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# The Effects of China's One-Child Policy: The Significance for Chinese Women

Kristine Sudbeck

*Abstract: In 1979, China introduced the legislation of the One-Child Policy to be implemented as a temporary means of curbing such high population growth. Over thirty years have passed since its implementation, and this family planning policy still continues to be controversial. Much of academia has focused on the problems stemming from this policy, such as increased abortions, the underreporting of live births, infants abandoned and/or left at orphanages, female infanticide and an imbalanced ratio of males to females among the Chinese population. Not much scholarship has focused on the benefits of China's One-Child Policy, especially for women. Since this policy's implementation, China has experienced changes in filial piety and patrilineality. In a land where sons have been highly cherished for thousands of years, singleton daughters are now experiencing greater parental investment and consequently greater gender equality within their society. In a country that has been traditionally dominated by males, China's One-Child Policy has indirectly benefited the role of women in society.*

## *Introduction*

For thousands of years, sons have been highly revered in Chinese culture. Sons were expected to carry on the honor of the family name, wealth, and the expectation to provide for his parents. Males dominated all aspects of Chinese life. In 1979, China introduced one of the world's most extreme state mandated policies for population control, one in which all married couples were to be restricted to having only one child. Even immediately after its implementation, the Chinese continued to believe in this cultural value in males.

Now, after thirty-two years of the One-Child Policy, those who were born as an only child under the policy are becoming parents themselves. As to be expected, some of these individuals were daughters. Without having to compete with brothers, much more

parental investment has been focused on these daughters in terms of education, pride, and wealth. These daughters, who were the only child in their family, have increasingly become active members of Chinese society. Higher education levels have provided a means for women to work in non-traditional jobs outside of the home. Women's earnings can then be focused not only on their own offspring, but for their own parents as well.

While China's One-Child Policy was first implemented to curb such high population growth within the country, I purport that it has inadvertently transformed the social structure within this society to allow for Chinese women to experience greater gender equality.

### *Context in China*

#### Male Preference

Traditionally, Chinese culture has placed high value on males within the society. Confucian influence and the dominance of an agricultural economy are both significant factors in the historical promotion of the Chinese preference for large families, especially those with many sons (Li and Cooney 1993:277-8). These sons are not only viewed as the laborers of the family, they support the older generation. They are perceived as the ones who continue the family line, tend the ancestral shrine, and carry the honor of his family name. Couples feel obligated to bear a son to be the heir of the family. In China and Hong Kong during the 1950s and 1960s, there was a common name among girls called *die di*, which translates "bring a younger brother" (Chan et al. 2002:427). This expresses the commonality of the desire for sons within the culture. Customarily, Chinese couples ensured having a son by producing more children or marrying another wife. Infertile couples tended to adopt a nephew with permission from a kinsman (Chan et al. 2002:427). Infertility or not having a son is viewed as a "curse in life" by the Chinese (Chan et al. 2002:427).

For many years, Chinese couples have preferred sons over daughters because males carry on the family name. This continuation of the family tree is perceived to be a filial obligation. Family genograms which can be found in the traditional ancestral halls most commonly contain a list of all names of sons and grandsons (Chan et al. 2002:427). The names of female offspring are typically left out, as they will later change their surname after becoming married. It is believed that after these women are married, they belong to her husband and his family. Parents rely heavily on their sons and daughters-in-law for old

age security and carrying out funeral rituals when they die; hence, families tend to invest more in their male offspring.

In addition, male preference is especially prominent among those living in rural areas. This is because sons are valued to help in farming and hard manual labor in order to support their family. Approximately 70 percent of the population still lives in the rural areas of China (Chan et al. 2002:427), which enhances this traditional male preference even more.

The patriarchal system in China is also very dominant. Men are among those who usually make all the major decisions in the family. Gender roles were also very adamant within China, as men are usually still the main source of financial income for the family and women do not generally work outside the home. Chan et al. (2002) notes that women are more likely to be in more casual and lower paying jobs, with less opportunity for promotion, and more likely to be laid off. Females also do not receive comparable benefits, such as medical insurance, like their male counterparts.

