

# China's One Child Policy



## Introduction

In 1979, after years of encouraging reproduction, the Chinese government implemented a policy known today as the one-child policy (not to be confused with the "one-China" policy which advocates the reunification of Taiwan with mainland China). The policy has at times been praised as an effective tool for ensuring that China will be able to continue to support its large population and at times reviled as a tool for human rights abuses and female infanticide.

The policy was adopted to ensure that China, a country that has historically been prone to severe flooding and famine, would be able to feed its people. The rapid population growth that occurred after the Communist Party came to power had put a strain on the government's efforts to help its people. So in an attempt to combat the widespread poverty and improve the overall quality of life, the one-child policy was gradually adopted.



### The Policy

The one child policy, although not formally written into law consists of three main points.

- \* Advocating delayed marriage and delayed child bearing
- \* Advocating fewer and healthier births
- \* Advocating one child per couple

However, the one-child policy does not mean that all families have only one child. The policy is very difficult to enforce, especially in rural areas, where enforcement officials are more prone to corruption and families need to be large to support the parents in their old age. In addition, families sometimes attempt to circumvent the law by sending pregnant women to stay with relatives. The resulting child will be unregistered, making it difficult for the child to be educated and advance in life, but will still be able to support the family.

Besides these *de facto* exceptions to the policy there are some formal exceptions. First, ethnic minorities are formally excluded from the policy, although some have reported being forced to comply. Second, if both parents are only children, they are allowed to have more than one child provided the children are spaced more than four years apart. As more and more marriages involve only children, this exception could be troubling to Chinese officials. Third, families who have children with mental or physical disabilities are sometimes allowed to have a second child.

There has been speculation recently that China may be relaxing the one-child policy. A Chinese official has been quoted as saying that the policy was intended for one generation only.



### **What People Think**

People who support the one-child policy point to figures that show that the policy has reduced China's population by 250 million. This relieves some of the obvious stress on China, which already has one fifth of the world's population. Also, education is very expensive in China, so the one-child policy allows families to concentrate their resources on one child, thus leading to higher standards of education. Furthermore, women, especially urban women, are now able to concentrate on their careers instead of raising lots of children. This has led to an increased role for women in the workforce.

Those who criticize the policy claim that it has led to extensive human rights violations and sexual discrimination. Chinese families overwhelmingly prefer male children to female children, and, as a result, female infanticide is increasing. Also, many people criticize the fact that abortions are often forced on women who are visibly pregnant with their second child.

Furthermore, critics say that the Chinese government is taking a short-term view by implementing this policy and has failed to consider all of the long-range effects. For instance, some estimates put the ratio of Chinese males to Chinese females at 117 males for every 100 females; others put this ratio as high as 131 to 100. The average ratio is about 105 males for every 100 females. Critics worry what will happen when these "extra" males can't find females to marry. In addition, the one-child policy has led to the rise of the so-called "little emperors" - only children who are spoiled, since their parents and grandparents have fewer people on whom to spread their generosity. Studies have shown that these children are less interested in tradition than their elders and feel compelled to quickly

carve out a niche for themselves in society. The Chinese government has been forced to start parenting classes and family clinics to deal with this issue.

*-Taken from the following website: <http://axe.acadiau.ca/~043638z/one-child/index.html>*