

'BIRTH' AND 'DEATH' OF THE ONE CHILD POLICY:  
THE SOCIAL INFLUENCES OF THE ONE CHILD POLICY ON INDIVIDUALS IN  
CHINA

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

The one child policy is considered one of the most radical population policies in the last century. Although the policy was intended to control population growth, it also had social and economic consequences. Despite the national level influences of the policy, this thesis focuses on the influences of the one child policy on individuals in China. In order to collect individuals' thoughts about the influence of the policy, I conducted 50 interviews in 2016 in China. All respondents are Chinese citizens and have been impacted by the policy in various ways. The interviews show that the one child policy has influenced Chinese people in different ways, on the national level. Individuals' desire to have children, opinions about having siblings and the sex preference of children seem different among the younger generation born under this policy than for older Chinese.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

China, a rising new economic superpower in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is about to become the most populous country in the world with a population of over 1.3 billion. Since the economic recession beginning in 2008 in the United States, China's has maintained an impressive high economic growth rate. As its economy grows larger, China plays a more important role in the world's economic growth. China will soon become world's largest economy in terms of nominal GDP by 2026 (Holodny, 2015), but the economic miracle in China is not the only thing that has attracted the world's attention. At the end of October 2015, the Chinese government announced it would end the controversial One child policy and allow all couples irrespective of ethnicity to have two children (Buckley, 2015).

The One child policy that had been implemented since 1979, was ended in 2015. It was initially established. The policy was criticized by both international and domestic scholars and media over the years (Feng, et al., 2012, pp. 115-116). One of the primary explanations for repealing the one child policy is that the policy has been the impact of the slowing economic growth over the population growth rate in China. Other explanations are related to the social issues that are also associated with the policy such as sex ratio distortion, low fertility rate, and lack of siblings in the family (Feng, et al, 2012; Cai, 2010; Feng, et al, 2014).

This thesis explores the background of the one child policy, and most importantly performs analyze influences of the one child policy to individuals especially the young generation who were born under the policy in China. This thesis examines the question

of to what extent has the one child policy affected individual Chinese beliefs about family size and dynamics.

The thesis is composed by three different sections in order to fully understand the one child policy and its impacts on individuals; a background section provides the history of population policies in China and the historic context of the implementation of the one child policy; a methodology section demonstrates what the research method that used to collect the interview data and how the data are analyzed; a discussion section explores and explains some of the social issues that are related to the one child policy.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### **History of Population Policy in PRC**

China in the 20<sup>th</sup> century moved from supporting population growth at a slow rate to attempting to severely limit growth. During the 1950s, China under Mao Zedong's rule followed a Marxist population policy which is counter to the Malthusian theory of population growth (Wiltgen & Herschede, 1982). The Malthusian theory of population growth suggests that population grows exponentially while food production only grows arithmetically. Population size will eventually exceed the amount of available food and will lead to famine (Button, 2011). As Wiltgen and Herschede mention, "Mao Zedong did not doubt that the new economic and social order would permit a resolution of the existing problems of widespread unemployment and inadequate food supplies" (Wiltgen & Herschede, 1982, p.22). Mao Zedong believed that population growth would not cause any problems, even, it would increase production due to more labor forces.

Wiltgen and Herschede (1982) state that although, at that time, the increase in food production was considered the main approach to improving people's living standards, family planning, and health care also were considered contributors to improve living standards. Therefore, the first birth control program was launched in mid-1956 by the Ministry of Health. Zhou Enlai who was the prime minister at the time; his new proclamation stated that "a due measure of birth control is desirable" (Wiltgen and Herschede, 1982, p.23). Clinics were built, birth control personnel were trained and distribution of contraceptives was initiated. However, because the population growth was not considered to be the major cause of poverty in China, the program only spread in urban areas and was absent from the countryside.

The first birth control program lasted for a short period of time beginning in mid-1958, but the program was ended at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward. The Great Leap Forward intended to transform China from an agricultural country to an industrialized country rapidly; it also caused one of the most severe famines in China's history resulting in 20 million to 39 million deaths during 1958-1960 (Dirkötter, 2015).

Wiltgen and Herschede (1982) note that short after the Great Leap Forward, the Chinese government restarted the birth control program from 1962. Additionally, an announcement was made that provided a series of incentives and disincentives to encourage participation in the program (Wiltgen and Herschede, 1982, p.24). In 1964, China's Birth Planning Commission with the State Council was established (Whyte et al., 2015, p.148). Even during the Cultural Revolution, birth control policy was still implemented by the expansion of oral contraceptive devices, for example, contraceptive pills. Whyte et al state that: "China also developed its own version of the contraceptive

pill by the mid-1960s and expanded the national distribution and propaganda network devoted to promoting birth control” (Whyte et al., 2015, p.149). Furthermore, China’s population policy shifted from voluntary to mandatory participation during the 1970s. In 1971, the State Council approved a report on birth control which set the goals for reducing population growth rate from 2.5 percent in 1970 to 1 percent in cities and 1.5 percent in rural areas by 1975 as part of the fourth Five-Year Plan (Whyte et al., 2015, p.149). In the next Five-Year Plan, the goals were even more ambitious, and by 1980, the population growth rate reduced from 1.57 percent to 1 percent in the rural areas and 0.6 percent in the urban areas (Whyte et al., 2015, p.149).