### Population Control

China's issue of gender preference was complicated even more by the introduction of the One-Child Policy that was implemented to control population growth in 1979. Over one-fifth of the world population resides within China (Lai 2005:315). This unprecedented population growth may in part be due to the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, which provided better health care, decreasing infant mortality and increasing life expectancy (Deutsch 2006:366-7). China's population at the turn of the century was just over 1.2 billion people, and is expected to peak at 1.6 billion by the year 2050 even after the policy's implementation (Chan et al. 2002:428).

Given this expectation for high population growth even after the policy was implemented, the Chinese government began to meet in the mid-1970s to deter the deleterious effects of high population in a country who was experiencing great economic hardship and a collapsing environment. After the death of Mao and the rise of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, population studies and the planned control of this growth became a crucial component of China's socialist modernization (Greenhalgh 2003:167). By using concepts and ideas with the planned economy, population scientists argued that the population problem was incompatible with the economic and demographic development within China (Greenhalgh 2003:167). Population became recognized as a national crisis; therefore, they relied on drastic measures to counterbalance the well-being of the Chinese

people with economic, environmental and global ascent. From these meetings, the government began employing different family planning programs, one in which was the One-Child Policy itself. These strict birth control procedures were implemented first in cities and areas of high population density, and later all throughout China, especially for those of the Han ethnic group who accounted for over 90 percent of the total population (Lai 2005).

### *The Policy and Its Regulations*

After understanding the context of the Chinese government that was in place at the conception of the One-Child Policy, we can now look at the policy and its regulations further in depth. Population scientists provided the government with a policy to ensure drastic changes within family planning. After the signing of China's One-Child Policy in 1979, all married urban couples were allowed to only have one child. This creates a typical family of four grandparents and two parents to one singleton child (also referred to as an only child). This singleton child would therefore not be replacing the prior generations, dramatically reducing the expected population growth within the country. Enforcement of this policy is held at the provincial level. For any additional child, the couple must pay a fine based upon the province of residence, family income, etc.

In lieu of risking the chance of paying this large fee, couples are encouraged to sign the One-Child Certificate. After pledging that they will only have one child, the couple then becomes eligible for certain benefits provided by the government, such as an allowance for the child until he/she reaches the age of 14, longer maternity leaves, priority access for hospitals and schools, and pensions for parents when they reach old age (Zhang and Sturm 1994:69). Couples who sign the certificate, but then violate the policy not only lose these benefits, but are also subject to penalties from the government. According to the policy, these couples in violation were to be even more seriously punished than those without the certificate at all. One sanction included the return of all benefits the family had received upon signing the certificate. In addition, the couple received an administrative sanction from the government, which included a cut in the couple's salary or demotion within a company, a denial of household registration status for the baby, denial of grain rations, and the refusal of maternal leave (Banister 1987; Cooney et al. 1991; Park and Han 1988; Tien 1991).

Though the ramifications stemming from this policy may seem harsh for Chinese citizens, there are some exceptions to the One-Child Policy. While urban couples were permitted to have only one

child, rural couples were allowed to have a second child under the condition that their first child was a girl and they wait at least 3-4 years (Liu et al. 2004:32). Ethnic minorities were also treated differently under this policy, as they were allowed to have more than one child. Ethnic groups with less than 10 million people (which included all 54 groups except the Zhuang ethnic group) were allowed to have two children (Zhang 1998).

In addition to rural families and ethnic minorities, there were also certain situations that remained exempt from this policy. If a couple was to birth multiple children within one pregnancy, it would still be perceived to follow the one-child (one-birth) rule. Additionally, if the couple was to lose their only child to an early death, the couple is allowed to have another child. The policy was more recently eased in 1984 when conditions were relaxed to allow couples made up of two singleton children (both only children themselves) to have a second child (Liu et al. 2004: 23).

