

Only One: Detriments of China's One-Child Policy

The overpopulation problem is one of the main concerns in the People's Republic of China. With a national population of over 1.3 billion and the continual increase of people, China is getting more and more crowded. Back in the 1960's, overpopulation caused concerns from the Chinese government. Parents, especially those who were less educated, continued to have children despite the fact that they were poor and could not possibly support all of their children. At the same time, the Chinese government was running out of resources to support all of its citizens. Therefore, in 1979, the Chinese government enforced the "one-child policy." It was designed to control the overflow of population in relation to the limited living space by limiting the amount of children a family could have to one per couple. Although this new policy alleviates the problem of overpopulation, the rising imbalance in gender and age and emotional stress on both parents and children cause concerns for future generations.

The one-child policy has effectively reduced the increase of the overall population. However, there are concerns that if this policy continues to stay in effect, the gender gap will increase. Although the one-child policy is well enforced in major Chinese cities, it has not gained popularity in rural areas. People who live in the rural areas, especially agricultural areas, are usually less educated and are more prone to practice traditional Chinese values. One of the beliefs is that the more children one have, the better off the household will be. They believe that boys will be more "useful" to the family once they grow up since boys usually are stronger and therefore able to do strenuous jobs that girls are not physically capable of. With the impending stipulations of the one-child policy and the traditional values that favor boys, girls are constantly being abandoned in the streets. Gender preference creates gender inequality, which results in the violation of women's rights. Forced abortion, sterilization, kidnappings, beatings, coercion, and

confinement cause Chinese women to fall under the abusive power of the government without resort or justice (Irizarry). They have fallen under the abusive power of the male dominated society without the government's protection or support. Furthermore, this imbalance has resulted in two more conflicts: domestic violence and a potential loss of forming a gratified family because of the lack of female partners for many men. Dan Ryan, an associate scholar at the Lion Rock Institute, predicted that "by 2020 China will have a surplus of 30 million unmarried men...who will have no hope of finding a wife" (Ryan). Because the proportion of males will be far greater than that of females, it will be more difficult for Chinese men to find native women that they could love.

Not only will there be an unbalanced gender proportion, there will also be an unbalanced age proportion. This trend is already visible in the current Chinese population. Since I took a personal trip to China this past summer, I saw the problem of China's age group imbalance first hand. As I strolled down my neighborhood, elders were everywhere: chatting with neighbors while they sat in worn wooden chairs and enjoyed the summer breeze or simply taking a stroll in nearby parks after dinner. If the one-child policy continues to be in effect, the growth of the elderly population, caused by decreases in childbirths, will keep rising in the next few decades. Ryan further estimates that the population of elderly in Shanghai, one of the most prosperous and populous cities in China, will reach a proportion of 40 percent in the year 2030 (Ryan). Such a high percentage will cause a shortage in the workforce. My grandmother and many other senior citizens in good physical shape will wake up around five o' clock in the morning everyday and go outside to exercise and buy groceries in the food market. They have leisurely lives because most of them do not work after retirement. As the elder population proportion continues to rise, there will be less proportion of employed people. As the number of unemployed people

increases, there will be less people to sustain the tax system that supports the elders' retirement benefits (e.g. Medicare levies). One of the objectives of controlling the population was to improve the economy and solve the problem of scarcity. However, decrease in the workforce would certainly not strengthen the nation's economy.

While the one-child policy can affect citizens on an economical level, it can also affect them on an emotional level. What if something unfortunate happens to the children, such as illness, severe injuries, or even death? A perfect example would be the Great Sichuan earthquake that occurred on May 12, 2008. "China's one-child policy was brought savagely into the light when [the] powerful earthquake shook Sichuan province, robbing towns of a generation of (only) children" (Godsland). Parents with only one child will be far more emotionally stressed than parents with more children. This does not mean that parents who have more children are not emotionally stressed; since only one child is allowed under the policy, the death of the child will leave his or her parents in destitution as there will be no one left to continue the family legacy in the next family generation. The situation would be worse with single parents. After experiencing conflict with their spouse and later the loss of their children, some of them become stress-intolerant and encounter mental instability.

Since parents are afraid of losing their only children in the future, children who have no siblings tend to be "over loved". These parents, also called "helicopter parents", are extremely obsessed with their kids that they "hover" above them; they "painstakingly [plan] their lives...[but] treat them like little princes and princesses" (Carroll). This upbringing, over time, causes many children to have a self-centered mentality. These children are in danger of being spoiled in the future. That would definitely not be beneficial at all in the long run. Taylor Clark, author of the bi-monthly magazine Psychology Today, interviewed Dawei Liu, who grew up in

the coastal city of Tai'an back in the 1990s. Ninety-five percent of his classmates were only children who received supports from their parents (Clark). There was one boy who Dawei Liu remembered that received excessive support from his parents than the rest. The boy's mother attended class everyday with him, giving up her job in order to monitor her son both at home and at school and to ensure that he got the perfect education (Clark). Liu later commented that "[the boy] might not [have] focus[ed] as much on class if his parent wasn't there" (Clark). It is surprising that this boy could be so overly dependent upon his mother that he even needed her in school in order to concentrate. What if her mother did not give up her job? What if the school did not allow the boy's mother to stay with him in class every single day? Could the boy have survived through school? That I cannot say. Yet, one thing is certain. If the boy's parents did not teach him how to be independent as he moved onto adulthood, his future could not have been bright.

Loneliness is another issue. Most parents are not available to take care of their children every hour of every day. Besides friends from kindergarten, a single child has no siblings to play with. This creates a psychologically unhealthy environment for the child to grow up in. When I was little, my mother would tell me stories of her childhood. When she was young, intermediate family and close relatives would gather together to celebrate the Chinese New Year. Although my mother had only one younger brother, my grandmother had eight siblings. A huge crowd of relatives showed up at my grandmother's house, and the atmosphere, as my mother recalls, was very mirthful and boisterous. Nowadays, the one-child policy impedes children from having any siblings. Because of this, the generations after these children will not have many close cousins if any at all. Therefore, the atmosphere would not have been as lively as it used to be decades ago. Studies have also shown that the prevalence for loneliness among older people has doubled in

less than ten years (Yang). More and more elders are being left behind as younger generations keep themselves busy with their own careers.

Overall, China seems to be progressing rapidly in the recent years. A few factors, such as the economy (i.e. international trade), must have contributed to its rapid growth. In addition, it has helped somewhat in resolving the problem of overpopulation and scarcity. However, the flaws within the one-child policy cannot be ignored. Limiting the population by means of one child per family is not an effective way to handle the situation if the Chinese government wants future generations to have successful lives. Moreover, this policy is cruel and unfair, withdrawing the basic human rights from its citizens. Chinese parents' and their children's lives would be much better if the Chinese government adjusts this policy.

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