In order to achieve the goals that had been set in the Five-Year Plans, a birth control campaign was implemented during the 1970s (Whyte et al., 2015, p.149). The campaign summarized three demographic components which were “later, longer and fewer” (Whyte et al., 2015, p. 149). “Later” referred to later marriage—at least after 25 years old for females and 27 or 28 for males in the urban areas, and at least after 23 years old for females and 25 for males in the rural areas. “Longer” referred to the longer time interval between each birth to children—at least four years. “Fewer” referred to fewer children that each couple gives births to; the number of children was actually required to be no more than two children for couples in urban areas and three for rural areas, otherwise, disobedient would be punished.

### **The Start of the One child policy**

Since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the Chinese leadership had to deal with the consequences of the Cultural Revolution, including destruction of economy, and disturbance of the society and politics (Feng et al., 2012, p.118). The economic

destruction was devastating; the economic growth was extremely low during the ten-year Cultural Revolution. In order to increase people's living standards as well as GDP per capita, the idea of the one child "policy" formed (Feng et al., 2012, p.118).

The Open-door policy, to connect China with more capitalist countries, was one of the policies that strive to achieve modernizations, so as the one child policy. Although the one child policy seemed irrelevant with the Four Modernizations, the Chinese leadership considered China's enormous population was the main factor that prevented improvement of the economy as well as people's living standards (Feng et al., 2012). The one child policy as part of the Four Modernizations campaign, a goal of reducing population growth rate to below 1 percent within three years was stated in the government's Working report in 1978. However, the goal was not accomplished until 1998. The one child policy allows Han Chinese couples to only have one child by applying disincentives such as penalty fees, and resignation from works since the Chinese government believed that this policy would dramatically decrease population growth (total fertility rate) in China and lead to improved living standards and economic growth (Fowler et al., 2010). The Chinese government claims that the one child policy has prevented 400 million births in Chinese since it implemented in 1979 (Feng et al., 2012). As Deng and other Chinese leaders expected, China's economy took off since the 1980s, both total GDP and GDP per capita has increased rapidly since the 1980s as the graphs shown in Figure 1 (Reuters, 2008).

