University of North Carolina Asheville
Journal on Undergraduate Research
Asheville, North Carolina
December 2014

Family Planning and Motherhood in Modern China

Narratives of Chinese Mothers and the State From 1950 to the Present

Edmond Baron
Interdisciplinary Studies-International Studies
The University of North Carolina Asheville
Asheville, North Carolina

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Grant Hardy

Abstract

China has implemented a national policy that regulates the amount of children couples may have. This policy has caused a number of complications and negative effects including gender imbalances, which have been furthered by acts such as infanticide and illegal pregnancies or abortions. This paper examines the cultural traditions of China as well as their role in family planning. I will also recount the introduction of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and how they came to not only make the discourse on sexuality a public concern, but also institutionalize it. The family planning policy as part of this discourse has effectively met its goals--fertility decline, population control, delayed marriages--but also had negative consequences, such as sex ratio imbalances, absentee mothers, and women being kidnapped. Despite these unintended repercussions, there exist key narratives in historical and present day China that continue to be promulgated.

1. Introduction

In 1979, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and his "Four Modernizations" campaign, the Chinese government enacted the family planning policy, commonly referred to as the "One-Child Policy."[1] With roughly a quarter of the world's population at the time, two thirds of whom were people under age 30, the family planning policy aimed at slowing the nation's population growth and thus improving living conditions. The policy specifies that all married couples (with the exception of ethnic minorities) were limited to having one child. In order to enforce this policy, various amendments and newer policies have been created to address the loopholes or disparities that have resulted because of it.

This paper outlines cultural traditions of China, particularly as they impact family planning. This includes a brief history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and how they came to not only make the discourse on sexuality a public concern, but also institutionalize it. In this institutionalization, there exist key narratives throughout Chinese history that continue to be promulgated. Among these narratives is that of self-sacrifice, often for the greater good. In addition are two narratives of the Chinese Communist Party, which Susan Greenhalgh describes as, "the narrative of national crisis and salvation and the narrative of women's liberation..."[2]

The voices of Chinese women are used in order to illustrate these narratives and their effects. The overall perspective of the family planning policy-making in China is that the policy, as part of this discourse, has effectively met its goals—fertility decline, population control, and delayed marriages; but, it has also had negative consequences, such as sex ratio imbalances, disappearing girls, and kidnapped women.

1.1 Historical Context

Several terms are used to describe traditional Chinese gender roles that make the current social attitudes of ethnic Chinese more comprehensible. Influenced by the Confucian Book of Rites (Lǐjì [礼记]), a historical dictation of rites and values dating back to dynastic China, men and women were traditionally separated into different social areas and roles known. As Patricia Ebrey writes:

> Men and women should do different things, or the same things differently…Men, however, were rarely if ever told to get involved with what their wives were doing; rather, their attention was directed to taking precautions to ensure that women did not intrude into the men's sphere.[3]

The separation of social spheres, commonly referred to as the inner (feminine) and outer (masculine) quarters confined women to household duties. The Confucian concept of "good wife, wise mother" (xiánqī liáng mǔ [贤妻良母]) defines femininity in a way that, "rather than objectifying women…serves to establish their centrality to the home."[4] Women were historically considered to be "innately more emotional than men,"[5] and were placed as the "emotional center of the household."[6] This is not dissimilar to another Confucian concept, *sān cóng sì de* (**三从四德**), which dictated "three obediences and four virtues as a guidance of a model Chinese woman."[7] The three obediences for a wife dictate, "while at home she obeys her father, after marriage she obeys her husband, after he dies she obeys her son."[8] The four feminine virtues are moral conduct (*Fù dé* [妇德]), proper speech (*Fù yán* [妇言]), modest appearance (*Fù róng* [妇容]), and diligent work (*Fù gōng* [妇功]).[9] Ban Zhao, the first female Chinese historian, further explained the four virtues in her publication titled *Lessons for Women*:

