<sup>79</sup> and determine the sex of their fetus. After doing this, the family may abort the baby if they believe it is a girl. All these different reasons for why the population of the Lu Village would have more males than females make the imbalance understandable.

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<sup>74</sup> Laurel Bossen, *Chinese Women and Rural Development: Sixty Years of Change in Lu Village, Yunnan* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 274.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Lydia H. Liu speaks about the strength that a woman's body has when analyzing *Field of Life and Death* in her essay entitled "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse." The piece of fiction that is being analyzed shows what a woman's body (in rural areas) has in strength through their "experience [in] childbirth, disease, sexuality, aging, and death"<sup>80</sup> through their lifespan. Women also experience "poverty, ignorance, class exploitation, imperialism, and patriarchy"<sup>81</sup> that all conspire against rural women to bring them down to an "animal existence."<sup>82</sup> Even though these strengths that a women's body goes through are written in a piece of fiction, they still hold true in the Chinese society before and during the One-Child Policy. These are important aspects to include because it shows that the One-Child Policy restricts a woman's body from doing what they were born to do.

The loss of a woman's power with the One-Child Policy is argued by Kay Ann Johnson. In *Woman, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*, Johnson shows that the need to control the growing population has led to "attitudes [that] discriminate against females and continue to lead peasants to prefer sons to daughters."<sup>83</sup> Johnson says that a "traditional economic motivation for having numerous sons... [was]... accumulated earnings to increase family landholdings."<sup>84</sup> This provides a valuable insight into the importance of sons in rural communities and why a woman's power was starting to diminish.

Even though Johnson believes that the One-Child Policy lessens a woman's power; she also sees how a woman could achieve some power as well. What Johnson noticed was that

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<sup>80</sup> Lydia H. Liu, "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death*," in *Body, Subject & Power in China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 164.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 227.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

“young women could be the government’s strongest ally in moving toward smaller families.”<sup>85</sup>

Young women are about to start their families and if they are convinced to have one child then they would become the example for future generations. Johnson shows the willingness of the young women when she explains that “young women [who] work outside the home for income and the fact that they now have the external support of a vigorous family planning program if they desire fewer children have increased their ability to override family pressures for more children.”<sup>86</sup> Without the support of young women who are about to become future wives, the government would not be successful with their implementation of the One-Child Policy.

Harriet Evans’ “Past, Perfect or Imperfect: Changing Images of the Ideal Wife” shows the changing role of the wife in her family through her research from news articles and secondary sources. In the late 1950s wives were beginning to work outside of the home, becoming prominent in making decisions that affected their children, and now had more power to control their bodies. One of the ways that a wife controlled her body was denying having sex with her husband or allowing it but a majority of the time the wife was not interested. The lack of interest could mean several things, but the explanation that Evans provides is that the One-Child Policy had placed a “fear of becoming pregnant in itself may be enough to discourage many women from showing much interest in sex.”<sup>87</sup> The fear inducing problem led women to have control over the kind of relationship they wanted with their husband and have some control over their body. Wives lacked control to decide if they wanted to have more children or not but were able to discourage sexual activity which lead to having less children.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Harriet Evans, “Past, Perfect or Imperfect: Changing Images of the Ideal Wife” in *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 346.

In order for a family to have only one child precautions needed to be taken to prevent conception. Birth control could be used, but the problem was that women became the only one responsible. Evans explains that there were “legal requirements on both partners to use contraceptive methods, [but] texts about contraception commonly...assume that birth control is principally a woman’s responsibility.”<sup>88</sup> Furthermore “their bodies are targeted as the means of restricting the number of pregnancies at any particular time, whether through the use of the IUD [intrauterine device] or abortions.”<sup>89</sup> Women had to follow the rules and not go against the policy. These constraints made a woman’s body not her own problem, but everyone’s problem.