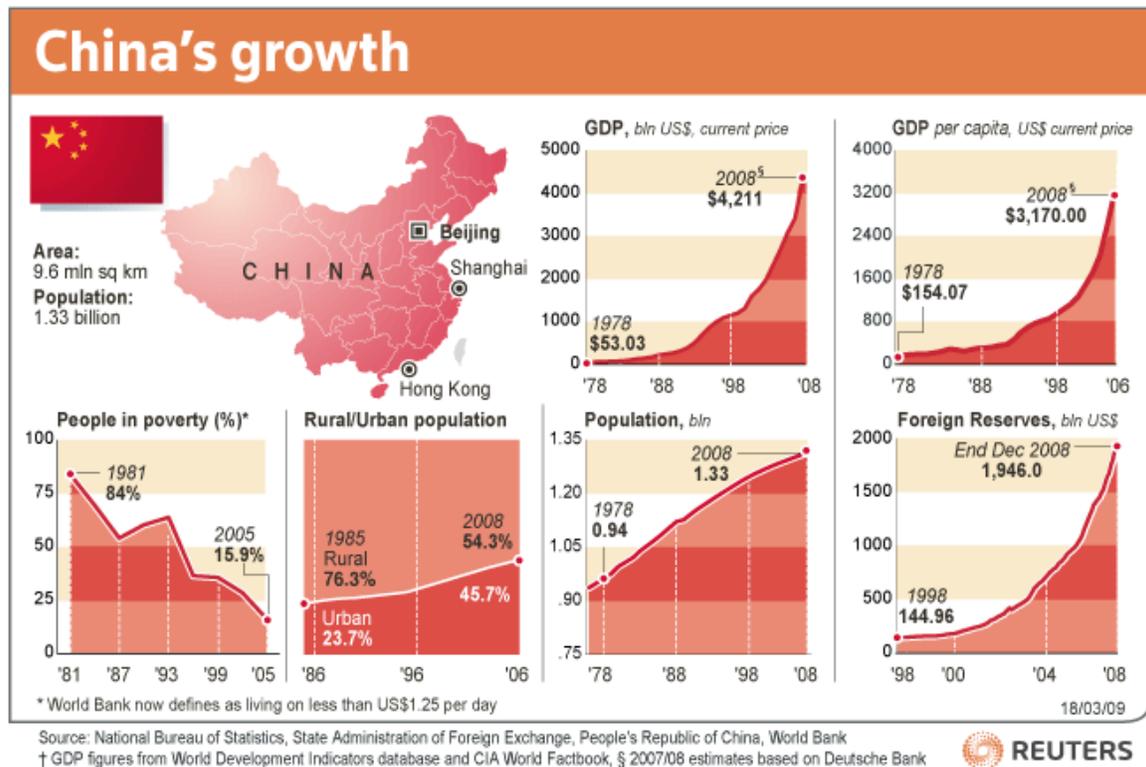


Figure 1: China's total GDP growth and GDP per capita growth charts from 1978 to 2008. (Photo source: Reuters)

Although the one child policy is believed to stimulate China's economic growth by lowering the fertility rate ((Feng et al., 2012, p.119), several social issues have been associated with the policy. According to Feng et al. (2012), the one child policy was only applied to Han Chinese which is the largest ethnicity in the country, counted as 98 percent of the population when the policy was implemented (p.124). Additionally, the policy had more prominent impacts in urban areas compared to its impacts in rural areas (Feng, et al, 2012, p. 124). Based on the Figure 1, approximately 400 million children were born from 1978 to 2008, therefore, the policy has influenced millions of families in China.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to explore how the one child policy has affected Chinese citizens, I conducted a series of qualitative interviews to demonstrate the opinions and views of people who have lived through the one child policy in China. Interviews provide insight into personal feelings that a nationwide quantitative analysis cannot offer.

According to Labaree (2016), a qualitative research method “obtains a more realistic view of the lived world that cannot be understood or experienced in numerical data and statistical analysis”. The One child policy was a population policy as well as a social policy. The policy influenced several social issues that significantly affected the Chinese peoples’ lives. Qualitative research reveals what people think about the policy and how the policy has affected.

### **Interview Sample**

In the summer of 2016, I conducted 50 semi-structured interviews using a snowball sampling method to recruit the respondents. The details of the sample are found in Table 1. 13 out of 50 respondents were friends, family members or relatives to the researcher, then the rest of respondents were introduced to the researcher by those who personally know the researcher. Due to the respondents were in various locations across China. 42 interviews were conducted over cellphone calls; those interviewees were first contacted through emails, then through phone calls once they have consented to participate in the interviews; 8 interviews were conducted face to face at the respondents’ home, coffee shops, and parks etc. All interviews have been recorded according to Institutional Review Board guidelines.

Although the one child policy has affected Chinese citizens in various ways, this research targets the generation who were born under the implementation of the one child policy as the main sample population because the “single child” generation has been most influenced by one child policy the most significantly; respondents from the older generation provide an history context as well as supplemental perspectives to the responses of the young generation.

**Table 1. Gender and age of the interview respondents**

Age groups	Gender		Percentage (%)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Younger generation Age 18 – 36</b>	22	17	44	34
<b>Older generation Age 37 and older</b>	6	5	12	10

**Note: Total number of respondents is 50.**

For the younger generation, there are 22 female and 17 male Chinese citizens across China participated in the interviews. The younger generation is the majority of the respondents due to the main focus of the research is to find out the generation that is born after the implementation of the one child policy. The ages of the young respondents range from 19 to 34. The young respondents come from various locations in China, 28 cities in 18 provinces, 4 provincial cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing) and Hong Kong.

For the older generation, there are 6 female and 5 male respondents across China participated in the interviews to give their opinions about the one child policy as background or supplemental information in addition to the responses from the younger

generation. The ages of the older participants range from 38 to 68. The older respondents come from various cities in Anhui Province in China.

The respondents have various backgrounds that could potentially influence their opinions about the one child policy and its impacts in terms of education background, occupation, migration history and number of siblings they have. Table 2 shows the educational background of the respondents. For the younger generation, all of the 39 respondents have at least a bachelor degree. However, for the older generation, most of the respondents have either a high school or middle school diploma, while only 2 respondents have a college degree.

**Table 2. Education background of the interview respondents**

Age groups	Education levels			Percentage (%)		
	M	H	C	M	H	C
<b>Younger generation Age 18 – 36</b>	0	0	39	0	0	78
<b>Older generation Age 37 and older</b>	5	4	2	10	8	4

**Note: M = middle school diploma; H = high school diploma; C = college degrees. College degrees include bachelor, master and Ph.D. degrees.**

The respondent's occupation may impact the findings. As shown in Table 3, for the younger generation, 38 out of 39 respondents are students while 1 respondent has his own business. For the older generation, 5 out of 11 respondents currently have a job and the rest of respondents are either retired or unemployed.

