One Child Policy in China

The Negative and Positive Effects

B.A. Essay
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Abstract

The One Child Policy in China was implemented in 1979, and lasted until 2016 when it was changed into Two Child Policy. The goal of the policy was to reduce the population growth in order to maintain an economic growth, natural resources, and stability in Chinese society. The restriction on family size; one birth per couple, has resulted in a significant drop in China's population growth rate during the last three decades, but the policy has been often widely criticized for its negative impact on the Chinese people. The policy violated their freedom of choice on family size through fines, forced sterilizations and abortions, that resulted in an increasing imbalance of sex-ratio, and accelerating ageing of the population. Regardless of its nature, the policy had a positive effect on gender equality and quite surprisingly improving the lives of women in China. This essay examines the development of the policy and its negative effects, such as the skewed sex-ratio and social problems caused by the sex-ratio imbalance, the problem of an ageing population, and the often overlooked policy's positive effects which improved women's lives.
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1. Introduction

Because of raising concerns about the world's growing rate of population size in the mid-20th century, international organizations and global forums began to support the establishment of family planning programs. In 1990, large-scale family planning programs were active in 115 countries, for instance in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and India. Nevertheless, the family planning policy that was established in China, known as the One child policy (OCP), is often described as the largest social experiment in the history of the human kind.

The birth planning, program of People's Republic of China, with the one child per couple policy, has been receiving both negative and positive evaluation over the past thirty years. The policy has often been criticized internationally for violating the freedom of choice regarding the family size of millions of couples in China by forcing women to undergo sterilizations and abortions, and the abandonment and neglect of females children.

The OCP was formally initiated in 1979 and it was the first time that family planning policy became formal law in China. Differing from birth control policies in many other countries, the OCP had a compulsory rule of one birth per couple, although the policy implementation and rules has varied considerably at different times. The policy had lasted over almost a quarter a century, but despite its great scope, a long term studies with qualitative data are unavailable in order clearly conclude whether the OCP was more beneficial than disadvantageous for the Chinese society. The series of negative outcomes, currently affecting the society in China such as a lower fertility rate, selective sex-abortion and unbalanced sex ratio at birth, are all rightly associated with the OCP, and those outcomes will have a long standing negative effects upon further development of the Chinese society, yet the OCP might have improved some aspects of women's lives in the Chinese society.

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1 Yi hai zhengce 一孩政策
2 Ji hua sheng yu 计划生育
This essay briefly examines the history of the implementation of the policy in China and its uneven application and distinct rules across the country and among ethnic groups. Furthermore, the essay focuses on the negative and positive aspect of the OCP in China; the consequences related to fertility such as imbalanced sex-ratios, sex-selective abortions, ageing population and its impact on the Chinese society as a whole. In addition, the essay examines whether the OCP have any positive outcome regarding women's equality in China and women's possibilities to obtain better educational and career opportunities. Lastly this essay examines if there is a behaviour change of only children born during the OCP.

2. The Evolution of Family Planning Policy

The decision of the government to limit the number of children to one per couple was a response to the threat of massive population growth that was perceived to negatively affect the future of economic development and of living conditions and standards of the Chinese people. The goal of the policy set in 1979 was to decrease the total number of people to about 1.2 billion for the year 2000, and to significantly reduce the natural increase rate. The OCP has been implemented, with exceptions to the rule, through economic aids and benefits for families that have only one child, but high taxes, fines, and various social disadvantages were issued for the families who disobey the rule. The acceptance of the OCP by the Chinese people has been difficult as the policy seems to conflict with the deep rooted Confucian tradition that emphasizes the importance of having many offspring in order to pass on the responsibility of supporting the elderly members of the family (Festiny, 2004).

It is important to place China's family planning policies in a time context when concerns of overpopulation were high on global scale. As mentioned previously, India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia also had family planning programs with some levels of governmental involvement. However, it is not clear how much China was influenced by those global concerns of overpopulation because in the 1970, China was still a quite closed and isolated country. But it is clear that the Chinese officials were aware that there were those concerns. For instance, during the first UN-organized World Population Conference in 1974 in Bucharest, and also at other international forums,
China denounced calls for family planning as part of an imperialist agenda. However, within the country, the officials were simultaneously implementing China's own population control policies. It suggests that those global scale discussions of population control had, in fact, affected China in implementing family planning policies (Zhang, 2017).

2.1 Historical Background and the Development of the OCP

The OCP first introduced in 1979 was a set of regulations and rules governing the approved size of Chinese families. However this was not the first attempt by the Chinese government to control the growth of its population. The government had an ambivalent, but generally positive outlook on childbearing in the 1950 when the population size was close to 550 million inhabitants. In addition, during the Great Leap Forward movement in 1958, Mao Zedong, the chairman of the Communist Party between 1949-1976, pronounced the idea that a larger population is better for China's economy, and the population size was increasing rapidly (Zhang, 2017).

During a famine that took place during the Great Leap Forward movement, in 1958. China's fertility rate decreased significantly, but after the famine the fertility rates rebounded, and the birth rate reached more than six births per woman in the early 1960s due to the improvement of maternal and child health and the fall of mortality rates. As a result, the initial tendencies towards China's adoption of a national scale family planning policy appeared in 1960s when the population size was growing, and Deng Xiaoping, a Vice Premier of China at that time, called for increased contraceptive use. Based on the data collected during the first census conducted in 1960, China's population size was 600 million. Deng Xiaoping announced that the central governments will begin advocating birth planning commissions, forming them at national and provincial levels. Additionally, a famous Chinese economist, Yinchu Ma, recommended family planning in China to the leader, Mao Zedong.