> 夫云妇德，不必才明绝异也；妇言，不必辩口利辞也；妇容，不必颜色美丽也；妇功，不必工巧过人也。清闲贞静，守节整齐，行己有耻，动静有法，是谓妇德。择辞而说，不道恶语，时然后言，不厌于人，是谓妇言。盥浣尘秽，服饰鲜絜，沐浴以时，身不垢辱，是谓妇容。专心纺绩，不好戏笑，絜齐酒食，以奉宾客，是谓妇功。
>
> The so-called women's virtue need not be brilliant or exceptional capability; women's speech need not be sharp and keen; women's appearance need not be beauty and glory; women's work need not be done more skillfully than others. To be modest and chaste, to observe rites and control her manners, to have good sense of propriety, is called women's virtue. To choose words with care, to avoid vulgar language, to speak at proper times, never to bore others, is called women's speech. To wash away dirt, to keep clothes and ornaments clean and fresh, to bathe [sic] the body regularly, to keep oneself free of filth, is called women's appearance. To weave with whole-hearted devotion, not to indulge in silly laughter or game, to prepare wine and food for guests, is called women's work.[10]

These Confucian values are examples of the narrative of self-sacrifice, as the female role is exemplified as being subservient to the dominant male in such a way that social and physical mobility are relinquished.

Other terms used to describe the sexes were yin and yang. Women, represented by yin, are considered "dark" and "passive" while men as yang are "bright" and "assertive." An important distinction to make is that men and women were not thought to be opposites. A core concept of yin and yang is interdependence: that nothing exists on its own; but instead everything shapes and is shaped by other things in a constant interrelationship.[11] [12]While everything is theorized to have yin and yang, one is usually dominant over the other. In the case of men and women, it is men (yang) who were considered to be the more dominant of the sexes.

Although an archaic practice, foot-binding remains a clear example of Chinese women enduring the pain and inconvenience of manipulating their bodies to adhere to sociocultural ideology. While foot-binding was associated with femininity and had a somewhat erotic focus, it was done to ensure a better marriage.[13] Thus, foot-binding was also much like the family planning policy in that it was considered self-sacrificial and aimed at a "greater good." In her book Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China, Jung Chang recounts the lives of her family beginning with her

grandmother Yu-fang. Chang's grandmother had started binding Yu-Fang's feet when she was two, insisting that this sacrificial act was to better her future.[14]

1.2 Mao's regime

After the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949, the government enforced a policy that subsidized child-rearing and banned methods of birth control. Chairman Mao Zedong addressed family planning initiatives:

> It is a very good thing that China has a big population. Even if China's population multiplies many times, she is fully capable of finding a solution; the solution is production. The absurd argument of Western bourgeois economists like Malthus that increases in food cannot keep pace with the increases in population was not only thoroughly refuted in theory by Marxists long ago but has also been exploded by the realities in the Soviet Union and the Liberated Areas of China after their liberation...Revolution plus production can solve the problem of feeding the population.[15]

When the Chinese Communist Party first came to power, their family planning agenda was not evenly focused. There had long been a growing disparity between the urban cities in China, where policies could be more easily implemented and monitored, and the rural countryside, where long-standing traditions continued to thrive and government outreach was difficult and limited. The original outlook of the CCP perpetuated this gap in that it focused more on Chinese women who were fertile, living in urban areas, and who were of marriageable age or were married. Ironically, some of the traditions that continued (and still exist today) in the countryside—including patrilineality and wives living with the husband's family—are part of what the CCP considered to be "feudal" practices that it sought to abolish. Overall, the party took no clear position on gender inequality. To do so would have taken focus off of class inequality, detracting from the party's main agenda.[16] Thus, under CCP rule, women were to align themselves with men in dress and manner. Both femininity and individualism were to be given up and rejected for being bourgeois.[17]

Further gender inequalities for women took the form of what is considered a "double burden." Mao had "liberated" women from their inner quarters, yet this further burdened women by expecting them to maintain their now dual-roles in the domestic sphere and workforce. That is to say, women's "liberation" resulted in the increased responsibilities of women to focus on production and reproduction. This double-burden was a further sacrifice from women for the state.

