

LATE, LONGER, FEWER

“Late, Longer, Fewer” is the translation of a 1970s Chinese campaign that encouraged later marriages, longer intervals between children, and fewer children as a means to liberating women.



Year	1953	1964	1982	1990	2005	2010
Total Population	601,938,035	723,070,269	1,031,882,511	1,160,017,381	1,306,280,000	1,370,536,875
Male Population	297,553,518	356,517,011	519,433,369	584,949,922	673,090,000	686,852,572
Female Population	276,652,422	338,064,748	488,741,919	548,732,579	633,190,000	652,872,280

CHANGE THROUGH POLICY

How the One Child Policy 1979, a government-mandated population control initiative, aimed to reduce China's population growth by the enforcement of family size limits.

Implemented between 1979 and 2015, China's One Child Policy was an intentional initiative of governmental intervention that sought to limited family size and growth with policy due to rising concerns of overpopulation. China's family planning efforts began earlier in the 1970s although was not greatly effective until October 15, 1979, when the One Child Policy was officially endorsed by the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. Enforcement of the policy progressed through a variety of means and established a near-universal one-child limit that was written into the country's constitution by 1982. Almost exactly 36 years later, in October of 2015, the one-child restriction was abolished in favor of a more relaxed two-child limit. China credits the program with contributing to the country's success since its implementation and enforcement effectively reduced birth rates; however, many critics point to demographic, logistical, and humanitarian reasons for its deficiency.

REASONS FOR POLICY

- **Ballooning Population from Early Cultural Mindset and Childbirth Encouragement:** People's Republic of China 1949 establishment under Mao Zedong's rule was inspired by Soviet Union policies ("Mother Heroine" award) and initially incentivized childbirth.
- **Family planning goals tied directly to the goals of the Great Leap Forward 1958-1962 and Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976.** These initiatives focused on upheaval, industrialization, and economic progress shifting attitudes to focus on more controlled childbirth plans.
- **Early campaigns of moderate family planning policies began to shape cultural mindset in 1970s.** Wan, Xi, Shao campaign (晚, wan, late marriage; 稀, xi, longer birth spacing; 少, shao, fewer children)
- **International Debate:** following moderate 1970s policies, international debate and organizations exhibit influence from the Malthusianism and other theory suggesting greater intervention is needed.
- **Economic and Social Development Aspirations:** leaders argued poverty would be alleviated and social mobility would be increased because wealth would be concentrated in one child's development. This "demographic dividend" resulted in increased economic growth and increased GDP per capita.

MEANS OF POLICY

PROPAGANDA

- Propaganda resulted in social pressure and cultural attitudes that encourage duty to the nation.
- Already burdened by expectation, pregnant women were harassed when not in compliance to family expectations.
- Written propaganda such as Renkou Jiayu (1981), emphasized the importance of family planning and birth control measures among teens.
- Visual propaganda such as nianhua (New Year prints) were used to convey one-child values in widely accepted traditional art mediums.

FINES, PENALTIES, AND PUNISHMENT

- "One Child Honorary Certificates": if someone had children before the policy, this was a pledge they had to make to ensure they would not have more children.
- "Social child-raising fee" / "family planning fine" : collected as a fraction of either the annual disposable income.
- "Social maintenance fee": the punishment for the families who had more than one child.
- Denial of hukou: a legal registration document that was required in order to marry, attend state-funded schools, or to receive health care.

REWARDS & EVASION

- Couples who only had one child received healthcare subsidies (baojian fei), retirement funds, and larger grain allowances.
- Cash payments or other material rewards were given as incentives for voluntary sterilization.
- Some couples paid fines to circumvent the policy.

COERCION BY CONTRACEPTION & STERILIZATION

- Forced contraception (IUD, IUD inspection, forced abortions)
- Forced sterilization (tubal ligation, vasectomy)

AUTONOMOUS ENFORCEMENT

- Many women elected for voluntary abortion, infanticide, or abandonment of their children to comply with policy and avoid punishment

WAS CHANGE SUCCESSFUL

MARKERS OF SUCCESS

- Even with population increases, effectively lowered birth rates
- Advancement for women in education and the workforce due to shifting expectations
- Increase in GDP per capita

CHALLENGES OF POLICY ITSELF

- Uneven enforcement of policy and expectations with emphasis on stricter regulations for urban areas
- Exceptions made for ethnic minority groups under 10 million people

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES & CHALLENGES

- Skewed sex ratio due to emphasis on having sons
- Growth of orphanages and adoption programs
- Shifted value focus from elderly to male infants (little emperor phenomenon)
- Significant decrease in the availability of family caregivers for the elderly in China

I believe change was successful in the objective means of making change. The policy undeniably fulfilled the intention of dropping birth rates which resulted in a ripple effect of many unintended consequences. One example of this ripple effect was the emergence and increase of China's transnational adoption program that was enabled between 1992-2024. I have personally seen the impact of this change as one of the international adoptees that made their way to the United States due to the social effects of the policy.

A VERY BRIEF TIMELINE



SHAPE OF CHANGE



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