The Benefits of China’s One Child Policy

Mika Brooks

Palm Beach State Community College

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China has conducted one of the most controversial social experiments: The One Child Policy. This is the law that limited families in China to one child, unless certain circumstances were approved by their government allowing one more. Although seen as a cruel method to dilute the population by many throughout the United States, most overlook the significant benefits that were achieved due to the policy including a decrease in population, economic and environmental support, reform in gender equality, a change in mentality of the Chinese. Due to the success of the one child policy, China has changed the rule to two children. It is important to recognize the advantages that policies like these serve to aid those in dangerously overpopulated societies and acknowledge that they may actually be beneficial.

Although there are benefits that the one child policy brings, recognizing that there are certainly disadvantages that come along with the policy is just as essential. As with any political law set in place, there have been legitimate criticisms. Due to the gender bias in an inherently male dominated work force and country, female babies were often aborted or abandoned which had significant effects on the gender ratio. “From baby girls abandoned on the steps of orphanages to young, rural women sold into marriage thousands of miles away from home. Grossly distorted sex ratios, ranging from 130 boys to 100 girls, have been reported in certain areas” (Evans, 2005). Females were widely unaccepted by many families because males were much more desired in the work force for hierarchical roles, and the family name would not be passed down to further generations. Additionally, China has been experiencing the effects of an aging population caused by the policy. As the people who lived in the era of the policy age, their numbers are not matched by the decreased population growth of China. Those elders will rely on their children to provide for them, and one working child just may not be enough. It is no
secret that China’s policy is not perfect and will have lasting effects, however, the advantages of the policy should be highly noted and recognized for their benefits.

Overpopulation and a poor economy were the two main issues that China faced that fueled the creation of the one child policy, which was decreased the population growth. The complications of overpopulated cities had numerous effects on the environment, the people, and the resources. With cities home to the available jobs, it made sense that the majority of the population would live in those areas, however, this made it difficult for shelter, food, and clean water to be readily available and accessible to the majority of the people, including the poor. China’s government decided that in order to prevent these issues, reducing the population had to be done, and if it had to be through strict laws, then that was how they would do it. On its own, “The policy has caused fertility to decline more rapidly than it otherwise would have - with estimates of the number of prevented births ranging from 250 to 400 million” (Golley, 2013). As a result of decreased birth, as the population aged, the competition in the job market decreased. With less competition in the job market and a lower population growth, China experienced an “increase in per capita GDP resulting in better nutrition, rising levels of education, longer life expectancies, and higher living standards for the vast majority of Chinese people” (Golley, 2013). Additionally, “many of those 400 million possible births could have joined the millions of Chinese living under $1.25 U.S. dollars” (Golley, 2013) which is important to note when considering the economy and availability of resources.

China was and still remains the most populated country in the world, reaching over one billion citizens, which took a significant toll on the amount of pollution and waste the country produced in the overpopulated cities and even rural areas. “In 2015, 3.78bn cubic meters of untreated wastewater was discharged across China, including 1.98m cubic meters in Beijing
alone. This is water that has been ruled unusable for agricultural, industrial and even decorative purposes dumped into rivers and lakes” (Tingting, 2017). These problems have been caused by an excess of people in the cities from the generations before the policy. This on top of poor management of the overabundance of waste produced, with nowhere to effectively dispose of it had caused numerous effects. A couple include contaminated ground water and surface water which in turn caused drinkable water shortages throughout the country. For example, “85% of the water in the city’s major rivers was undrinkable in 2015, according to official standards, and 56.4% was unfit for any purpose” (Tingting, 2017). Many lower economically developed countries like China have experienced water shortages but have high populations that cannot be supported with available water. Due to the adverse pollution and resulting contamination, the one child policy promoted a decrease of these issues as there were less people that needed these resources.