1.3 The Marriage Law

The Marriage Law of 1950, which was delivered by Mao himself, directly altered the dynamic of the patriarchy by formally banning "the feudal marriage system, which is based on arbitrary and compulsory arrangement and the superiority of man over woman and ignores the children's interests…" Instead, new marriages were to be "based on the free choice of partners, on monogamy, on equal rights for both sexes, and on the protection of the lawful interests of women and children."[18]

Yet the Marriage Law itself is evidence of how the CCP began to institutionalize the discourse on sexuality. This can be observed in Article 5, which dictates in what cases two people should be allowed to marry. Article 5a disallows marriage in cases of incest. Continuing on:

> b. When one party, because of certain physical defects, is sexually impotent.
> c. When one party is suffering from venereal disease, mental disorder, leprosy, or any other disease which is regarded by medical science as rendering the person unfit for marriage.[19]

The second clause is contradictory because it declares that the state is able to interfere with marriages that are based on "free choice", and that it will do so based on a couple's reproductive capabilities. The third clause is perhaps the most imposing because it is also the most subjective, leaving the state in control of whom it considers to be fit for marriage. In addition to being reminiscent of eugenics, Article 5 of the Marriage Law is another example of the CCP's prerogative to institutionalize and control aspects of sexuality such as love and marriage.[20]

1.4 History of the Policy

Mao's Marxist approach to population theory—that a greater population meant a greater workforce—combined with the association of the sciences with Western forces led to the repression of population research. Ma Yinchu, an economist and demographic researcher, used the security of his presidency of Peking University to conduct field studies among rural Chinese populations in the 1950s. In 1957, Ma dispersed pamphlets with the title "The New Population Theory" which poised overpopulation as a legitimate concern. He was soon silenced by the state and other academics for having Malthusian views and criticizing the party, yet the government initiated its first birth control campaign which made contraception and abortions more accessible to the public.[21] In 1962, overpopulation began to become a national concern, and there was an initial attempt for family planning reform in urban areas; but, it was impeded by the Cultural Revolution, which sought to further Mao's conquest to increase reproduction. However, in 1973, the first family planning policy was made to combat overpopulation. The policy aimed at improving sexual education, bettering contraceptive and abortion services, as well as advocating later marriages and fewer children. The 1973 policy was further refined in 1975, and in 1979 Ma Yinchu's "The New Population Theory" was deemed "correct" and authorized for publication by the Central Committee.[22] This has resulted in Ma Yinchu being deemed "the father of the one-child policy."[23]

In 1981, statistics showed that the policy was not being properly implemented, as "about 6 million 'one-child' families had another baby and...over 1.5 million families with five children or more had another baby." The government took action by passing a law that supported its population control initiative. Under the new law, "[i]f a woman had one child, she had to have an intrauterine device implanted; and if a couple had more than one child, the wife or husband had to be sterilized. Birth-control cadres had to fill sterilization quotas and, if necessary, force even late-term abortions. Families who had more than one child lost various welfare and medical benefits and might be fined; in the rural areas, they might even lose their land."[24]

In addition to being considered as part of the "greater good" it was presented as the "lesser of two evils."[25] In February 1982, a policy titled "Directive on Doing a Better Job of Family Planning Work" was issued, declaring:

> We are faced with two possibilities: either we control the population growth strictly and effectively, make a gradual enhancement in the standards of living of the people as a whole, and expand the country's construction with each passing year; or we do not exercise strict enough control, our measures are insufficient, and we allow the population to continue to grow in large numbers, with the result that we would neither be able to improve the people's lives nor carry out economic, cultural, and national defense construction well. Our only choice is between these two alternatives; we have no other possibilities.[26]

Liu Bohong, a women's studies researcher, theorized that the state was able to present this "dollar-over-population" equation because of the traditional narratives of self-sacrifice and national savior. "Chinese traditions," she said, "lead us to think that 'the state is a big thing, the individual woman is a small thing…people simply would not think to question the government's assessment…of the population problem."[27]

Seven months after the "Directive on Doing a Better Job of Family Planning Work" was issued, the family planning policy was formally declared as a "basic state policy" (jīběn guócè [基本国策]).This meant that the subject of birth planning became of high importance to the state and could not be challenged or debated.