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Da Yuejin 大跃进: an economic and social campaign that began in the 1950s and aimed at changing China into a socialist society, organizing peasants in communes in order to increase production. The collectivization of farming led to food shortages and the largest famine. See Gamer (2012).
Mao was initially supportive and even considered setting up a national family planning commission, but the quest for rapid economic growth of the Great Leap Forward movement was still on-going, and therefore Mao Zedong dismissed the idea of controlling population size on a national scale. The Cultural Revolution\(^4\), launched in 1966, stopped the initial family planning policies of Deng Xiaoping, and shortly after Deng was dismissed from his position (Zhang, 2017).

By the end of 1969, China's population grew to 800 millions. Economic growth and prosperity began to stagnate. Such occurrence was often discussed in term of overpopulation. Leaders began discussing possible solutions to this problem. In the early 1970s Mao Zedong himself stated that population growth must be controlled. In order to achieve Mao's idea, a serious family planning campaign began in 1971. The propaganda slogan of the family planning at that time was; Later, Longer, Fewer\(^5\). The campaign focused on extending the services of contraception and abortion into the rural areas, and on extensive promotion of later marriage, longer intervals between births, and smaller families. The family planning campaign turned out to be successful and China's overall fertility rate declined (Zhang, 2007). It is important to stress out, that in the 1970s, this family planning policy was still voluntary, but as Zhang Junsen (2017) pointed out, the government controlled the enforcement of the policy among general public; "in each village, work unit, and neighbourhood in China there were social workers keeping records on women concerning their menstrual cycles and previous childbirths, the purpose of those workers was to detect any 'out of quota' pregnancies at an early stage" (p. 43). Yet this early family planning policy was less constraining than the OCP that followed (Zhang, 2017).

Mao Zedong died in 1976 and by 1978, Deng Xiaoping rose to leadership. Deng and other senior leaders stressed the importance of birth control policies in China because they realized that the control of population is important in order to maintain acceptable living condition for China's society. Deng Xiaoping, the leader of China

\(^4\) *Wenhua dageming* 文化大革命: A movement taking place in 1966-76, initiated by Mao Zedong in order to strengthen his position as a leader, reducing elitism in cultural and political institutions. The movement resulted in social and economic chaos, and political purges. See Gamer (2012).

\(^5\) *Wan xi shao* 晚 稀 少
between 1978-1989, began implementing his economic reform programme. Based on population projections at that time, the data suggested that the population would continue to rise, because around two thirds of the population were under 30, and because the people born during a baby-boom, that occurred after the great famine in late 1950s and 60s, were entering their reproductive years. Deng saw population control as essential to the success of his economic reform programme, and the OCP was introduced (Zhu, 2003). In addition, the control over the population was seen as toll used in increasing the GDP per capita in China. For instance, when Deng met with the Japanese Prime Minister, Masayoshi Ohira, in 1979 in Beijing, Deng referred to a development goal of quadrupling GDP per capita by the end of the century. In order to raise the GDP, economic reforms together with a 'Open Door Policy' 6, were to open China up to foreign businesses. It was in the context of both global concern over population and ambitious economic development goals that the Chinese government decided to enforce the OCP in 1979 (Zhang, 2017).

2.2 Rules and Exceptions

In the mid-1980s, many rural families, particularly those with only one female child, strongly resisted the policy. As a results of those difficulties, a list of 14 types of exceptions for special cases, eligible for second-child, permits was published and enforced in the year 1980 and until 1985. The most important exception on this list was that rural couples, with only one daughter, could have a second child. The reason for this exception in rural areas is that families found the policy unacceptable for their life situation; they had very limited savings and were without government pensions. They needed children to support them in old age, and if they only had a daughter, that traditionally moved into their husbands’ family, they would be left alone with no support for old age nor help with hard labour on farmlands (Wang, 2007).

After 1990, the OCP became relatively stable. Although OCP was applied throughout China, local implementation of the policy, such as penalties for exceeding the quota births, or for unmarried women and couples, had often varied across rural and urban areas, regions, provinces, and even ethnicities (La Rosa, 2018).

6 Gaige kaifang 改革开放
The reason for those variations in enforcing the policy in China is that the government was able to control the behaviour of urban residents more easily than residents in rural areas. Chinese urban residents were under direct control of government policies and measures. For instance, many urban residents worked in state-owned enterprises or institutions, and if a couple had more than one child, they were often demoted in their occupation and they lost access to social welfare payments. (La Rosa, 2018).

In addition, sex-selection technology was more available in urban areas for those who wanted a son. A common punishment for rural residents who exceeded the birth quota was a one-time fine. Many rural families were so poor that they could not pay the fine anyway. As Zhang Junsen (2017) pointed out, these complications resulted in a "two-tier policy, urban and rural" (p.6).

The variations in the policy were also considerable among different regions in China. For instance, in the western regions that were less urbanized, the fertility level was significantly higher than in the eastern regions before the OCP was introduced. To strictly implement the OCP in the western regions was more difficult because it meant enforcing a larger social change. Even within the eastern regions, the enforcement of the OCP varied significantly. For instance, within the two neighbouring provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu, that shared many similar characteristics, OCP was more strictly implemented in Jiangsu than in Zhejiang (Zhang, 2017).

Because of the uneven implementation of the policy across regions in China, it significantly altered birth rates in urban areas, while it barely affected the countryside. Even though the penalties ranging from high fines to confiscation of land were common up to the early 1990s, it had become easier to have more than one child because of loopholes and lax enforcement of the bureaucracy in charge. The policy needs to be understood in terms of one birth per family rule. For instance, if a woman gave birth to twins or triplets in one birth, she was not penalized in any way. That is why some provinces had increased demand for twins and triplets. According to Chinese newspaper Guangzhou Daily, that conducted an investigation in which the results found that certain private hospitals in Guangdong province were providing healthy women with infertility
medicines to stimulate ovulation and increase the chance of having twins or triplets (AllThatInteresting, 2015).

