

# The One Child Policy

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### Geography Essay

China has one of the strongest economies in the world, and is one of the most technologically advanced countries too. Nevertheless there are darker aspects to its nature. One of these is that a significant number of baby girls are being abandoned – or sometimes even murdered soon after birth. Some blame the One Child Policy, although this does not answer the question: why girls? This essay shall delve into the factors that could be the cause.

The death rate in China has dropped from 30 per 1000 people to 15 per 1000 people. This is because in the in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the economy had grown tremendously. Healthcare, technology and better living conditions are just some of the results of the economic growth. They are also causes of the high birth rate. In fact, since 1985, the birth rate has remained 17.8 births per 1000 (the population being 1.2 billion, accounting for  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the world's population). One would have concurred that because of China's massive size, it would not be such a problem. However, China has a varying landscape. Deserts, mountains, and rainforests are all present in China, and are also uninhabitable, so almost all of the population live in cities in central and southern China. As a result of the low death rate, and the steady high birth rate, the population of the People's Republic of China is still increasing. As cities are becoming overpopulated, the Chinese government is forced to buy farmland to build new houses. This puts strain on the food farmers due to their unfortunately small amount of land, and they are unable to provide and sell a lot of food. This causes the risk of a food shortage, leading to a nationwide famine. Since 1949,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the country's farmland has been sold to make

bigger cities and towns. In due course of the low amounts of food being produced, food prices have gone up.

All of these points worried the government. Food shortages, inflation of food prices, and worst of all, the population was still rising. With such a high population, the government found it increasingly difficult to provide a good quality of living to all. So, in 1979, the government put the One Child Policy into action. The new law permitted couples to have only one child (two in the countryside if the first was a girl, which is influenced by the traditional values that I shall talk about a little later). If they had more than one child, the pregnancy is terminated (by force) and both of the couple are sterilised. Also the parents would be fined large sums of money. The introduction of this policy caused many controversies. One positive outcome is that if there are less people to feed, and houses to be built, the economy will grow even more. Another positive aspect is the government are able to provide a better standard of living to all because it is easier to maintain a smaller population. However, there are some negative points. One of these is the punishments of breaking this law. If a child is not registered, it is not given any rights to food, education, medical care, housing, and in the future they will find it hard to get a job. Also, punishments towards the parents contravene with human rights. Another controversy is that it is very difficult to support the elderly and ageing population. This is because one child has to earn enough money to help support his family, and pay taxes so the government can pay out pensions.

Now, going back to the fact that in the countryside of China, families are aloud to have another child if the first is a girl. China can be called a patriarchal society because it believes in all of its country's traditions. In due course, laws are also heavily impacted by them too. According to these traditions, couples prefer to have a boy because he can work. These beliefs and values are the main reason that causes so many baby girls to be abandoned or murdered.

Naturally, more boys are born than girls. However there is also a higher mortality rate among the male population so eventually there should be a similar amount of boys and girls. However when the One Child Policy was introduced, the number of baby girls being abandoned increased. This caused a potentially large problem for the future. That was that there would be a great deal more boys than girls. With a significantly lower amount of girls, it will be harder for the disproportionate population to reproduce. This also means that the ageing population will grow even more, and it will cause an even larger strain on the national budget. These long-term problems strike questions about the sustainability of the One Child Policy. It is possible that some time in the future the Chinese government may be forced to alter the policy in order to attempt to stop the increase of female babies being abandoned, aborted and murdered. They might do this by controlling abortions, or even allowing couples to have two children.

The One Child Policy has sparked numerous controversies, and prevented 300 million unwanted births. It is also another factor (as well as the traditions, and current state of affairs in china) that has contributed to the increase of prejudice towards girls, and the reluctance of couples to have them. It remains to be one of the most debated laws in today's world, and will be for years to come.