#### *Adaptations stemming from this policy*

After the policy's implementation in 1979, many changes accrued within Chinese society to cope with this significant change in family planning. While some of these practices already existed and increased in frequency, other practices were brought about in direct response to this family planning policy. The challenges that Chinese families faced brought about practices of sex-selective abortion, infanticide, abandonment of children, undocumented children, sterilization, an increase in fertility drugs, movement away from Mainland China, and an unequal gender ratio.

First, sex-selective abortion became more prominent within Chinese society during the 1980s when technological advancements came to the medical field by enhancing the ultrasound equipment (Miller 2001:1089). Keeping in mind that Chinese families traditionally desired sons and given the new strict family planning programs of only being allowed one child, many of these were female-selective abortions. To counteract these female-selective abortions, the Chinese government banned hospitals from using ultrasound equipment and revealing the sex of the child to its parents starting in 1993 (The Christian Science Monitor 1995). Although Chinese laws were in place that prohibited health care workers of informing the families about the biological sex of the fetus, it appears that there is a lack of enforcement and punishment when the information leaked (Lai 2005:324). It is perceived that the total number of females aborted from 1980-2000 in China is approximately 4 million (Miller 2001:1086).

Abortion is not the only practice to rid families of an undesirable child. Infanticide, most commonly that of females, has also become a common practice in China in response to the One-Child Policy. While Divale and Harris (1976) purport that female-infanticide is practiced as part of a system which reduces population growth in societies where warfare is present, Dickemann (1979) thinks that female-infanticide can be better explained as a cultural practice that increases reproductive success. Instead, Hawkes (1981) argues that female infanticide is best explained by synthesizing these two theories when taking into account:

- 1) Relationships among populations and resources
- 2) The way this is organized economically and politically, with special attention to the contribution having children makes to perpetuation of these arrangements
- 3) The different constraints this imposes on the behavior of women and men

[Hawkes 1981:95]

Within China, the most common practice of a child's death during the infancy stage is female infanticide. This can be attributed to families who seek a son as their only child. This practice is especially prevalent in rural areas, as couples prefer sons to daughters because sons can assist in farm labor activities (Chan et al. 2002:427). This can also occur in families allowed two children who already have two children of the same sex and wish to have one of each. These infants are then subjected to poor health care, lack of medical treatment, malnourishment, etc.

Another adaptation stemming from this policy is the abandonment of children, which again are most commonly girls. China is estimated to have one million orphans, with nearly all of them being girls (Chan et al. 2002:429). Many Chinese girls left in orphanages are abandoned soon after birth, whereas most boys are abandoned after realizing visible disabilities or illness of the child (Chan et al. 2002:429). Since most girls are abandoned soon after birth, the parents do not register the child, as they can still use the childbearing permit to try to conceive a boy (Chan et al. 2002:429). The annual number of adoptions in China rose from less than 200,000 children adopted during the 1970s to about 400,000 during 1984-86, which then progressed to over 500,000 in 1987 (Johansson and Nygren 1991). This large increase in adoptions can be in part to the greater number of children available at orphanages, as well as a method to have another child in

the family without getting fined for noncompliance to the One-Child Policy.

As stated earlier, some parents do not register their unwanted child and abandon him or her, leaving them as undocumented children. Other children may remain completely undocumented by the Chinese government and still live with the family. Zeng et al. (1993) reported that couples who already had two daughters and wanted a son could bypass the rules of sterilization after two children by hiding the second child or under-reporting people in the household to the government entities. This may occur in provinces where the policy is not as strictly enforced; however, this child's life becomes much more complicated when dealing with any situations where governmental documentation is involved.

Sterilization is another change in response to the policy, as it has become the most prevalent method of contraception within China. Approximately half of all women of reproductive age have reported that either they or their husbands have been sterilized (Short et al. 2000:279). Sterilization is strongly promoted by the Chinese government. In 1982, the Chinese government advocated sterilization as the preferred method for couples with a second birth (Short et al. 2000:279).