Another variation in the policy was that the practical application of the OCP differed for the ethnic majority Han and ethnic minorities. All of the 56 ethnic groups, including Tibetan, inner Mongolian, Yi, Pumi, and Lusu, which account for about 160 million people spread over China, were excluded from the policy in order to avoid the danger of the ethnic group dying out, and additionally to reduce conflict with these minority groups (Zhang, 2007). Han women in urban areas were generally allowed to have only one child, whereas minority women were normally allowed to have two or more children (Zhang, 2017). As a result, many Han Chinese married a non-Han or asserted a non-Han identity in order to avoid the OCP rule (Gamer, 2012).

By early 2000, the OCP was revised and families that exceeded the birth quota had to pay a social compensation fee instead of a fine payment. The new measure was meant to reflect a collective cost rather than to punish individual couples for having more children. According to Zhang Yueran (2013), The State Council defined the fee as "a fee paid by citizens giving birth extra-legally, in order to compensate for the government's public goods spending, adjust the consumption of natural resources, and protect the environment"(Zhang, 2013). The social support fee is officially defined as an 'administrative fee' rather than a 'fine', and as Zhang Yueran (2013) suggested, all the information about its collection and spending "should, therefore be included in budget planning by treasury bureau and made publicly available." But because the State Council granted individual provinces autonomy over pricing and collecting of those fees and the provincial governments issued only broad regulations, the prices differ greatly. For instance, the government in Beijing require that the fee or fine for every out of quota child to be "six to ten times the average annual income of local residents" and the amount of the payment is often settled through negotiations. (Zhang, 2013).

The renaming of the fine was considered a first step towards a more gentle family planning policy that sought to improve China's image in the world. In reality, it was the same set of punishments for excessive birth quotas, just with a different name. The positive aspects of this revision was that under the new law, local officials were no longer able to pocket a high portion of those fees and they had to turn the money over to
the central government. This was the first time the policy was legislated. In the past there were only government directives collecting the fines (Taylor, 2003).

In 2001, a large majority of provinces relaxed the conditions for a second birth. Firstly, if the first child was a girl. Secondly, if the couples were only children. Thirdly, if the only child was disabled. By the year 2013, in all provinces, couples that were themselves only children, were allowed to have a second child (Zhang, 2007).

The next significant change in the OCP appeared in 2015, when the government in Beijing announced that the OCP had been relaxed to be a two child policy, allowing all couples to have two children. The law to legally allow couples to have two children was put into effect on October 15th 2015 (Buckley, 2015). Nevertheless, the limits and penalties on additional births for unmarried couples and women remained unchanged. The social compensation fee might be up to 10 times of the couples or singleton mothers annual salary. Such high fees often forced women to go for an abortion. The public reaction to the party leaders’ decision on two child policy has been restrained. Many Chinese citizens in Beijing, who were asked if they welcome the chance to have two children, expressed reluctance or indifference, only a minority of them was pleased (Taylor, 2003; La Rosa, 2018). Such reaction from the public is better observed through statistical numbers of births per women; In 2015 the birth ratio per woman was 1.617 and at the end of 2006, the number rose to 1.624, the increase is therefore, negligible (WorldBank, 2017).

Because the birth rates seems to be stagnating, the Chinese government had ordered a research on the childbirth restrictions in the country, and on the possible effects of removing the restrictions altogether in order to avert the prognosis of ageing population (La Rosa, 2018). The State Council is currently discussing the possibility of abolishing the family size restriction policies that would enable parents to decide independently how many children they want (Buckley, 2015).
3. Negative Effects of One Child Policy

For many years the authorities in China claimed that the OCP was the main contributor to China's growth and economic transformations. But more than 30 years of the enforcement of the policy within China by the governmental commission could not leave the country without any side effects. China's population is now ageing rapidly and gender imbalance is beginning to cause serious social issues. Furthermore, China's ageing population is supported by a rapidly decreasing workforce. In 2016, there were 17.9 million births in the country, and the number dropped down to 17.2 million births in 2017. With almost 1.4 billion people, China has the world's largest population but it is aging rapidly even before reaching its expected peak of 1.45 billion people in 2029 (Phys, 2018).

China's full implementation of the two-child policy, allowing each urban couple to have two children, is an active response to those above-mentioned challenging problems. As Philips (2015) noted, the Communist party representatives announced in a statement through Xinhua, an official news agency of China, that the "change of policy is intended to balance population development and address the challenge of an ageing population." Additionally, according to experts on demography, the relaxation of family planning rules in China is will highly unlikely have a lasting demographic impact on the population growth. (Philips, 2015)

In urban areas couples are hesitant to have a second child because of the high cost connected to raising a second child. In 2015, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences reported that the average cost of raising a child from birth to 16 years of age in urban areas of China is close to 490,000 yuan (Wanli, 2016). According to the National Bureau of Statistic of China (2017), the per-capita disposable income in the Eastern Regions for 2016 was 30,654 yuan, where the education of a child is very expensive, especially in large cities. In addition, the competition for good education forces parents to pay extra fees to send their children to elite schools or after-school classes. The quality of child-raising is much more important for a Chinese family than the quantity of their offspring (Wanli, 2016).
3.1 Uneven Sex-Ratio

Although the OCP has been often criticized in terms of the high sex-ratio imbalance, the policy cannot be assumed to be the only contributory factor. It is important to stress that there was a high sex-ratio imbalance in China even before there was any family planning policy. It is because of China's long standing tradition of preference for males, that is based on the patriarchal order of Confucian values, as will be discussed in Ch.3. Additionally, a sex-ratio imbalance occur naturally, over the whole world, the rates in 2016 were 1.073 male birth per female births (WorldBank, 2017). Furthermore, several other Asian countries, that have no established family planning policy, but do have a traditional preference for males, are also seeing sex-ratio imbalance; in Taiwan, the ratio is 1.19, for South Korea it is 1.12, and parts of northern India, the number is 1.20 (Hesketh, 2005). China's OCP had successfully reduced the fertility rate and China's population growth stagnated, but the decrease in birth rate also brought about unintended side effect of the increasing distortion in sex-ratio among males and females in the country.