In order to ensure that Chinese citizens adhere to the regulations within the policy, the government has used various incentives and penalties. In 1988, a "Certificate of Honor"[28] was introduced, which gave couples who agreed to limit themselves to birthing only one child certain benefits including healthcare, maternity leave, a monthly stipend, and preferential housing as well as preferential education and healthcare for the child. Those who violate the policy lose these benefits and are subject to substantial fines.[29]

In addition to the extended surveillance and disincentives for "illegal" pregnancies, a "personal responsibility system" was introduced in the 1990s. The "personal responsibility" system placed further responsibility upon the heads of FP and party committees at each level to make sure they met certain quotas by punishing any deviations. Unfortunately, this has also led to underreported or falsely reported children and further corruption.[30] A study conducted in 2001 about underreported births in China noted, "[o]mitting reports of infant deaths and the associated births is an easy, safe way to keep reported fertility below the quota ceiling."[31] The study also found that "the number of 'missing' [girl] reports is about 1 or 2 per village, or 1 or 2 per 40+ women surveyed." The researchers suggest that these results show how "one or two 'missing' girls per village could be concealed without much effort by individual couples or by birth planning officials."[32]

2. Discussion

The PRC has perpetuated the same tendency as Mao to consistently contradict its goals for modernization and the "greater good" with the implementation of its own policies. Despite its attempts to grant its citizens freedoms, government policies often thwart or work against the goals of the state. Although there have been many efforts made to empower women, there has only recently been significant legal action aimed at granting Chinese women full autonomy over their own bodies.[33] Instead, women have been further objectified through law as their reproductive capabilities are controlled and they become instruments used by the state to achieve its population goals.[34] As Emma Rafaelof notes, "the control over a woman's womb is ultimately not hers to be concerned with; if she pursues any such control, she is viewed as selfish by not only birth planning workers, but by the general populace."[35] Susan Greenhalgh has expressed that, as a result of this objectification, there are "deleterious effects" on women's physical and mental health as well as their socioeconomic security.[36]

The family planning policy was created to set reproductive goals and modernize the state, and the themes of self-sacrifice and national savior are directly evident in its rhetoric. The first article of the policy reads:

> 为了实现人口与经济、社会、资源、环境的协调发展，推行计划生育，维护公民的合法权益，促进家庭幸福、民族繁荣与社会进步，根据宪法，制定本法。[37]
>
> The Law seeks "to achieve coordinated development of population on the one hand, and the economy, society, resources, and environment on the other; to promote birth planning and safeguard citizens' legitimate rights and interests; and to advance family happiness, national prosperity, and social progress."[38]

2.1 Policy Implementation and Enforcement

The CCP and the State Family Planning Commission are both responsible for the enforcement of the family planning policy. The family planning structure begins at the state commission, extending down to the provincial level, then to that of the city, the district (for urban areas) or county (in rural), the street/township, and ending at the neighborhood or village family planning committee. Leaders of the CCP are also present at each level of the family planning committee. Additionally, cadres, who work for the family planning committee at the village level, are usually members of the CCP.[39]

Further stipulations are made at the provincial or local government levels. In some cases, only children also have preferential employment.[40] At the village and district level, married women are frequently required to visit family planning stations every couple of months to have their contraceptive use and pregnancy status checked by cadres.[41] Most of the birth planning workers, themselves, are women. This is both comforting for the women they monitor, but also "creates a condoning environment around the often intrusive monitoring."[42]