While some couples have complied with the government's family planning policy, others choose to avoid it. Some couples have found this population control policy to contradict their own beliefs; rather than adapting to the country's mandated policy, they move from Mainland China so that the policy does not apply to them anymore. Some immigrate to other nations where they are allowed more freedom in their reproductive choices. Others move to Chinese territories such as Hong Kong or Macau, who have been granted a 50 year grace period after the transfer of colonial rule to Chinese rule. While these territories will eventually come under Chinese rules and regulations, at this moment they have their own government and policies in place. The One-Child policy does not apply there; therefore, families are moving from Mainland China in order to have more children.

Another way in which couples are resisting the One-Child Policy to have more children is with the rise in fertility drugs. These drugs have become widely available and more frequently used in order to increase the chances of reproduction for couples with problems conceiving, as well as enhancing opportunities for couples to have multiple births within one pregnancy. As stated earlier, the birth of multiples such as twins, triplets, quadruplets, etc. is exempt from the One-Child Policy since it occurs from one pregnancy. In 2005, a hospital in the eastern city of Nanjing reported a sharp increase in the



number of twins and triplets delivered jumping from a yearly average of 20 sets to 90 sets (BBC News, 2005:1). The medical advancement of fertility drugs has allowed couples to have better reproductive success, despite the odds against them.

The final and maybe most controversial adaptation hailing from the implementation of this policy is the unequal gender ratio (Hesketh and Xing 2006). This unequal gender ratio may be attributed to some of the aforementioned adaptations, such as female-selective abortion, female infanticide, abandonment and undocumentedation of females. One way to measure gender ratio within a society is by looking at the sex ratio at birth (SRB) which can be defined as “the number of live males to females born to a population within a given period, usually a year” (Lai 2005:313). In 1981, the sex ratio at birth for the majority of provinces in Mainland China were slightly higher than 106, which is the number generally regarded as the upper limit of a normal SRB (Lai 2005:317).

After the subsequent census in 2000, it was found that the sex ratio at birth increased to an extremely high level for all the provinces except one, Xizang which had an SRB of 97.43 favoring more females than males. The highest SRB in 2000 was 138.01 in the province of Jiangxi (Lai 2005:320). Additionally, the provinces of Anhui, Henan and Guangdong had each an SRB greater than 130, with several other provinces with an SRB close to 130 (Lai 2005:321). As demonstrated through this census information, China has experienced a great shift in the sex ratio at birth favoring more males than females. In addition, female infanticide is also more common, which decreases the amount of females within the society even more. There is a huge gap between the amount of females and males within China, especially among those born after the signing of the One-Child Policy in 1979.

### *Changes in Social Structure*

The adaptations that have occurred in China following the implementation of the One-Child Policy have also presented Chinese society with changes in their social structure. Social structure can be defined as “rule-governed relationships—with all their rights and obligations—that hold members of a society together. This includes households, families, associations, and power relations, including politics” (Haviland et al. 2007:155). The aspects of Chinese social structure that have transformed in light of the One-Child Policy are: marriage, post-marital residence patterns, filial piety, patrilineality, gender roles, and parental investment.

As discussed earlier, there is an extreme difference in the ratio of males to females within Chinese society, which has stemmed from male preference practices such as female-selective abortion, female infanticide and females placed in orphanages (which can possibly be adopted from outside the country). This unequal gender ratio may cause many problems for the availability of prospective spouses.

There may not be one universal definition of marriage that applies to all societies; however, no matter who constitutes as the spouses in the marriage union, (e.g. male-male, male-female, female-female, male-intersex, female-intersex, or multiple partners) there usually tends to be a public ceremony recognizing this relationship, a creation of ties between the two intermarrying families, and specific rights and obligations for each spouse. Ember and Ember define marriage as a “socially approved sexual and economic union, usually between a woman and man” (2007:161). This union is considered to be more or less permanent, whereby including reciprocal rights and obligations between the two (or more) spouses, and between spouses and their future children.