Since the beginning of the OCP in China, there has been an increase in the reported sex-ratio. In 1979 it was 1.06, in 1988 the number went to 1.1,1 and up to 1.17 in 2001. The data collected in 2001 by the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Survey, which was carried out among a representative sample of 39,600 women of reproductive age, showed that the increase in sex-ratio imbalance is not limited to rural China only. In urban areas, where higher number of births is rare, the sex-ratio is 1.13 for the first birth and peaks at 1.30 for the second birth, but decreases for the third and fourth births (Hesketh, 2005). Those numbers suggest that some urban Chinese were making the choice to perform sex-selection with the first pregnancy, since they were allowed only one child. But in rural areas, where most couples are permitted to have a second child if the first one is a girl, and if the second child is also a female, the pregnancy is often unrecorded so the woman can have another child. This can partially explain the high male to female birth ratio as some of the female births go on unreported.

Nevertheless, there currently are indications that the traditional preference for boys, that will be discussed in Ch.3, is shifting. In the National Family Planning and
Reproductive Health Survey, 37 percent of women, mainly younger urban women, claimed to have no preference for one sex over the other, whereas 45 percent answered that the ideal family consisted of one boy and one girl. In fact, slightly more women expressed a preference for one girl than for one boy, 5.9 and 5.6 percent respectively. Although these preferences have not yet been translated into a "normalization of the sex ratio", this may happen in the near future (Hesketh, 2005).

3.1.1 Sex-Selective Abortions

Up until 1999, the Chinese government denied any causal link between the female deficit and the OCP, and all questions regarding the skewed sex-ratio raised by both Chinese and foreign commentators, were considered as 'false alarms' or even 'vicious criticism' (Nie, 2011). A change in attitude of the Chinese officials towards the female deficit problem occurred in early 2000 when the results of the national census were published. In those reports, the skewed sex-ratio became apparent and the government could no longer deny that there is a reason for serious concerns (Nie, 2011).

Sex-selective abortion after ultrasonography had affected a large proportion of the decline in female births. Actual figures are unknown, because sex-selective abortion is illegal, although it is widely known that those abortions are carried out notwithstanding, and women often turn to a private sector in order to undergo an abortion. Non-registration of female births also contributes to the sex-ratio gap. In China, parents have historically preferred sons to daughters, and the increase in the sex-ratio imbalance between the 1980s and 1990s coincided with easily accessible and affordable ultrasonography, and not to a large degree because of a change in enforcement of the OCP. It is quite likely that even without the OCP, the sex-selective abortions would continue, although it would possibly be less common (Hesketh, 2005). The numbers from 2000 show a female to boy birth ratio of 1.2 across China. Nowadays, the fact that almost 40 million girls are 'missing' in China is widely reported and discussed in the Chinese mass media (Nie, 2011).

In recent years, despite the general improvement in infant health care in China and the government's public promotions of girls, the number of male children below the age of 15 exceeds the number of female children by 13 percent. The sex-ratio distortion
in China is due to prenatal discrimination against females. In the past, the extent of prenatal sex-selection during pregnancy was limited by the unreliability of traditional methods of identifying the sex in the uterus, but in the early 1980s, population control officials sent portable ultrasound machines to many cities across the nation in order to improve health services. Those machines were often used for sex-selective abortion until those abortions became illegal. Theoretically, prenatal diagnoses are legally only allowed by authorized hospitals to diagnose certain hereditary diseases, and individuals or clinics violating this ban are penalised, but women undergo the diagnoses despite those regulations and laws, turning to private, and illegal sector that offers those sex-selective abortions. This is partially responsible for the severe imbalance in the sex-ratio at birth, which constitutes the most significant contributor to the phenomenon referred to as 'missing girls' (Nie, 2011).

Even though the National Commission for Family Planning and the Ministry of Health had issued a regulation in 1989 that prohibited prenatal diagnosis at the mother's request, sex-selective abortion has been widely practised in China over the past three decades. In addition, available data also indicate that after having sons, parents appear to practice sex-selection to ensure the birth of a daughter. In the 2000 census, mothers with two sons who have a third child have a 61 percent chance of having a daughter, which indicated the practice of a sex-selective abortion. According to a field research on sex-selective abortion in China in 1994, 7 percent of male foetuses are aborted following ultrasound, and this is consistent with qualitative evidence that Chinese parents prefer a daughter after having sons. The motives for having a daughter for a family from rural areas are also financial. Especially in those rural areas where education and literacy rates are low, villagers refer to a second son as a 'heavy burden'. To have a second son requires a new house at the time of his marriage, which may cost up to 10 years of annual income of one family. That is why mothers un rural China prefer at least one daughter in order to save financial resources and to help with their household (Ebenstein, 2010).

Another additional cause of the sex-ratio distortion is the adoption of unwanted
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girls by Chinese families with no daughters. While published figures indicated that only
10,000 adoptions occur per year in China, some have estimated that as many as 500,000
adoptions take place if informal adoptions are included. Although adoption within
China is common, external migration via adoption is much less common and cannot
explain these results. China has been the number one source of foreign-born children
adopted by Americans adopt from China 3500 children per year with mostly girls and
some boys with handicaps, all predominately from south-east of China. The State
Department granted 6,493 visas to Chinese orphans in 2006 (Belluck, 2006). Those
numbers represents only a negligible share of the 'missing girls' (Ebenstein, 2010).