**Table 3. Occupation of the interview respondents**

Age	Number/Percentage					
	Student	Unemployed	Self	Gov't	Retired	Other
<b>Age 18 – 36</b>	38/76	0/0	1/2	0/0	0/0	0/0
<b>Age 37 +</b>	0/0	2/4	1/2	2/4	4/8	2/4

The place of birth of the respondents is also one of the factors that could influence their opinion about the one child policy and its impact due to the influences from exposure to different cultures, education background and parents as well as grandparents. All of the respondents reside in the urban area now but some of them migrated from the rural area to the urban area. Respondents who grew up in the rural area could have different perspectives of interpreting different issues that are related to the one child policy. As in Table 4, for the younger generation, 35 out of 39 respondents were born and raised in the urban area while 4 respondents were born and raised in the rural area. For most of the older generation, they were born and raised in the rural area.

**Table 4. Place of birth of respondents**

Age groups	Total		Percentage (%)	
	Born Urban	Born Rural	Born Urban	Born Rural
<b>Younger generation Age 18 – 36</b>	35	4	70	8
<b>Older generation Age 37 and older</b>	3	8	6	16

**Note: Urban = born and grew up in the urban area. Rural = grew up in the rural area and migrated to the urban area.**

I hypothesized that the number of siblings might impact the respondents' points of view because siblings play an important role in the family during children's growth. As

the data are shown in Table 5, for the younger generation who were born after the implementation of the one child policy, most of the respondents do not have any sibling while a few of them have one or two siblings. However, for the older generation, all of the respondents have at least one sibling.

**Table 5. Number of siblings of the respondents**

Age groups	Number of siblings			Percentage (%)		
	None	One	More than one	None	One	More than one
<b>Younger generation Age 18 – 36</b>	34	4	1	68	8	12
<b>Older generation Age 37 and older</b>	0	5	6	0	10	12

### Interview Questions

The respondents were asked to answer a series of questions. The questions are in four categories according to the analytical themes. The first theme focuses on respondents' general attitude towards the policy and other three themes focus on the social phenomena associated with the one child policy: decline in fertility rate, son preference, and absence of siblings. The first theme has determined the topics of the following theme. The detailed questions could be found in the appendix.

The first theme is the respondents' general attitude towards the one child policy. I asked the respondents about their attitude towards the one child policy, whether they think the one child policy had more positive influences, or more negative influences or the same amount of positive or negative influences. The answers are reflected in the remaining analytical themes.

The second theme is the low fertility rate which is reflected as the willingness to have children. The low fertility rate is considered as one of the most prominent issues that influenced by the one child policy. The respondents were asked to whether they realize that the fertility rate in China is low, whether they think the issue are related to the one child policy, and how they think the policy or other factors might affect their willingness to have children.

The third theme is sex ratio distortion which reflected as son preference. Sex ratio distortion is considered as one of the issues that influenced by the one child policy directly. The issue is related to low fertility rate as well. Therefore, the issue is the second theme. The respondents were asked to answer whether they are aware of the sex ratio distortion issue in China, whether they think the issue is related to the one child policy and how they think the policy or other factors might affect their preferences on the gender of their children.

Theme 4 is the absence of siblings. This theme supplements the other themes because the absence of siblings could be influential to the respondents' willingness to have children as well their preference on children's gender. The respondents were asked to share their opinions on whether they have siblings or not, how do they feel about siblings, and what advantages and disadvantages of having siblings are.

In the next section, I discussion analysis of the respondent's views about the impacts of the one child policy on individuals.

## **DISCUSSION OF INDIVIDUAL IMPACT OF ONE CHILD POLICY**

The four themes are related to the five categories of interview questions: attitude towards the one child policy, son preference, willingness to have children, the role of siblings and the pressure of taking care of the family. The findings show that among the younger generation, the wiliness of having children is low, son preference is highly influenced by Chinese traditional culture and the role of siblings is determined by personal interests.

### **Attitude Towards the One child policy**

I grouped the responses about attitudes about the one child policy into three types: positive, negative and neutral. As the data show in Table 6, a large portion respondents think that the one child policy had relatively equal amount of positive and negative influences on China and for themselves. 8 out of 39 young respondents think that the policy had more positive influences for the country and on them while 9 out of 39 respondents think that the one child policy had more negative influences. The positive influences are mainly related to population control; on the national level, young respondents noted the avoidance of overpopulation, less competition for jobs as well as other resources are the main positive influences while on the individual level, less competition from siblings is considered the major one. On the national level, main negative influences are sex ratio distortion and the decline in the labor force while one the individual level, lack of siblings, and pressure of taking care of the family are the primary concerns.

**Table 6. General attitude towards the one child policy (OCP)**

Age Groups	Attitude towards OCP			Percentage (%)		
	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral
<b>Age 18-36</b>	11	10	18	22	20	36
<b>Age 37 and above</b>	6	1	4	12	2	8

Respondents note several primary concerns about the most important influences of the one child policy. Those concerns have been integrated into four different categories in order to explore the influences of the policy to individuals in China more deeply.