2.2 Contraceptives

Historically, traditional Chinese medicine used homeopathic treatments to control pregnancies, although infanticide was a more preferable means of birth control.[43] Ma Yinchu has been attributed with foreign, scientific contraceptive methods such as diaphragms, intrauterine devices (IUDs), sterilization, and abortions gaining state endorsement in the late 1950s. With pills being a more practical method, contraception was distributed to urban and rural areas, yet it was mainly limited to married couples.[44] The separation of social spheres, the inner (feminine) and outer (masculine) quarters, can especially be reflected upon in observing contraceptive methods amongst Chinese couples. Initially, many males also took preventative measures to avoid unwanted pregnancies, but eventually it became predominantly women who took on that responsibility, echoing the narrative of self-sacrifice.[45] A 1997 study showed that while more than 90 percent of couples use contraceptives, 86-87 percent of that figure is contraceptive use by women.[46] Another study, conducted amongst rural women, revealed even though women reported doing the majority of the agricultural labor, "many of them said that women should be sterilized rather than men in case there were side effects that would cause the family to lose men's labor power."[47]

Most of the contraceptive methods in China involve the risks of surgery.[48] There is also the chance that contraceptive measures will fail, which has historically been an issue the Chinese government and its population have struggled with. When contraception gained state recognition in the 1950s, it was very controversial because of it Western associations. To work around these biases, contraception was manufactured domestically, yet this

resulted in a significant decrease in quality.[49] Modern failures are also not uncommon, with one particular IUD being prone to falling out. A 28-year-old mother of one from Jiangsu shared her experience:

> I had a C-section. After the baby was taken out, they put in an IUD immediately. Last month [one year after insertion], I had a contraceptive failure. I took medicine and had an abortion.[50]

As previously stated, sterilization not only remains an option to couples, but was forced upon masses of the population as part of a family planning initiative in the 1980s. There are numerous side effects of sterilization in terms of its effects on physical health and the family model. Sterilization after childbirth is problematic for the family because of possible complications or developmental problems during child growth. A Yunnan mother of two voiced further concern:

> If we use sterilization, maybe we will worry about the husband's morality [that the husband will find another woman and get divorced]. The family will be broken. After divorce and remarriage, the woman will need to have a baby. Also, our work is heavy, and sterilization is not good for health. It might cause backache.[51]

2.3 Pregnancies and Childbirth

A study conducted amongst Chinese mothers found that there was a common reverence for the importance of early bedtime, proper diet and nutrition, and happiness. Both traditional and modern beliefs tie a mother's emotional state to the health and growth of the fetus. One mother said, "I can't see any influence to my baby now, but if you aren't happy [during pregnancy] the baby will have a strange character. Her character won't be healthy."[52]

Just as Sung women would choose proper midwives to deliver their child, modern Chinese mothers find proper caretakers for their newborn as part of what Robin Kartchner and Lynn Clark Callister refer to as "a group project with roots in a collectivist tradition." Most health care providers for women giving birth, whether extended family or government officials, are female. Traditionally, childbirth is seen as "women's business" and a "short and painful, but necessary step on their *journey* to motherhood."[53] Women are also expected to endure the pain of childbirth, as energy is lost through crying.

After childbirth, a mother's lifestyle undergoes a temporary yet dramatic shift. While medical texts from the Sung dynasty advised postpartum women to remain in bed for three days,[54] modern Chinese mothers often engage in a lengthier, more self-sacrificial tradition known as "doing the month"[55] (*zuò yuè zi*[坐月子]).[56] "Doing the month" is not necessarily related to a woman's socioeconomic class or capabilities, but has historically been attributed to concerns about postpartum depression.[57] Historical Chinese medical records believed postpartum women were "apt to get depressed or delirious and to report seeing ghosts…"[58] Traditional Chinese medicine is based around the traditional balance of *yin* and *yang*. After losing blood during childbirth, this balance is offset. Yin becomes dominant as the mother's body becomes "vulnerable and cold [*sic*]."[59] This belief was perhaps further reinforced by how maternal morbidity has historically not been uncommon.[60] There are many different practices and rituals undergone to respect a new mother's vulnerability and restore balance. Although the strictness to which these traditions varies, new mothers are encouraged to do the following: abstain from cold yin foods in favor of warm yang foods, remain indoors for one month to avoid any drafts, avoid any unnecessary movement and rest as much as possible, avoiding any unnecessary movement, and refrain from reading, watching television, or using the computer to prevent eye problems. Additionally, during the month after birth, "a woman should not shower, brush her teeth, or wash her hair…although she may take a bath with ginger and red wine a week after childbirth."[61]