An essay written by Patrick Shaou-Whea Dodge and Elizabeth A. Suter looks closely at a problem that many outsiders bring up about the One-Child Policy: preference for boys over girls. Their article “‘It’s Okay to Have a Girl’: Patronymy and China’s One Child Policy” brings up the issue of families finding out that they are having a daughter and the measures that may be taken by the families to have a son instead. The authors focused on the methods that the government took to reassure the Chinese population that it is alright to have a girl. One of these methods was with billboards that might show a young girl that is “smiling and is centered in the billboard while her parents are in the background smiling.”<sup>90</sup> These kinds of messages help the public feel better about having a girl instead of a boy because the billboards show how happy the family is.

Billboards like these were developed because of the traditional practice of patronymy. Dodge and Suter show that in order to pass on the father’s last name from generation to generation, it is necessary to have a son. If a family only had a daughter, then the last name

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 350.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Patrick Shaou-Whea Dodge and Elizabeth A. Suter, “‘It’s Okay to Have a Girl’: Patronymy and China’s One Child Policy” in *Women and Language* 31, no. 1 (2008): 17.

would not be passed on. The role of the daughter is to become a “heterosexually married women [and] take their husband’s last name when they marry”<sup>91</sup> instead of keeping their maiden name. The authors also discuss the repercussions that would happen in families if they wanted a boy more than a girl. Dodge and Suter point out several measures that may have been taken to ensure that the family would have a boy. For instance, there was “infanticide, forced abortions, sex-selective abortions...and kidnapping”<sup>92</sup> if the family found out they were having a daughter. The reason behind the methods couples would take to ensure that they had a son, according to the authors, was “the strict implementation of [one-child] policy and family planning.”<sup>93</sup>

### **Posters Used to get the Message to the Public**

Propaganda posters are one of the most successful ways to promote an idea to a population. The posters are usually visually appealing to ensure that the viewer would take the time to look at the poster and identify with the image that is shown. When characters are used in the posters the slogans are in short sentences to make sure that the message of the poster is clear and memorable to the viewer. If there are too many characters, then the people that the poster is geared towards would not want to stop and look at it because it may take too long to read. The propaganda posters below are great examples of how the government persuaded the masses to have only one child.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



Figure 1: Stefan R. Landsberger, "Carry out family planning, implement the basic national policy," Chinese Posters, <http://chinese-posters.net/posters/e13-415.php>

The propaganda poster shown above was released in 1986 and the designer was Zhou Yuwei. The poster was not released the same year that the One-Child Policy was enforced, but the message that is conveyed through the poster does promote following the policy. The image of the woman with a child and the slogan “Carry out family policy, implement the basic national policy” are used to bring out a positive feeling in the viewer on what their duty should be. The baby is smiling and not of identifiable sex. The unknown sex of the child leads me to understand it as a way for the government to show that an only child does not need to be a boy. The poster is supposed to promote a healthy relationship between the mother and her one child, boy or girl. At the same time, it is easy to see that the government was also trying to promote the policy and avoid criticism for its effects. Chinese families wanted sons and not daughters because of the son’s greater importance to the family.

The bright colors in the poster seem to be used to enhance the feeling of happiness in a one-child family. There is a blue sky, the sun is shining brightly, there is green everywhere, and the flowers are in bloom. All of these elements could be associated with the season Spring that



also tends to bring out happiness in people because everything around is bright and not grey or dry like the seasons before it. The mother and her child may not be wearing bright colors to stand out from the bright colors in the background, but they do have the wind blowing through their hair. The wind also provides a happy feeling because it could mean that they do not have any worries coming their way and if there are worries it is only blowing past them. All of these metaphors enhance the government's message to only have one child in each family. If they believe that they can be happy and worry free with only one child, then the parents would want to only have one child.