### **Willingness to Have Children**

Although China’s one child policy has helped to lower the population growth rate, another prominent concern emerged that the fertility rate is now too low for replacement. Liu (2010) suggests that China’s fertility rate is below replacement level with a total fertility rate of 1.5 children per woman (p. 291). The low fertility rate is attributed with causing several social issues including the decline in the labor force, slower economic growth rate, and rapidly aging society.

However, based on the interview data, a large amount of respondents considered not to have any children or still wanted to have one child instead of multiple children as shown in Table 7. However, the data suggests that the majority of respondents from the older generation chose to have 2 children while the majority of younger generation respondents chose to not to have children or only one child even they are allowed to have

more children. Such results have indicated that the young respondents tend to have low willingness to have children.

**Table 7. Ideal number of children**

Age Groups	Ideal number of children				Percentage (%)			
	One	Two	Three or more	None	One	Two	Three or more	None
<b>Age 18-36</b>	13	11	1	14	26	22	2	28
<b>Age 37 and above</b>	1	8	1	1	2	16	2	2

All young respondents agree that the low fertility rate is related to the one child policy. However, the respondents revealed different opinions around the low fertility rate phenomenon; one is that people are less willing to have more children and another is people are willing to have children but was restricted by the policy.

On one hand, many young respondents have expressed their lack of willingness to have children due to several reasons including the rise of feminism since women’s social status has improved, as many young female respondents stated “women have the right to control their own life and decisions”; increase of educational levels, and the dramatic increase of costs for raising children in modern China.

Feminism is more present than it used to be. Feminism has challenged the Chinese traditional culture for promoting women to work and to be economically independent. Many young female respondents reported that they think children are constraints for them to keep them at home instead of enjoying social life. Young female respondents stated:

I am still young. I don't want to spend my late 20s and 30s in babysitting (breeding and taking care of children). A lot of things are out there for me to explore and experience, I don't want to do that when I am an old lady (Respondent 36: Female 21, Shihezi, Xinjiang Province).

I want to be an independent woman who will not depend on men for a living. My best friend from middle school, she got married and has two children now. She complained to me that her life is all about kids now...she is a housewife who totally depends on her husband (Respondent 42: Female, 22, Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province).

I don't like men treat women like a "breeding machine". Women are independent individuals who should decide their own life instead of men. We could choose to have kids or not, we could choose to work or not (Respondent 46: Female, 21, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province).

Furthermore, many respondents suggested that education is also an important factor for them choosing not to have children. According to Boiling (2008), women's education level is one of the factors that influences fertility rate since better-educated women are more likely to have a secure job and are economically independent. The respondents also suggested that better-educated women could have more control over their lives instead of being dependent on their husbands. A young female respondent has demonstrated how education influenced her decision about having children:

I am more likely to get a job with higher wages than my best friend from middle school who never went to high school. So she decided to get married and have

kids and I decided to get in higher education and have a life with independence (Respondent 42: Female, 22, Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province).

Another reason that the respondents have shown low interest in having children is the rising costs to raise children in modern China. After the economic reforms, income has dramatically increased as well as the cost of products and services. Many respondents stated that prices of powdered milk for infants, diapers, clothing as well as other accessories such as baby cart and toys have been increasing each year. The oldest respondent from the younger generation group who has a daughter stated:

It is really expensive to raise a kid nowadays, not to mention two children. That will cost a fortune for a family like mine with average income. The costs will go on as children need to go to school, get married, and other needs (Respondent 17: Male, 34, Dalian: Liaoning Province).

On the other hand, some respondents explained the reasons for having two or more children including abundant economical support and cultural influences.

In traditional Chinese culture, continuing the bloodline of the family is seen as an obligation for every family member especially males. Children who have failed to produce offspring are considered irresponsible for their filial duties to their parents (Greenhalgh, 2013 p.138). This cultural context is one of the reasons that some respondents think that they need to have at least one child to fulfill their duty to the family. A young male respondent stated:

It would be ungrateful to my parents who have raised me and supported me for so many years if I don't have any children. They gave me what they have and I have

to pay them back, you know to finish the obligation as the only son in the family (Respondent 28: Male, 23, Dunhuang, Gansu Province).

Other than the influence of traditional culture, another popular reason among the young respondents to have multiple children is that there is no financial issue to raise multiple children. Concerns such as rising costs of raising children and the little time of being with the children are not obstacles for rich families. A few respondents who are from families with high income stated that they could have as many children as they want to because they could afford to raise them, pay the penalty fees to the government, hire babysitters and nannies, satisfy what their children need and send them to the best schools.