The truth of the matter is that necessity resources will eventually run out, and when they do, there is really no simple way of bringing them back. These necessities include water, air, land, and shelter. With a population that multiplied as quickly as China’s did, providing those resources became more difficult and unsustainable. In order to diminish food shortages, which China had previously experienced before, the government put the policy to use. It makes sense: the less population that there is, the less people there are to feed, which would decrease the food shortages and famines that were so widely experienced by the Chinese. “Furthermore, China was having trouble simply sheltering its growing population, not to mention educating such vast numbers of children” (Button, 2011). Shelter is another necessity that became more and more difficult to provide due to the vast amount of people living in cities where jobs were abundant. The policy was necessary to be able to control the amount of people using these resources, and
without it, the likelihood of China surviving and being able to provide for its citizens would be very low in the long run.

China’s one child policy also brought huge reform in gender equality to the country with a significantly dominant male population, as women were highly encouraged to work. When the policy was implemented, “the government encouraged both men and women to participate in the workforce in an all-out effort to advance the country's economic development” (Nie & Wyman, 2005). This brought change to a predominantly male workforce, and the number of women working grew exponentially. This was beneficial as it liberated the women, and the increase in labor was one of the many goals of the one child policy, which was further excelled. With more people in the workforce, the country as a whole was able to produce more at a lower cost as the quantity of labor was high, creating greater output. With greater output, comes a greater economy since more of China’s citizens were at work which brought in money, a major goal in implementing the one child policy was reached.

Also, rather than complying to the role of a housewife, the women were relied on economically, which turned their focus on a career instead of children, as many of them had to work to support themselves and their elderly family. “Chinese women are performing well in
large corporations in China as well as abroad. Six Chinese women made it to the Forbes 100 Most Powerful Women List in 2015. These women are definitely not living the stereotypical ‘subordinate life’” (Siddiqui et al, 2016). The roles are changing, and Chinese women are becoming more successful as they are more widely accepted into higher positions and receiving greater equality.

Additionally, the policy was actually pretty widely accepted by most of the Chinese people because many of them did not want more than one child anyway. As the costs of living in a city like Shanghai or Beijing was already fairly high, having more children only heightened those costs. As stated by Xiaoli, a female in China at the time of the policy, “In big cities, most people didn't think having one child was a problem. Most people didn't want too many” (Nie & Wyman, 2005). Not only was the cost of living for an adult high, but for children it was even more expensive. Food, school, and clothes for their growing bodies put working families in a tight hold on expenditures. Plus, many working aged people had to support not only themselves, but their own parents, which was far too much for many factory and labor workers in cities and around China. Additionally, being born into a family who recognized and respected the policy allowed their children to grow up also respecting it, as Zhanghui stated

“I was born in this environment, and, to me, it's always been like this. People respect the policy and no one needs to challenge it because we don't want many kids anyway. One child is good for couples. An only child is not hard to raise and doesn't give parents too much trouble. I do not want more than one. I know
some people who don't want any children” (Nie & Wyman, 2005). As the aging population who were born in the time of the one child policy realize the benefits of it and how their own families have respected it, they tend to follow the same path.

Those who complied with the policy were not unrecognized, either. In order to get this strict policy to be upheld by the population, it was important that the government provided incentives to follow the rule. When parents have one child, they receive a certificate verifying the birth, which acts as their “ticket” for numerous benefits including “education, health, or cash subsidies, housing improvements, a longer leave period from their job, and interest-free loans” (Short & Fengying, 1998). As long as the people complied with the one child policy, the Chinese government aided those parents through beneficiary means, which most people did, and received what was promised.

As a whole, although China’s one child policy did have its fair share of criticisms, the strengths of the policy helped decrease the population growth which reaped numerous benefits among its people, the economy, environment, and society, proving significance in the long run. Recognizing that eventually many countries in the future will be experiencing very similar issues as China did is important as policies like these may need to be implemented elsewhere when the world becomes dangerously overpopulated and cannot be supported by essential resources. The one child policy has clearly done its job by controlling population growth to sustain China in the future, which, without it, may have experienced far worse effects than the policy did.
References


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