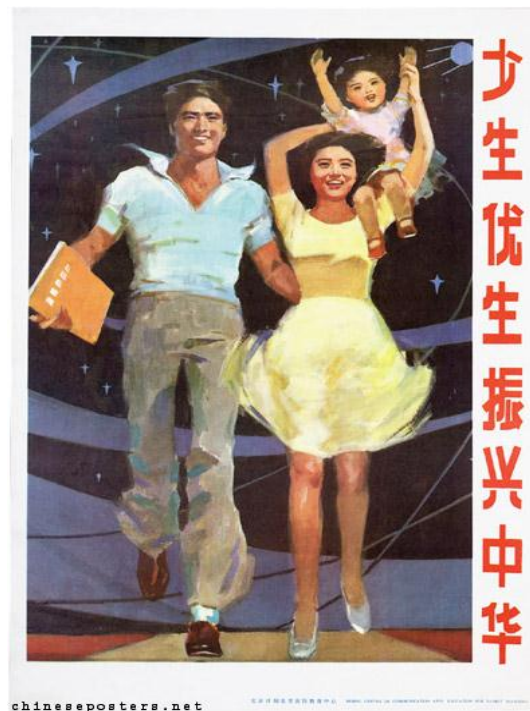


Figure 2: Stefan R. Landsberger, "Less births, better births, to develop China vigorously," Chinese Posters, <http://chinese posters.net/posters/e13-871.php>

This poster was produced in 1987 with a message that states “Less births, better births, to develop China vigorously.” Unlike the first propaganda poster, this one was provided with a little bit of analysis from the website’s author, Stefan R. Landsberger. What he mentions is that in a “poster like this it is usually girls that are shown, to indicate that they are worth as much as

boys.” This child is labeled as a girl by the long length of her hair and the fact that she is wearing a dress. This is the government’s way of showing that it is alright to have a girl instead of trying to only conceive a boy. The fact that the child is of a specific sex is only one of the differences from the previous propaganda poster. Some of the other differences are the fact that it is a complete family and the background the poster is not as bright like the background of the previous poster.

The family in the poster includes a father, mother, and a young daughter. They all look happy and look like they love one another. The family also seems to be skipping and wearing bright color clothes. The emotion shown through their faces and the feeling one would get from skipping and wearing bright clothing provides a positive outlook on having only one child. If the family in the poster is happy about having one child then the onlooker may imagine that having only one child in their family would produce the same emotions.

The background is darker than the bright clothing that the family is wearing to show a contrast between the two things. The darker background is not going to be the first thing that a viewer would look at when walking or driving past the poster; the first thing that they are going to notice is the family because they are wearing lighter colors. With the family being the image that stands out in the poster, the view can understand the message that the propaganda poster is trying to persuade to the viewer.

The background in this poster has its own contrast in colors. There is a dark blue color with swooping lines and small stars in a lighter blue color to stand out. It looks like the family is heading out for the evening and enjoying the time that they are spending together. The parents do not look upset that their child is a girl or the fact that they have just one child; they are just glad that they have each other.

## Population Projections

Something that I feel is necessary to provide to explain one of the main reasons behind the government decision to use the One-Child Policy is to show data that estimates the population of China from several different years. There are the years before the policy, a year between 1979 and 2011, and the year 2011. Through the United Nations demographic website, I was able to find most of these facts that would help me see if the policy had any effect on the population. The second website that I consulted was the CIA: The World Factbook of China.

### 1. Estimates of mid-year population and vital statistics summary: 1948-1997

Estimations de la population au milieu de l'année et aperçu des statistiques de l'état civil: 1948-1997 (continued — suite)

(See notes at end of table. — Voir notes à la fin du tableau.)

Continent, country or area and date	Population
Continent, pays ou zone et date	

ASIA — ASIE

China — Chine

1955	x609 005 000
1956	x617 789 000
1957	x626 818 000
1958	x636 335 000
1959	x646 515 000
1960	x657 492 000
1961	x669 392 000
1962	x682 357 000
1963	x696 552 000
1964	x712 142 000
1965	x729 191 000
1966	x747 754 000

Figure 3: United Nations, “Estimates of mid-year population and vital statistics summary: 1948-1997,” Demographic Yearbook: Historical Summary, July 1, 2007, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/DYBHist/HistTab01.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2011).

