

China's One-Child Policy

China has a population of 1.3 billion people, which is 20% of the world's total. But with that comes a lot of problems.

China's one-child policy, started in the late 1970s, is officially credited with preventing 400 million births. But how did this policy come about and why?

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Mao Zedong said there could never be too many Chinese as human resources would be China's greatest defense in the widely predicted third world war. With the Chinese population wanting to make China stronger, the population of China rose from 540 million in 1950 to over 850 million by 1970. But some saw this rapid population growth as possibly having serious consequences. In the 1960s, Premier Zhou Enlai stated,

"If we control population development, we will obtain benefits. Not only will it reduce the burden of the state, increase (capital) accumulations, and enable our country to become wealthy and powerful more quickly ... it will also raise the scientific level of our country so that it will catch up with and surpass that of the [advanced countries] more quickly, and accelerate the speed of our industrialization."

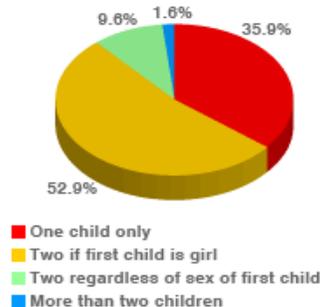
This rapid increase in population led to the "late, long, few" policy of Mao's in the mid-1970s. This policy called for later child bearing, longer spacing, and fewer children and was a largely conventional family planning program. But more was needed to curb China's population growth.

Deng Xiaoping regarded the curbing of population growth as essential for economic expansion and improved living standards, so the one-child family policy was introduced in 1979.

The informal policy limits urban couples to one child and rural couples to two children if their first-born child was a girl. Only 36% of the population is limited to having just one child. These people live mainly in urban areas. Many rural couples, accounting for 53% of the population, are able to have two children if the first one is a girl.

In other provinces, parents can have two children regardless of the sex of the first child, and in a few areas the rules are even more relaxed.

HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE CHINESE PEOPLE ALLOWED?



SOURCE: GOVERNMENT statistics

Ethnic minorities, those not of Han ethnicity, are also allowed to have two or three children because of the small size of their populations and because they typically live in areas with "harsh natural conditions."

The Chinese government says that only couples that have obtained permission -- a birth permit -- may have a child. The government sets quotas for each region of the country for how many births they are allowed to have. Rewards for having up to one child include monthly cash bonuses, free medical care, and special benefits in education, housing, and jobs. For having more than one child, the government issues such punishments as fines, reduction in pay, loss of benefits, public humiliation and harassment, and loss of job.

The fine is based on how much the couple earns, and seems to vary from region to region, but many families just pay up.

A couple is exempt from this policy if:

- the first child has a defect (defects which are allowed are specifically defined)
- in the case of re-marriage if one partner has no child by the previous marriage
- they belong to certain groups of workers such as miners
- both partners are themselves from one child families
- they have twins because that is a sign of good fortune

To promote the benefits of this policy, the government has utilized certain slogans, like "With two children you can afford a 14 inch TV, with one child you can afford a 21 inch TV" and "The One Child Family Policy can guarantee that children will be better cared for and educated." The government has also utilized billboards, too, like the following:



The policy, from China's point-of-view, is fighting against the problems of overpopulation, which lowers everyone's standard of living, as well as hurting jobs, housing, food, and education.

The problems that China is seeing from this, though, are that it is beginning to face the long-term logic of its one-child policy - too many old people and not enough young people.

Also, even though China is the world's most populous country, factory owners are now finding it difficult to get enough workers. "It's very difficult," says William Wang, who runs

a factory, "and it's getting more and more difficult. Now there are a lot more factories and fewer workers because of the one-child policy. Costs are going up. It's not looking good."

In other words, fewer workers supporting more and more elderly relatives.

In the next few decades, this burden will get heavier and heavier. China will have 400 million elderly people. Who is going to feed them all?

Critics say it has led to sterilizations and forced abortions. If a woman gets pregnant "illegally", which means she does not have a birth permit or is pregnant with a second child, then the government will force a woman to have an abortion and then either be sterilized or have an IUD inserted so no further "accidents" would happen again.

Forced abortion continues to be practiced by officials in remote parts of China despite its having been banned by the central government in Beijing in 2005. It is pressure from above to comply with population quotas that prompts local officials to adopt measures such as forced abortion, forced sterilization and the like, says Nicolas Becquelin of New York-based Human Rights in China.

Harry Wu, a human- rights activist who spent 19 years in the Chinese labor camp system, cites a 2003 document from an area of southern Guangdong Province where party secretaries and village heads were told their salaries would be cut in half if, in a 35-day period, they did not reach a goal of sterilizing 1,369 people, fitting 818 with IUDs and carrying out 163 abortions.

About 13 million abortions are performed nationwide each year, China's National Population and Family Planning Commission has said -- about 35,000 a day. It is unknown how many of those are coerced.

Wei Linrong, of Guangxi Province, already had one child and believed that — like many other couples — they could pay a fine and keep their second baby. Wei was 7 months pregnant when 10 family planning officials visited her at home in April 2007.