### Summary

The one child policy has impacted China's fertility rate, but with the improvement of higher education levels, the rise of feminism and increase costs of raising children, most of the young respondents prefer to have no children or still have one child. Because of traditional culture's influences, a few young respondents treat having children as an obligation to the family. For the young respondents who are from the family with high income, the tendency of having multiple children is higher due to efficient financial support.

### **Son Preference in China**

According to Loh and Remick (2015), China's sex ratio distortion issue is highly related to the son preference phenomena (p. 295). Loh and Remick (2015) note how the one child policy affects the sex ratio at birth in China as well as other factors that might

affect the sex ratio China has a significant high sex ratio at birth which is way higher than a natural range of the sex ratio at birth (97-107) since the 1970s (Loh and Remick, 2015, p.296). The sex ratio distortion has created many social problems in China such female infanticide, sex-selective abortion, girls who are not registered as citizens when they were born because parents prefer a boy and avoid punishment from having a second child, and about 24 million single males will not have a wife (Loh and Remick, 2015, pp.296-298).

From the data gathered from the answers, all young respondents have been aware of sex distortion issue in China through media such as social media, news, television shows. All respondents think that sex distortion issue is related to the once child policy to some degrees. Many respondents have experienced or heard about son preference through news or personal experience. A respondent from the elder generation group stated that when the policy was first implemented, many couples who wanted to have a boy would go to the hospital and do a pregnancy ultrasound scan to see the gender of the child, if it was a boy, they would keep the child, otherwise, they would choose abortion. However, as abortion phenomenon became popular, in the late 1980s and early 1990s the Chinese government has banned the doctors in all hospitals to reveal the sex of the unborn child to the parents to prevent sex-selective abortions. According to Loh and Remick (2015), the increase in sex ratio at birth in China slowed in the late 1980s (pp. 296-297). But a rapid increase has continued after the short pause.

Loh and Remick (2015) have suggested that “the highly skewed SRB (Sex Ratio at Birth) indicates a problem of ‘missing girls’ caused by non-registration of girls at birth, female infanticide, sex-selective abortions, or more likely, a combination of the three (p. 297)”. Many respondents from the younger generation did not experience the cruelty

behind the son preference such as abortions, abandonment of children and infanticide, they still have experienced the influences of son preference. All young female respondents have experienced son preference phenomenon in their lives directly or indirectly. A young female respondent said:

My very own experience with son preference is with my grandmother. She showed a strong preference for boys over girls. She dislikes me for being a girl because I cannot pass the bloodline of the family by keeping the family name. She even likes my cousin (my father's brother's son) who is a boy more than me (Respondent 18: Female, 21, Wuhan, Hubei Province).

Above is an example of direct impact from son preference while another young female respondent has shared her experience with indirect son preference:

My parents and grandparents do not mind I am a girl at all. They think that girls and boys are equally important. But my aunt (my father's sister) had mocked my mother for failing to have a boy because I will get married to a guy and my children will carry his family name instead of ours (Respondent 34: Female, 19, Jincheng, Shanxi Province).

The respondent further explains that although the son preference has not influenced her significantly, but there are a lot of families across China in which son preference is still deeply rooted; son preference is a part of the traditional culture even before the implementation of the one child policy. Loh and Remick (2015) suggest that the relationship between the one child policy and China's skewed sex ratio is rather complex due to the involvement of traditional Chinese culture. They suggest that son

preference has existed in Chinese culture for centuries; culture is one of the drivers that leads to sex ratio distortion in China.

According to Murphy (2004), culture could be one of the factors that determine preferences and actions through a "mental programming" (p. 598). Many respondents have stated that the traditional culture plays an important role in their preference on children's gender. Chinese traditional culture like most of other cultures around the world was "male-dominant". A female respondent stated that women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in China were oppressed by the "male culture":

Back in the 1900s or 1910s, when my mother was born, women would still bind their feet by fabrics in order to have small feet called 'lotus feet'. My mother had the 'lotus feet' which was considered a beauty standard for women. That's how women were oppressed by the culture back then (Respondent 3: Female, 68, Hefei, Anhui Province).

Seven respondents from the older generation group noted that male children have been favored for decades even after the establishment of the PRC. Although after the establishment of the PRC, feminism has started to rise, the discrimination against women is still rooted in the traditional culture according to both the young respondents. Many young respondents suggested that the traditional Chinese culture is the opposite to Western culture (specifically referring to American and western European culture) where feminism is more influential. Some respondents suggested that exposure to Western culture could affect their preference on their children's gender. A young male respondent stated:

I don't want my kids to be boys...I don't care about the whole "pass on the bloodline" thing...don't girls also have my blood in them? You know, like the westerners, they don't care about this; they promote equality of both genders (Respondent 11: Male, 21, Huainan, Anhui Province).