3.2 Ageing population

The ageing of population has been a global phenomenon in all modern societies.
It largely because of the improvement in nutrition, health care and medication that is
also connected to the extension of life expectancy. The increased ageing of China's
population is a side product of the implementation of the OCP. Before the policy
Chinese population was mainly consisting of young people, and those above the age of
65 only accounted for 4.4 percent in 1953. The proportion of population of age between
0 and 14 dropped from 40.7 percent in 1964 to 19.5 percent in 2005. According to those
numbers, the proportion of 65 years old or older increased from 4.9 percent in 1982 to
9.1 percent in 2005. The proportion of elderly people in China is expected to grow to
13.2 percent by 2025 to 22.7 percent by 2050 (United Nations, 2001).

Although these figures are lower than those in most industrialised countries,
especially in Japan, where the proportion of people over the age of 65 years is 20
percent, a lack of adequate pension coverage in China means that financial dependence
on offspring is still necessary for approximately 70 percent of elderly people. Pension
coverage is available only to those employed in the government sector and large
companies. In China, this problem has been named the 4:2:1 phenomenon⁸, meaning
that an increasing number of couples will be responsible for the care of one child and
four parents. The reason China is changing the attitude towards its family planning
policy is then simply that at the present time, there are too many men per women, too

⁸ Si, er, yi xianxiang 四，二，一现象
many elderly people, and too few young people to join the labour force. With the current population growth, China will have a vastly diminishing workforce to support a large and ageing population (Worrall, 2015).

The rapid decrease in birth rate, combined with stable or improving life expectancy, has led to an increasing proportion of elderly people and an increase in the ratio between elderly parents and adult children. As proposed by Hesketh, "the Chinese government needs to improve access to government pensions and to encourage saving for private pensions in an attempt to reduce the burden of the 4:2:1 phenomenon" (p. 1174). The Chinese officials have been aware of this problem in urban areas since 2000, allowing couples who are themselves only children to have more children themselves. When those only children reach reproductive age, many couples will meet these criteria, though it is unknown how many will take advantage of the opportunity to have more than one child (Hesketh, 2005).

According to The World Population Prospects, published by the United Nations (2001), the fertility projection of China's total population will peak around 2030 with 1,416 million people, and then it will decrease to 1,348 million by 2050. Based on the shortage of working population and their increasing wages in China, the proportion of the ageing population in China will increase by 30 percent in the near future, and it may remain around 35 percent until the end of this century (Zhang, 2017).

Considering that the recent two-child policy cannot be expected to reverse the trend of a declining and ageing population, the Chinese government will need to adapt to the predicted demographic changes in other ways. According to Zhang Junsen (2017), "the Chinese government should consider changing the age for retirement. It is currently 50 years for women, and 60 years for men" (p. 157). In addition, Zhang suggested that China should also consider removing the national registration system, Hukou, in which people are registered as rural or urban, and they are prohibited from migrating. Finally, Zhang (2017) also stated that as China's population ages, the government "needs to pay more attention to the reform of the pension systems in the urban and rural areas" (p.157).
3.3 Social Problems

3.3.1 Not Enough Women For Men

With regard to the unbalanced sex-ratio in the population, there is a growing concern that there are simply not enough women for the Chinese men to marry, and there will be a high number of men who will have to remain bachelors because they are unable to find a suitable partner. Those men are identified by a Chinese phrase 'bare branches'. Many sociologists in the USA and the UK have suggested that the uneven male-to-female ratios in China may become a source of large-scale domestic unrest. At least 18 studies by Chinese scholars have also drawn attention to the many serious problems that the female deficit may cause for the whole Chinese society; communities, families, and individual men and women (Nie, 2011).

The Chinese government has acknowledged the potentially disastrous social consequences of this sex-imbalance. The shortage of women may lead to increased mental health problems and socially disruptive behaviour among men and in addition, it will leave some men unable to marry and have a family altogether. The lack of women has led to an increase in kidnapping and trafficking of women for marriage and it increased the number of commercial sex workers, with a potential rise in human immunodeficiency virus infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. There are fears that these consequences could be a real threat to China's stability in the future (Hesketh, 2005). Based on recent reports, Chinese gangs are beginning to traffic Vietnamese and North Korean women for Chinese would-be husbands. This rising problem is particularly alarming and suggest the 'marriage market' could become an even larger policy issue in the future. A long history of male preference and the "economic realities favouring sons in China" make it a long standing problem that might take many decades to resolve (Ebenstein, 2010).

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9 Guanggun 光棍
3.3.2 Unregistered Children

All new born children have to be registered in the national registration. In China, the birth registration (BR) refers to the system that records a child's birth, states the child's citizenship, and registers its permanent residence, it is known as *Hukou*\(^{10}\). Every born child is registered in the Hukou, and the registration is one of the most important components of the household management system in China. Unregistered children are referred to as 'black children'\(^{11}\) and the estimated number of those children remains unknown, because of lack of academic studies based on data analysis focusing on the issue of unregistered children (Choi, 1999).

The regulations of the Hukou registration were issued in 1958, "and it was an important symbol of the formal establishment of a unified administrative policy for urban and rural citizens" (Feldman, 2010). The regulations states that the household, relatives, or foster parents of the newborn baby should apply at the Hukou registry office at the place of the permanent residence of the baby for its BR within 30 days after the birth (Feldman, 2010).