The chart, “Estimates of mid-year population and vital statistics summary: 1948-1997” provides the information that would help understand why the Chinese government decided to choose the One-Child Policy as a solution to a problem and whether it actually provided a solution. The chart shows that the years before 1961 there was a population increase of

10,000,000 people or less each year, but after 1961 the increase was getting larger. Instead of the population increasing each year by 10,000,000, it was rising by 20,000,000 or a little bit less. At this rapid rate, the population was going to be over the billion mark within several years. If the population was going to continue to rise at this rate, then it is understandable why the government would want to use the One-Child Policy to slow down the population growth, especially if previous policies were not slowing the population down by only limiting child bearing to three or two children for each family.

Continent, country or area and date	Population
Continent, pays ou zone et date	
1979	x985 467 000
1980	x998 877 000
1981	x1 012 409 000
1982	x1 026 029 000
1983	x1 040 000 000
1984	x1 054 667 000

Figure 4: United Nations, “Estimates of mid-year population and vital statistics summary: 1948-1997,” Demographic Yearbook: Historical Summary, July 1, 2007, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/DYBHist/HistTab01.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2011).

In 1979, the chart shows that the estimated population was about 985,467,000.<sup>94</sup> The year after, the population had jumped to about 998,877,000<sup>95</sup> people. In 1981, the estimated population had finally gone over a billion. This increase was getting higher and higher with each year and it was becoming a concern to the Chinese government because the people of China were going to be in trouble economically if the growth did not slow down.

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<sup>94</sup> United Nations, “Estimates of mid-year population and vital statistics summary: 1948-1997,” Demographic Yearbook: Historical Summary, July 1, 2007, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/DYBHist/HistTab01.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2011).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Continent, country or area and date	Population
Continent, pays ou zone et date	
1992	x1 183 568 000
1993	x1 196 167 000
1994	x1 208 278 000
1995	x1 220 224 000
1996	x1 232 083 000
1997	x1 243 738 000

Figure 5: United Nations, “Estimates of mid-year population and vital statistics summary: 1948-1997,” Demographic Yearbook: Historical Summary, July 1, 2007, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/DYBHist/HistTab01.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2011).

With the One-Child Policy beginning in 1979, the expectation was that the population would start to slowly rise instead of rising at a higher rate. This takes time to get the desired reaction, but it seemed that it was taking several years to slow down population growth. Based on the chart, the population continued to rise around 20,000,000 people each year until 1995. In 1995 the population was estimated to be 1,220,224,000.<sup>96</sup> The next year the population was estimated to have risen a little over 10,000,000 people, which is an improvement compared to how the population had been increasing before 1995. This could have also been a result of the policy or it could have just been a fluke, but the population was back on its steady rise of about 10,000,000 each year. It has been at a constant rate ever since then, so that currently the population in China is 1,336,718,015<sup>97</sup> instead of the enormous amount that it could have become if the population continued growing by 20,000,000 people each year.

China’s One-Child Policy was successful in slowing down the growth of the population through its methods of persuading the people of China. The rationale behind the policy was that the government noticed that the population was rising rapidly and would cause economic problems for future generations. They had tried implementing Family Planning Campaigns in

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> CIA: The World Factbook, China: People, April 25, 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html> (accessed April 29, 2011).

two separate occasions before the policy, but the campaigns were unsuccessful. When the One-Child Policy was established in 1979 there was a greater success even with the many negative responses from the people. Rural families saw that the policy would prevent them from having many children and were unhappy because few children meant little work on the parents' farm. Women also had difficulties embracing the policy because they were the ones responsible to make sure that their new family would be small one yet they received pressure from in-laws to produce descendants. All Chinese families lacking a son suffered because a son was expected to continue his family heritage and was supposed to take care of his parents when they were older. However, urban families accepted the policy because most families, who already had one child, were not planning to have another with both parents working outside of the home and could not afford the extra expense. For people that were not willing to change their ways, the government chose to persuade them with heavy propaganda, fines, and forced sterilization. Without these methods to make sure that the people would obey the policy, China's One-Child Policy would not have succeeded in slowing down the growth of the population. Current countries that are facing the same population crisis as China was in 1979 can benefit from looking back on China's history and their use of the One-Child Policy.

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