According to Loh and Remick (2015), son preference is more likely to exist in rural areas in China (p 311). In the rural area of China where Western culture has not penetrated into and traditional culture is still dominant, son preference phenomenon is much more influential to the residents than those who live in the cities where access and exposure to Western culture are higher.

In order to get a better understanding of the son preference phenomenon, the young respondents are asked to give a preference on whether they would prefer a boy or boys over a girl or girls. 8 out of 39 respondents have answered that they prefer male child or children over female offspring(s).

**Table 8. Son preference of the respondents**

Age Groups	Preference of offspring				Percentage (%)			
	Either	Female	Male	None	Either	Female	Male	None
<b>Age 18-36</b>	8	9	8	14	16	18	16	28
<b>Age 37 and above</b>	9	0	1	1	18	0	2	2

Interestingly, a significant portion of respondents has shown a preference to have children of both sexes, ideally, one girl and one boy. The explanation of such responses is related to culture as well. Although the traditional Chinese culture promotes son

preference, the traditional culture also emphasizes "balance" as there should be the same amount of people of both sexes in the family. To put such philosophy in the modern China context since people's income has been increasing dramatically after the economic reform in 1979, a middle-age respondent stated:

It is now becoming a trend for men to prepare certain things before marrying a woman; housing, a car, sometimes a good amount of cash. When I got married, all I have prepared were a television, a new room in my parents' place and a small ceremony (Respondent 7: Male, 54, Fuyang, Anhui Province).

The respondents who prefer to have children of both gender revealed that it is more economical to have female children because preparation for marriage is a heavy burden for most of the families in China except for the rich ones. However, due to the influence of son preference in the traditional culture, it is ideal to have a boy and a girl in the family from both an economical perspective and a cultural perspective.

### Summary

Chinese traditional culture has played a major role in shaping people's preference of their children's gender. Son preference has rooted in Chinese culture for centuries, but as the rise of feminism, impacts from western culture and the termination of the one child policy, the data has shown that majority of people prefers to have a boy and a girl instead of just boys in the family.

### **The Role of Siblings**

Lack of siblings is one of the most popular and controversial influences of the one child policy gathered from the respondents' responses. Due to the restriction of allowing

couples to have only one child in the family, lack of siblings is common in modern Chinese families across the country. Although the restriction did not apply to minority groups other than Han Chinese, the respondents are all Han Chinese. Therefore, most of the young respondents are the only child in the family except a few families that are wealthy to afford the penalty fees of having more than one child.

The respondents were asked to express their attitude towards siblings. The majority of respondents think that there are advantage and disadvantages of lack of siblings; a significant portion of respondents think that there are more disadvantages of lack of siblings while a few respondents think that absence of siblings has more advantages. The disadvantages are an increase of self-centrism, the loneliness of growing up and pressure of taking care of the family. The advantage is the lack of competition from the siblings.

**Table 9. Attitude towards siblings**

Age Groups	Attitude towards siblings			Percentage (%)		
	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Age 18-36	7	12	20	14	24	40
Age and 37 above	0	6	5	0	12	10

For those who have the negative attitude towards having siblings. All of the respondents are from the younger generation group. The primary concern to them is the competition from the siblings. The competition could be from as little as food, clothes to as much as attention from the parents, even financial supports. A young male respondent stated:

If I have a big brother, he is probably going to fight with me on every toy, comics even cool clothes. When we are older, he is going to fight with me on financial supports for college, marriage, even heritages (Respondent 50: Male, 21, Changzhou, Zhejiang Province).

However, more respondents think having siblings has benefits. Due to the absence of siblings, the single child in the family tends to be more self-centered than child grew up with siblings (Fowler et al., 2010). The young respondents believe that having siblings could help to reduce self-centrism. Other two primary concerns of the absence of siblings are loneliness of growing up and pressure of taking care of the family. Several respondents have shown their regrets of growing up alone. A young female respondent stated:

I felt so lonely growing up. I have been also jealous of those who have siblings. Siblings are like the closest friends, they can share secrets, be each other's emotional support and help each other when in troubles (Respondent 43: Female, 21, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province).

Other respondents have shown their concern about the pressure of taking care of the family. Due to the absence of siblings, the single child generation faces the great pressure of taking care of their parents, children, even grandparents in the future. Several respondents stated:

I am worried about my parents when they get old because I am studying abroad and probably will settle here. If something happened to my parents like they are sick, they have an accident, I would not be there for them as soon as possible.

This makes me guilty and unfilial as a daughter (Respondent 45: Female, 21, Changsha, Hunan Province).

I could feel the pressure of taking care of my parents and potentially my grandparents and my kids at the same time. They are all important to me, I could just hire a nanny or send them to senior homes, but I'd rather not; that will make me feel terrible (Respondent 48: Male, 22, Beijing).