As mentioned previously, in order to enforce the OCP, families were discouraged from having more than the allowed number of children per family by having the government limiting or removing the family's access to social benefits and privileges regarding education, living accommodations, and access to health care as well as monetary aid. In many cases, especially in urban areas, families had to pay severe fines and fees in order to be allowed more children. At the height of the OCP, it was common for a woman who became pregnant with a girl to choose to give birth to her baby in secret in order to have another child, possibly a boy, that would be registered in the Hukou. Those children that were not registered in the Hukou were at serious disadvantage, unable to obtain a proper health care and education. This discriminatory designation and the differences in rights from registered children have a negative impact on the child's future development (Feldman, 2010).

If a child is not registered in Hukou, it means that he or she will not be protected under the law, and will not be able to access any social welfare, health care, and

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10 *Hukou* 11 *Heihaizi* 黑孩子
education. Without a registration in Hukou, children do not obtain nationality and citizenship, nor can they be independent as individuals. Furthermore, children cannot easily enter school or may be asked to pay extra fees to be accepted to any school at all. Those black children might not be able to, when they become adults, to get a legal employment or get married (Feldman, 2010).

4. Quality of Life for Women

The vast majority of research on the OCP, concerning women's well being, has been primarily focusing on the negative effects the policy had on women's life in China. As previously discussed, the increase of abortions, female infanticide, unreported births, and an imbalance ratio of males and females among the population, are all undeniable facts, but a very few researches point out beneficial factors of the policy (Sudbeck, 2012). As suggested by Deutsch (2006), "it is important to note that this family policy can have unintended consequences for women, whether for good or for ill" (p.385).

A balanced view of the policy needs to be taken in account, not only the negative aspects, but also the positive aspects. Especially how the low fertility rates, produced by the policy, had helped women to pursue careers and education that increased their abilities to provide financially for their parents in old age, and thus proving that daughters can be as filial as sons and they deserve to be treated equally (Fong, 2002). The limit of the size of a family had helped to transform the structure of Chinese families, especially its two basic components; filial piety and the the position of women and girl in China within the patriarchal structure (Deutsch, 2006).

Even though the OCP had been controlling the women's freedom to decide for themselves the size of their families, the policy might, to some degree, allow Chinese women to achieve a greater social equality than ever before. Since the implementation of the OCP, China has experienced changes in filial piety and patrilineality. In rural areas, where sons have been preferable offspring into a family, singleton daughters born during the OCP have received a greater parental investment, and consequently greater gender equality. According to Sudbeck (2012), "the OCP, had helped to transform the Chinese society into one in which the patrilineal kinship system may finally cease to be a significant factor in everyday life" (p.55). This development within the Chinese
society had been particularly helped by the increasing empowerment of Chinese women through rapid expansion of schooling and job opportunities that opened up for women after the OCP had been implemented (Hong, 1987).

4.1 Context of Male Preference in China

For centuries, Chinese families have reflected Confucian ideals. Children were instilled with the values of filial piety toward their parents, which included respect, obedience, and the obligation to care for elderly parents and respond to their needs. A collective sense of self was encouraged in which family needs and honour were of greater importance than personal desires. Family roles were also highly gendered. The Chinese family has been described as patriarchal where women were supposed to follow the Three Obedience rule12; obey their fathers, their husbands, and ultimately, their sons. Daughters were expected to leave their natal families and become part of their husbands' families. Stem families included one married son and his wife and children (Deutsch, 2006). Confucian influence together with dominance of an agricultural economy are both significant factors in the historical promotions of the Chinese preference for large families, especially those with many sons (Sudbeck, 2012). Sons were not only viewed as the labourers of the family, they supported the older generation, they are the ones who continue the family line, therefore couples always felt obliged to have a son to their family. The preference for sons was clearly observable in China and Hong Kong during the 1950s and 1960s, according to Sudbeck (2012), "there was a common name given to girls; die di, which translates as bring a younger brother" (p.44). Thus expressing the desire for sons within the culture. Customarily, Chinese couples ensured having a son by producing more children. The son is the one who will carry on the family name, the continuation of the family tree is one of the filial obligations. Parents relied heavily on their sons for their security in old age, that is why they invested more in sons than daughters. In addition, the preference for male offspring was especially dominant in rural areas because sons are the ones who are valuable in helping to do hard manual labour on farm lands in order to support the family. Because of the patriarchal system in China, men were the ones making any major decisions in the family, concerning

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12 Sancong 三从
marriage and other family matters, and they were the main source of financial income for a family. Women were mostly working on farmlands, taking care of the household and raising children, thus deprived of the possibilities to develop their potentials (Sudbeck, 2012).

### 4.2 Women's Position in China Before the OCP

Even though China's leaders began to transform property and marriage laws together with labour relations after the Communist revolution in 1949. In reality, it did not improve women's status as much. It became important to bring women from their household isolation, where they worked for the family and their husband, out into production for society, but in many parts of China where women participated in the public sphere, in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, the policy of bringing women to work place had no direct effect on women's economic equality, and women remained underpaid and discriminated against (Gamer, 2012).

In accordance with the traditional view on women's position in the family, female roles were greatly undermined and quite powerless compared to males. The low status of women that derived from the classical Chinese family patterns and kinship system with its emphasize on male centrality, deprived women from legal rights to own properties or to get divorced. The possibility for women to get divorced or to own a property was only allowed after 1950, with many obstacles for women to undergo in order to get divorced legally or to own a property (Gamer, 2012).

On a positive side, women, as well as men, have benefited from the reform and opening up policies that took place in 70s, and new occupational and educational possibilities became available. Especially younger women began "to draw on their education" and greater exposure to the outside world to take a risk in seeking urban and non-farming related employment (Gamer, 2012). Those trends helped to undermine the patriarchal order within China's society. When the OCP had been implemented, it harmed women in depriving them of their choice in family planning, and additionally

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13 The Communist victory over the Nationalistic government of Chiang Kai-sheg and the Guomindang party resulting in the formation of the Peoples' Republic of China with Mao Zedong as the leader. See Gamer 2012
the restriction on family size had underlined the preference for sons in China, especially in rural areas where it lead to high infanticide, abortions of females foetuses and skewed sex ratio, but it also worked against patriarchal demands for large families. With more women "educated and less encumbered by reproduction", more possibilities became available for them (Gamer, 2012).