Historically, Chinese society has accepted monogamy as the most common form of marriage; however, some forms of polygyny are also present. With the scarcity of females within the population, should China expect to see polyandrous marriage practices emerge? Given the historical context of Chinese preference of sons and male dominance and no current documentation of this practice within China, I believe that the practice of polyandry is not very likely to occur. Instead, males have been seeking females outside of their age range. In addition, Guttentag and Secord (1983) suggest that societies with a relative under-supply of women tend to value women more, and are consequently less inclined to divorce.

While the structure of marriage has been transforming after the creation of the One-Child Policy, so have post-marital residence patterns (Hong 1987). Traditionally, Chinese couples tended to be patrilocal, residing with or near the family of the husband. After 1979, there are now more singleton children in China, each of which may experience a heavy reliance from their parents since they have no other siblings. Post-marital residence is one very important aspect of taking care of one's parents in their old age in China.

In duolocal residence, husband and wife do not live together but in separate homes, which can be near the homes of their own parents. In matri-patrilocal residence, the couple alternates their place of residence. In spite of the apparent fairness of the above alternatives, the choice in China is more

likely to be uxorilocal marriage, where the husband resides in the wife's household [Hong, 1987: 321].

Just as both marriage and post-marital residence patterns have transformed since the policy's implementation, another aspect of Chinese social structure that has changed is filial piety. In a study performed in the early 1990s, the average parent's ideal child possessed 'good moral character' which meant that the child demonstrated love towards others, cooperation in a group setting, good manners, respect for elders, obedience, and *dongshi* which stands for an understanding of adults' desires (Wu, 1996). After examining the differences between singleton children and children with siblings, Deutsch purports that filial piety itself has not vanished with the coming of what was perceived to be spoiled 'little emperors,' also known as singleton children (Deutsch 2006:369). Instead, she found that only children were just as likely as children with siblings to demonstrate as much concern for and responsibility towards their parents, and even more emotional closeness (Deutsch 2006:385). One important aspect of filial piety is to provide for one's parents in their old age. Lai argues that the more developed regions of China should provide some form of social retirement arrangement, especially for families that have only one daughter (2005:324). However, Deutsch notes that filial piety has transformed into something relevant for singleton daughters. Daughters who had no brothers to support their parents in old age began to compensate for the brothers they lacked (2006:369). These daughters began supporting their parents financially with the income they made, and also are increasingly sharing the same place of residence with their parents.

The patrilineal systems are also another aspect of China's social structure that has changed due in part to the One-Child Policy. Since singleton children will not have any nephews or nieces, and their children will not have any uncles, aunts or first cousins, it will consequently only take about 40 years for the newest member in the family to find him/herself without any collateral relatives within the fifth degree, which are the traditional boundaries for Chinese lineages (Hong 1987). This is assuming the couple, their child, and their grandchild all marry in their early 20s and have their own offspring shortly afterward. Therefore, the patrilineal network will be reduced to only the direct lineal kin—parents, grandparents, and great grandparents (Hong 1987:319). This decomposition of patrilineality is becoming increasingly more prevalent as children born under the One-Child Policy as an only child are becoming parents themselves.

Another alteration found in the Chinese social structure is the changing of gender roles within society. As long as women have to invest most of their adult lives to childbearing, they are less likely to be able to prepare and commit themselves to their gender-specific careers. In contrast, if childbearing is reduced to a relatively short time period early in their lives or perhaps completely eliminated, Chinese women may find it more rewarding to prepare for and obtain careers traditionally held by men in their society (Hong 1987). Cross cultural studies have examined that a drastic decline in fertility is accompanied by a large increase in women's labor force participation (Davis and van den Oever 1982). However, this does not necessarily mean that the women take over occupations that are heavily dominated by men.