However, the majority portion of young respondents thinks that absence of siblings brings both the advantages and disadvantages stated above. They have a mixed opinion because they enjoy being the only child of the family, but fear the responsibility that they will fulfill. A young respondent revealed his paradoxical opinions about siblings:

I think if I have a sister, she will probably take care of my parents when they get old so that I can occasionally visit my parents instead of worrying about them all the time. But I think she will also compete with me for my parents' love...My parents might spend money to buy her clothes instead to buy games for me (Respondent 16: Male, 26, Tianjin).

### Summary

Although the absence of siblings offers several disadvantages to the individuals in China, the fear of competition from siblings makes the majority of respondents to hold neutral attitude towards the issue.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the interview data, the one child policy has influenced Chinese people in different ways, on the national level, main negative influences are sex ratio distortion and decline in labor force while on the individual level, their willingness to have children, their preference on children's gender and their opinion about siblings.

In terms of willingness to have children, most of the respondents indicated that they prefer not to have any children or only one child even they are allowed to have two, due to the rise of feminism, improvement of education and increase of costs for raising children. A significant portion of respondents prefers to have two children due to cultural influences and efficient financial supports. A small portion of respondents prefers to have more than three children because of their personal preference of having multiple children as well as the ability to afford to raise the children.

Preference of children's gender is another popular topic. All respondents have acknowledged the existence of son preference in China under the influence of traditional culture. However, the majority of respondents prefer to have a girl and a boy as the ideal combination of children. A significant portion of respondents prefers to have only female children because of personal preferences and influences from western culture as well as feminism. Some respondents prefer to have only male children due to the influences of the traditional culture.

Additionally, the last popular topic is the absence of siblings. A significant portion of respondents stated that they have positive opinions about having siblings because siblings could provide support to take care of the family and reduce their pressure. A small portion of respondents argued that siblings could compete with them for resources such as daily essentials, financial supports and emotional attention from the

parents. However, the majority of respondents hold a neutral opinion about having siblings due to the combination of fear of competition and reduce pressure of taking care of the family.

To conclude the one child policy's influences to individuals in China, the influences are prominent and significant to alter individuals' opinions on fertility, sex preference of children as well as the role of siblings.

## **APPENDIX:**

### **1. Timeline of interviews**

(1). May 20, 2016, to May 30, 2016: the first round of interviews: respondents are the family members, close friends, and relatives. An approximate number of respondents are 15.

(2). May 30, 2016, to July 20, 2016: Second round of interviews: respondents are the family member, close friends and relatives of the respondents from the first round. An approximate number of respondents are 35.

(3). July 20, 2016, to August 15, 2016: translate, select, and analysis the interviews

### **2. Interview questions**

1. As you know, the one child policy was over so in what ways do you think that the one child policy has influenced Chinese society? Do you think that it is beneficial to the society? Or harmful? Or both? Did you grow up in a one child household?
2. What are some of the benefits of having a child? What about drawbacks? What are some of the benefits or drawbacks of having more than one child (for the older generation)? Did you ever think about having a child (for the younger generation)? If so, why? If not, why did you not want to have a child? Did you ever think about having more than one child if there wasn't the limitation (older generation)? If so, why is that? If not, why, what made you

not want to have more children? What do you think is the ideal age to have children?

3. One of the demographic impacts of one child policy is that there are more men than women in the country, so in your family, are there both girls and boys? If so, are there more boys than girls? If not, how about your cousins? Are there more boys than girls? Do you want a girl or boy as a child (for the younger generation)? Did you want a boy or a girl as a child (for the older generation)? Or do you prefer a boy or a girl? Or both?
4. What are some of the benefits of having siblings? What about drawbacks? What are some of the benefits of being the only child? Any drawbacks? What are you going to take care of your parents in their old age (for young generation)? How did you take care of your parents in their old age (for the older generation)?
5. One of the demographic issue in China right now is that the population of older people/retired people (above 60 years old) is getting larger while the population of the labor forces (below 60 years) is getting smaller. Do you think that you have a lot of pressure on to take care of both the elderly and the children (the older generation)? If so, what kind of pressure, and how the pressure affected you? Do you think there will be a lot of pressure to take care of the elderly and the children (for the younger generation)? If so, what kind of pressure, how that will affect you?
6. What is your education level? What is the education level of your parents/grandparents? Do you think there are differences in terms of the ways

of seeing the society/world between you and your parents/grandparents? If so, what kind of differences and what is causing the difference?

7. I am interested in your migration history. Where did you grow up? In a rural area or in an urban area? If you were from the rural area, when did you move to the urban areas? Why did you move to the urban area? What do you think are some of the benefits or drawbacks of living in the cities? What do you think about the experience of working in the cities (for rural residents)? How did you relate to rural children/ workers in the cities (for urban residents)? Do you think you and the people who are from the rural areas are different? If so, what kind of differences are there? If not, why do you think that way?

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