"I was scared," Wei told NPR. "The hospital was full of women who'd been brought in forcibly. There wasn't a single spare bed. The family planning people said forced abortions and forced sterilizations were both being carried out. We saw women being pulled in one by one."

The officials gave Wei three injections in the lower abdomen. Contractions started the next afternoon, and continued for almost 16 hours. Her child was stillborn.

"The nurses dealt with the body like it was rubbish," Wei said. "They wrapped it up in a black plastic bag and threw it in the trash."

This was also the treatment given to the stillborn baby of He Caigan. Family planning officials turned up at her house in Guangxi Province before dawn in April 2007 to force her to go to the hospital. This would have been her first baby — but she hadn't married the father, in contravention of family planning laws. She was already 9 months pregnant, just days away from delivery.

In October 2010, Xiao Aiying detained, beaten and forced to have an abortion just a month before her due date because the baby would have violated the country's one-child limit, her husband said. She was detained in a clinic for three days by family planning officials and her pregnancy was aborted through an injection that caused the child to be stillborn. Family planning officials told the couple they were not allowed to have the child because they already have a nine-year-old daughter.

The one-child policy has also led to a dangerously imbalanced sex ratio due to a traditional preference for male heirs, which has led to abortion of female fetuses and female infanticide in the hope of a son who will look after them in their old age. There are 117 boys born for every 100 girls born in China, and in some areas the number is as high as 130 boys born for every 100 girls.

The centuries-old tradition of cherishing boys — and a custom that dictates that a married woman moves in with her husband's family — is reinforced by a modern reality: Without a real social safety net in China, many parents fear they will be left to fend for themselves in old age.

Parents who can afford it have an ultrasound to determine the sex of their child, then abort girls. Those who give birth to girls may abandon them or leave them to die. Determination of gender during ultrasound scans has been officially banned for years, but the practice continues. One 1999 report on the International Planned Parenthood Federation website says that up to 750,000 female Chinese fetuses are aborted every year after sex screening.

In 2000, the United States Department of State issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which denounced China for its human rights violations, including the one-child policy. The U.S. Congress views China's one-child policy as a form of persecution and mandates the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services to set aside 1,000 visas per year specifically for its victims.

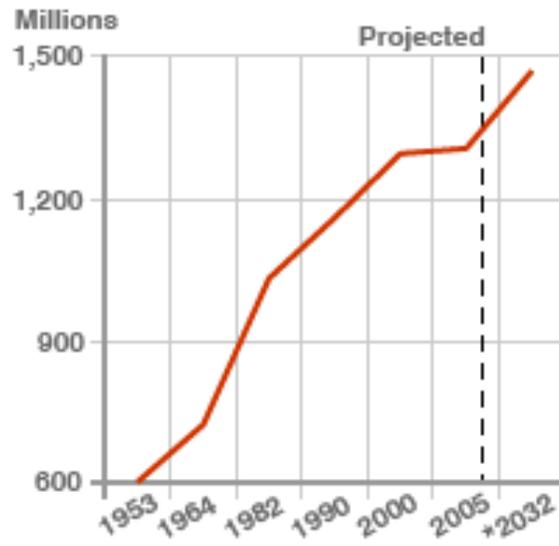
The United Nations Population Fund has praised the policy as the most successful population control plan in human history, though. The U.S. used to give money to this fund, but not anymore because they refuse to support any group that supports the one-child policy.

But as China has grown wealthier, couples who can afford to pay the fines are choosing to ignore the policy and have bigger families.

"More party members, celebrities and well-off people are violating the policies in recent years, which has undermined social equality," said Yang Youwang, director of the provincial family planning commission.

In 2007, over 1,500 Communist Party officials and party members defied the policy in 2007 in Hubei province alone. Of these, hundreds have been expelled from the party and stripped of their posts.

POPULATION GROWTH IN CHINA



SOURCE: National Bureau of Statistics of China

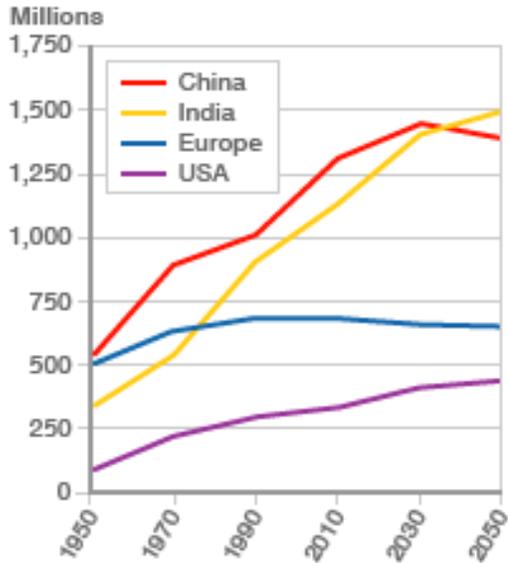
*SOURCE: National population and family planning commission of China



A slogan on a village building outside Baise in southwest China, reads, "Keep the birth rate low to enhance the quality of the population."



POPULATION GROWTH AND PROJECTIONS



RURAL AND URBAN POPULATION