4.3 Beneficial Factors of the OCP for Women

As stated by Sudbeck (2012), "gender inequality can be attributed to a universal opposition between the domestic orientation of women and the orientation of predominately men into public spheres" (p.54). Additionally Sudbeck (2012) proposed that "the fertility transition accompanied by modernization not only enables but compels women to devote themselves to work and education rather than only motherhood" (p.54). With the adoption of a modern economy and the OCP, China has seen an increase in women's employment rates and diminishing parental bias against daughters as they begin to earn money (Sudbeck, 2012).

While acknowledging the abuses on women the OCP had caused, a prominent Chinese feminist, Li Xiaojiang, argued that the OCP policy ultimately have great benefits for women. Li stated that prior to the OCP, Chinese women did not exercise reproductive choice. Fertility decisions were controlled by husbands' families. According to Deutsch (2006), the policy liberated women from these demands and allowed them to "talk back to their husbands" (p. 369). Because of the limiting fertility women were to able to develop their intellectual potential (Deutsch, 2006).

The OCP indirectly challenged the traditional patrilineality in China. If parents only have one child and that child is a daughter, the parents must depend on her for their future economic welfare. Arguably, this changed family dynamic and the daughters became valuable to their parents and the parental investments. The destruction of patrilineal norms and behaviour will need a long period of time in order to help creating gender equality. But there are already clear signs, in the Chinese society, of equal treatment of only sons and daughters (Deutsch, 2006). Based on an ethnographic study of families with adolescent students in the city of Dalian in the Liaoning province, the results revealed that parents' attitudes toward daughters were changing because of their
status as only children. Mothers, with only children provide more help to their own parents than they otherwise would if they had more children. This challenge to patrilineal norms, in turn, encouraged women and their husbands to count on their own daughters' future help. According to Deutsch (2006), "Chinese parents' increasing support and in their daughters' achievements may represent enlightened self-interest" (p.371). After the OCP daughters have benefited from the demographic patterns produced by the policy. By comparing the experience of daughters born in 1980 with the experience of their mothers and grandmothers, singleton daughters received a better treatment from their parents (Fong, 2002).

The low fertility rate also contributed to the empowerment of women in China. On one hand, the OCP had freed mothers from heavy child bearing and child-rearing burdens, but on the other hand it has deprived mothers of their freedom to choose their family size. Nevertheless, the policy's effects can be beneficial for daughters that were raised as only children. Daughters that have no sibling, are more likely to be encouraged to pursue advanced education and demanding careers. A high female employment is one of the strongest correlates of low fertility. Education is also likely to help women to learn childrearing practices that lead to reduced infanticide. The adoption of a modern economy increased women's employment rates and parental bias against daughters decreased when daughters became seen as capable of earning money. Before the women's emancipation, daughters could not provide for care or economic support for their elderly parents. A significant obstacle to equality between daughters and sons in previous generations was the assumption that daughters would not be able to support their parents in old age. Because of this assumption, parents avoided investing family resources in daughters (Fong, 2002).

4.4 The Effects of the OCP on Gender Equality

Because women no longer invest most of their adult lives in childbearing, they are more likely to prepare and to commit themselves to careers that was unthinkable in the past, especially in services and retail. When childbearing is reduced to a relatively short period of time, women may find it rewarding to prepare for and to engage in many of the jobs that were traditionally held by men. It has been noticed in many societies
that the drop in fertility is accompanied by a large increase in women's labour force participation. The new demographic structures created by the OCP, together with the disintegration of the patrilineal kinship network could create a climate that could bring Chinese women to a level of social equality (Hong, 1987).

Because of the social consequences of the OCP, one cannot ignore the fact that the rise of a single-child household in urban areas, which now accounts for over half of the country's population, has improved the status of girls and their life prospects. Nowadays the interest of every single child's family in China is the same, irrespective of gender, that is how to best provide for the child. Chinese parents are concerned about their children's education and a large proportions of family financial resources are spend on children's education, which can be expensive and vast in a country with a high-pressure education system, that is competitive from a very early age. The OCP in China has had a liberating impact on the lives millions of women who are now better educated and more independent than ever before (Ren, 2013).

Despite overall improvements to women's lives and their social prominence however, women still face social inequalities as a result of traditional concepts. They are still quite under-represented in professions and high-ranking roles facing common gender stereotypes (Ren, 2013). Furthermore, women in China still earn, on average, 35 percent less than men for doing similar work, ranking in the bottom third of the Global Gender Gap Index, and in a 2010 survey, more than 72 percent of women stated they were not hired or promoted due to gender discrimination. Yet, there are visible improvements, for instance, more women obtain an university education than even before. In 2014, 51.1 percent of enrolled higher education students were women. And women also represented over 50 percent of graduates in 2014 (Catalyst, 2017)

In addition, women are beginning to obtain careers that were previously predominantly attainable by males, especially in politics. The proportion of female representatives in the State Council has reached the highest level in history. Sun Xiaomei, a deputy of the National People's Congress and a female scholar, concluded that "the enthusiasm and actions of Chinese women in politics are driving the country's new development." Among the 2,987 representatives of the 12th National People's Congress elected by the whole country, the number of women reached 699, accounting
for 23.4 percent of the total number of representatives, which was 2.07 percent higher than that of the 11th National People's Congress (Wei, 2013).