Since the One-Child Policy reduces the amount of time spent on childbearing, early marriage and early pregnancy would allow women to be freed from child-rearing responsibilities at a relatively young age (Hong 1987:323). Fong noted that among her survey respondents, students expected the division of domestic work in their own marriages to be more egalitarian than in their parents' marriages (2002:1105). In addition to shared domestic work, it is now much more acceptable for women to work outside the home and earn their own income.

The final aspect of Chinese social structure that is essential to examine is parental investment. The differential investment in offspring can be further examined by the Trivers-Willard hypothesis which predicts that high-status individuals will invest more in sons, and low-status individuals will invest more in daughters (Trivers 1972; Trivers and Willard 1973). This hypothesis was first tested among species different than our own, but has since been further supported by Cronk (2000) who studied the Mukogodo of Kenya, a low-status group of mothers who experiences high female-biased parental investment. Furthermore, Irons (2000) has supporting research with his study of the Yomut Turkmen of Central Asian Turkestan, who can be viewed as high-status mothers with greater investment in sons than daughters.

Parental investment, as indicated by the Trivers-Willard hypothesis not only applies to the sex ratio at birth. It also includes the investment in offspring after birth, which may include nurturing of children while they are young, in addition to parental investments in the education, as well as social and cultural development of their children (Hopcroft 2005:1113). Though classical studies of gender in Chinese societies is greatly dominated by the parental investment in males, females born after China's One-Child Policy have no brothers to compete with, and therefore receive greater parental investment themselves. Fong argues that daughters without brothers are more

likely to be encouraged to further their education and pursue demanding occupations (2002:1099). In previous generations, the greater studiousness of girls was limited, since their parents were reluctant to invest money in their daughter's education. Sometimes they even made daughters drop out of school to work and fund their brother's education (Fong 2002:1103). Brotherless daughters are they are encouraged to strive academically and have successful careers since they are their parents' only objects of investment, and consequently the only hope for support in their old age (Fong 2002:1103).

### *Significance for Chinese Women*

While much scholarship has been placed on the detrimental effects of the One-Child Policy, what benefits have surfaced for the Chinese people? Beyond the obvious social and economic advantages of retarding the massive population growth, and subsequently commensurating it with the economic development and availability of resources, such as adequate food and fresh water, the One-Child Policy has fueled a significant change for the benefit of Chinese women that may ultimately outweigh its adverse effects (Hong 1987:318-9). This policy may eliminate the right women have to control their own reproduction, which has inadvertently encouraged female-selective abortions and female infanticide; however, it also has the potential to ironically allow Chinese women to achieve what was once held as an unattainable goal of social equality.

Rosaldo (1974) believes this gender inequality can be attributed to a universal opposition between the domestic orientation of women and the orientation of predominately men into public spheres. The fertility transition accompanied with modernization not only enables but compels women to devote themselves to work and education rather than only motherhood (Fong 2002). With the adoption of a modern economy, China has seen an increase in women's employment rates and diminishing parental bias against daughters as they begin to earn money. After the One-Child Policy, China has dramatically dropped in fertility. The total fertility rate was around 6 during the 1950s and 1960s, and by the end of the 1990s the total fertility rate dropped to 1.22 (NBS 2002). This extreme decrease in fertility has consequently produced empowerment among women.

As stated earlier, singleton daughters have no siblings, most importantly brothers, to compete with for parental investment. Parents of singleton daughters are now encouraging these young women to strive academically, study abroad, and have a successful career. It has become more widely accepted for women to work outside of the home,

especially in urban areas. In 2007 Huang Qinghi, the vice-president of the All-China Women's Federation Secretariat stated, "45 percent of China's laborers were female, with over 4 million women living in rural areas being lifted out of destitution" (Xinhua 2007:1). Not only are women to work outside of the home, but they have also become active members in politics. In 2007, the proportion of female officials at various levels of government and provincial institutions is 40 percent (Xinhua 2007:1). Chinese women are still not as likely as males to hold higher positions; however, since 2001, five women have been promoted to high profile positions (Xinhua 2007:1). Strides have been made towards a more egalitarian society among men and women alike.