There are a variety of opinions about this practice, and the following quotations illustrate some of the concerns mothers have about its continuance:

- I feel after I had the baby the only thing I didn't do was housework and cooking. Everything else I did the same. During the first month some people asked me, "You just gave birth to a baby. Why are you brushing your teeth?" I said, "Why not? I think it's ok!" I'd be very uncomfortable if I didn't brush my teeth for a month. That would be horrible to talk to your child face to face if you hadn't brushed your teeth.[62]

- The 'doing the month' [*sic*] practice is not suitable for modern women in China. It is like being in prison for me to be confined at home. I was not allowed to do anything but lie in bed. It was so boring. You know,

I was a career woman before the baby was born, but I could not work during that month. I wanted to go back to work as soon as possible.[63]

- If your body is dirty that is not good for your feeling or health. If you don't let wind in then that is also not good for you or the baby's health. It's no good if the baby can't breathe fresh air.[64]

However, many mothers also experience severe fear, anxiety, and depression after birth. These mothers have a radically different perspective of their own self-worth. Traditionally, a mother nursing her own children was considered to be a sign of "motherly devotion."[65] However, some contemporary Chinese mothers report anguish and despair due to their concerns about nursing their children:

- When I was pregnant, I learned from the antenatal education class that breastfeeding is the best way to feed the baby. The nurse encouraged us to breastfeed. When I could not breastfeed the baby because of a mammary gland infection, I was so disappointed and I thought I was such a failure. I was not a good mother.[66]

- I hoped to be a perfect mother. I hoped that my baby would be breastfed. Then my breast milk dried up, and I was so disappointed and felt like a shriveled tree.[67]

- I have read a lot of books on how to take care of babies. However, it makes me even more anxious. When my baby cries more at night I worry whether she is sick, because the books say that babies cry because they might be sick. I am not a doctor. I know very little about the illness of babies, and feel anxious and useless.[68]

2.4 Sex-Selective Abortions And Female Infanticide

Another woman from Yunnan stated, "If you only have a daughter at home, you are considered incapable. That is stupid, but people in villages think that way."[69] Areas in the countryside have historically differed in practice, tending to uphold traditional Chinese values over modern government policies. In Chinese, the gendered hierarchy of yin and yang is reflected in the term *zhòngnán qīng nǚ* (重男轻女), which means "to value males and devalue females."[70] The patriarchal devaluation of females has led to sex-based abortions as well as infanticide, abandonment, and violence against young girls. Some couples with traditional values "believed that they needed a son or their lives would be blighted and they would not go to heaven. Their forebears in the Underworld would be angry with them for not producing a son to carry on the family line and they would never ever be able to rest in peace."[71] This is because, traditionally, daughters were married off and sent to live in their husband's household, leaving the sons at home to take care of the family.[72]

Sex-selective abortion is a practice exacerbated by the family planning policy because of the narrative of self-sacrifice. The desire to have a son results in the sacrifice of female infants and has arguably been a considerable factor in the growing sex ratio imbalance in China. Although reportedly less common today, the strictly forbidden practice of sex-selective abortion is suspected to continue in both urban and, especially, rural areas of China.[73] If a couple is found to have had an abortion based on the sex of the child, they lose their right to have a second child.[74] For those allowed a second child, such as rural couples, there is an "at least one son practice" that motivates couples to pursue sex-based abortions.[75]

In interviews conducted by Greenhalgh, Liu Bohong, assistant director of the Women's Studies Institute in the Women's Federation, and scholar Zhu Chuzhu both stressed "the psychological trauma and social isolation" amongst rural women who have two daughters as their first children.[76] However, it has been especially difficult to prove if a couple has had a sex-selective abortion because of the prevalence and availability of abortions.[77]