4.4.1 The OCP Generation Entering Adulthood

Since the establishment of the OCP, there has been a discussion concerning the kind of consequences such policy could possible have on an individual, growing up in a changing society as a singleton child, having all the family resources devoted to his or her upbringing. While the enforcement of the policy is diminishing, the possible psychological effects of the policy on singleton children are yet to be seen. There had been a concern that being an only child will turn those children into socially inept individuals because an only child is the only focus of attention of his or her parents, thus turning the children into spoilt and self-centred individuals. Such individuals are often referred to as 'little emperors' \(^\text{14}\), who embody such characteristics (Hale, 2012).

Many Chinese parents of the OCP generation children born during during 1980 were worried whether their children will be able to take care of them in the old age, and thus fulfil the traditional obligation of supporting their ageing parents or if they are becoming unable and unwilling to do so. According to Yan (2018), "the entitlement of little emperors, or the spoiled generation is misleading, because it does not specify by whose standards and how exactly are the only children spoiled" (p.255). In the context of the changing social structures in China, the children born during the OCP are faced with a lot more pressure from their own parents, but also from the society. Especially the elders will once rely on their financial support. Parents of the children born in 1980 see their children as their only future prospect, and therefore the pressure on education is demanding. In this regard, one cannot really perceive the OCP generation as spoiled (Yan, 2018).

In accordance with a research conducted by Toni Falbo, a professor of educational psychology and sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, based on data collected from tens of thousands of singleton children from both the US and China since the late 1970, he came to the conclusion that no measurable differences exist in terms of sociability and characterisation between singleton children and multi-sibling children. With the only exception that single children scored higher on intelligence and achievement tests due to a lack of 'dilution of resources' (Ren, 2013).

\(^{14}\) Xiao Huangdi 小皇帝
Furthermore, in accordance with a research conducted by Professor Yoshihiko Kadoya from Hiroshima University's, the results are suggesting that in the workplace, the one child generation is just as cooperative as preceding generations of Chinese workers. In Yoshihiko Kadoya's study conducted through interviews, Chinese workers of different age groups were asked to respond to the statement, "At work, I should follow the opinion of the group". The average score of 'will to cooperate' in the workplace. Based on responses, the research suggests that Chinese workers as a whole are seemingly very cooperative, and it this study did not find that being born before or after the OCP has any direct effect on willingness to cooperate. There seems to be no real difference among the singleton child OCP generation and those born before the OCP (Kadoya, 2018).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

For more than three decades, the OCP had directly affected the fertility of millions of couples in China. This essay explored different negative effects and some of the positive effects the policy have had on population in China, focusing on its intended and unintended consequences. From the negative effects connected to the OCP it is the uneven sex-ratio, sex selective abortions, ageing population, and social problems connected with the OCP. From the positive effects, how the policy might have helped to improve women's lives in China.

One cannot simple conclude whether the OCP has been only beneficial or only negative in general. It is clear that the OCP had helped the potentially problematic population growth in China. Although it is only fair to mention that there are scholars that disagree on the extend of how much the fall in population ratio can be attributed to the OCP, and additionally, those scholars also assume that the economic and opening-up reforms that introduced the market economy, could have had the same impact on the fall of the birth ratio, because similar pattern occurs in the Western capitalistic countries.

The OCP had definitely brought about many problems, such as the unbalanced sex-ratio, increase in crime connected to human trafficking, and there are rightful concerns about the future prospect of the ageing population in which there are not enough women for men to marry and have children with. The Chinese government is
aware of those problems, and that is why the rules of the OCP has been modified several times in order to deal with the aforementioned problems. The policy had different standards for Han, minority groups, or citizens of urban and rural areas. All those different implementation practices were put in practice to ensure peace among people.

Since the 2010, the government has been continuously relaxing the the restrictions of the policy, realizing the growing negative impacts that began to appear in China. In 2012, China's government started the selective two child policy that allowed couples to have two children if one member of the couple had no siblings. Finally, by 2016, the government ended the OCP, allowing all couples to have two children, regardless of the number of siblings each of the parents have. Although the OCP is probably going to be terminated soon, based on available sources, there are many important questions that have yet to be answered. Until a considerable further research is conducted, it is difficult to determine what can be learned from China's family planning, and what could possibly be applied in future decisions on family planning policies in another countries with similar population issues.

While the majority of scholars has been focusing on studying the negatives created by the OCP. Those scholars that are willing to discuss beneficial aspects, typically only mention the dropping numbers in population size. However, some scholars realized that the OCP have quite a beneficial effect on the promotion of gender equality among men and women in China, and ironically how women have benefited from the policy; the patrilineal kinship system is disintegrating, and the filial piety became compatible with females. Daughters born during the OCP had received the same support their parents, would otherwise invest in their brothers. Because of the OCP, women gained more opportunity to purse careers, and they reached higher education than their predecessor born before the OCP. As a result, not only sons, but also the daughters became valuable to their parents since both genders can provide for them financially. Chinese daughters born before the OCP were quite in a disadvantageous positions because of the norms within the society. In contrast, singleton daughters of the OCP enjoyed a great support for their effort to challenge norms that were against them.
The singleton generation was born into a changing society where the family patterns were changing, and where their parents' Confucian views on patriarchal structure were challenged. Those singleton children have received their parents' resources and all their attention, but they did not turn to be socially inept or spoiled. Quite the contrary, they were pressed into working harder and to do better to ensure that their parents would have enough of financial support in their old age, be it a son or a daughter, it became irrelevant. Especially in the urban areas once a family only had one child to rely on.

Some may argue that China still has not reached gender equality, and Chinese society still has a dominant preference for males. It may be true in some aspects, but it should be seen as a developing process, and a large change cannot happen in a short time frame. By having relatively small changes to ensure women's rights and access to education and other resources, more progressive advancements of gender equality will emerge in China in upcoming years.
References