### *Conclusion*

Since the signing of the One-Child Policy in 1979, the preference for sons in China has been seriously challenged. While some practices may have been used in this sex-selective process immediately following its implementation, we are now beginning to see those societal norms change. Specifically, the One-Child Policy may transform society into a country which the patrilineal system may cease to be a significant factor in everyday life (Hong 1987:319).

### Strengths

One may already witness the strides women have made towards gender equality within China, such as educational attainment, career choices, and political participation. The patrilineal kinship system is disintegrating, just as the filial piety has been transformed into something that is compatible with singleton daughters. Marriage and post-marital residence patterns have also adapted to the shift in population demographics following the One-Child Policy. Parental investment has also become something not only reserved for sons, as some parents do not have any sons in which they can invest. Daughters have seen a transformation occur that has allowed resources to be allocated for their own success. Chinese daughters born prior to the One-Child Policy were severely hindered by the norms within the society. In contrast, singleton daughters today enjoy exceptional support for their effort to challenge preconceived norms working against them (Fong 2002). Since these daughters are no longer systematically excluded from familial and societal resources, females have been able to prosper towards a more egalitarian society.

### Limitations

While educational attainment, career choice, and political participation following the One-Child Policy may very well constitute as support for better gender equality in China, it is still unclear what impact other factors have played in promoting gender equality. For example, globalization may be a subordinate means for this gender equality to emerge. Other countries, as well as organizations like the United Nations have promoted gender equality throughout the world. The developed countries have recognized women with an allocation of rights, as well as counteracting discrimination against these women. In addition, how significant of a role did the overturn of the government in 1949 to become the People's Republic of China play in promoting gender equality? Feminist movements were introduced during this period, in reflection to other feminist movements going on around the world in years prior.

Others may argue that China still has not experienced gender equality, and Chinese society still has a very dominant preference for males. While this may hold true in some aspects, I believe that this is a developmental process and cannot change overnight. By taking small steps to ensure women's rights and access to education and other resources, we will see more progressive advancements of gender equality in the future.

### Suggestions for Further Research

Previous studies have argued that the significance of Chinese cultural norms on childbearing has been weakened by socioeconomic development and modernization. It was viewed culturally acceptable to bear many children, with the importance being held on sons. However, it has been difficult to locate any published studies in English with empirical data systematically testing the interaction between son preference and socioeconomic development. The Trivers-Willard Hypothesis should be tested in this specific country to report and adverse effects it has had on the population over time. A longitudinal study would be very beneficial in this situation; however, it may be too late to document this. I also think a comparative study between rural and urban populations would be valuable and necessary. Earlier research has focused on the role of governmental control in urban areas with a lack of this same control in rural areas. What effects has this played in the social structure and gender equality of both rural and urban areas of China?

In addition, I have not been able to locate any previous studies with empirical data studying the role adoption has played, perhaps as a

strategy to circumvent the One-Child Policy. It would be interesting to see how many couples adopted children that were not their own biological children, so that they could reach the desired amount of children within their family.

It is also still unclear what the future holds for such an uneven gender ratio. For those born under the One-Child Policy, there is an extreme gap in the availability for females to males. What will this mean for potential marriage partners, the frequency of same-sex marriage, and those who will not marry or produce any child(ren) at all?

### In Summary

Most scholars have focused much of their time studying the hardships created by China's One-Child Policy. Those that do express benefits typically only speak of the lower population and what advantages it has given families and Chinese society as a whole. However, little scholarship has focused on hidden unintentional effects this policy has had on the promotion of gender equality. This review of literature has allowed for a less prominent benefit to surface, one in which Chinese society no longer holds such a disparity between males and females. While China's One-Child Policy was first implemented to curb such high population growth within the country, it has inadvertently transformed the social structure to allow for Chinese women to progress towards greater gender equality.

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