A common way of determining the sex of a fetus is, illicitly, through the use of ultrasound machines. A mother from Anhui explained, "People use an ultrasound B machine. If it is a female fetus, they don't want it. People will usually go elsewhere to check. No matter how much money they have to spend, they think it is worth it."[78] However, there are also other means couples rely on in order to determine the sex. In her book *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother*, Xinran interviewed a former midwife whom explained how she could tell whether the baby would be a boy or a girl by the mother's physical characteristics:

> ...when the belly sticks out in front, it's usually a boy. If the woman carries it more toward the back, it's usually a girl. A sticking-out belly button means a boy, a sticking-in one means a girl. And we had a saying where we lived, that a boy baby 'eats' his mother up, but a girl is like face paint. That means, women who are carrying girls look fresh and bright-eyed, but being pregnant with a boy has a much bigger effect on the woman.[79]

Xinran also detailed her account of the time she visited an impoverished region of China along the Yellow River in 1989. There, she learned of the practice of female infanticide, referred to as "'doing' girl babies." When she began to inquire about the morality and legality of this practice, a local policeman simply replied, "They do things differently here." Then ordered her to not ask any more questions. She actually went to a home where a wife was giving birth, and she witnessed an infant that had been put into a slops pail. The following dialogue displays the difference in urban and rural attitudes towards child rearing:

> "Doing a baby girl is not a big thing around here. You city folk are shocked the first time you see it, right?" the older woman said comfortingly, seeing how shocked I was.
> "That's a living child!" I said in a shaking voice...
> "It's not a child," she corrected me. [sic] "...If it was, we'd be looking after it, wouldn't we?...It's a girl baby, and we can't keep it."
> "A girl baby isn't a child, and you can't keep it?" I repeated uncomprehendingly.
> "Around these parts, you can't get by without a son...If your children just eat, and don't earn, and you have no land and no grain, then you might as well starve! You city folk get food from the government. We get our grain ration according to the number of people in the family. Girl babies don't count. The officials in charge don't give us any extra land when a girl is born, and there's so little arable land that the girls will starve to death anyway."[80]

Two years later, the couple that had thrown their baby into the slops pail came to visit Xinran at her radio station in the city. She told Xinran why they had ventured so far from home and how she perceived her own societal role:

> "...I heard that city folk know how to have a baby boy. I thought I could learn that too, have a boy and then go home and live like a human being for a bit!" This woman really had grown up in the belief that you do not count as a human being unless you have a son.[81]

These passages are evidence of the limitations of the government in communicating its narratives of women's liberation and state savior to the outreaches of China's rural populations.

2.5 Familial Pressures

Susan Greenhalgh found that "[g]ender bias coupled with ignorance of reproductive biology have resulted in the scapegoating of women."[82] Mothers are placed "at fault" for not having a son. There have been cases of husbands who will abuse and emotionally neglect their wives for having daughters.[83] Grandparents and extended family have also been attributed with the encouragement of this gender bias in China. The following quotation is from a mother living in Yunnan in response to a study of rural regions of China in the late 1990s:

> If a grandson isn't back home on time, the grandmother will worry. If he is sick, she will bring him to the hospital. If it is the granddaughter, no. Our generation treats girls and boys equal. But there is a common sentence in the village: boys are treasure, girls are trouble.[84]

The mother's words are reflective of the power dynamics associated with different familial relations. Another significant relationship is between a wife and her mother-in-law. Mothers-in-law often exert further pressure upon Chinese mothers, especially in regard to childrearing. The following quotations are from women voicing opinions on their own mother-in-laws:

- [My mother-in-law] always criticizes me. Nothing that I do is right at all. She hurts me and makes me lose confidence. Before the baby was born, I was a confident career woman, but now I have lost my confidence and feel depressed.

- I hoped that my mother-in-law would treat me better because my baby is a boy. But she is the same, she ignores me the same as before. It makes me so sad.

- When I was in the hospital bed after delivery, the woman who was in bed next to me commented, "It seems that your mother-in-law does not like your daughter"…I knew that she didn't like that I'd had a baby girl, as she asked me to have another baby. She is putting a lot of pressure on me. I don't know what to do; I wish I were dead.[85]

These perspectives shed light on the perspective of the rural wife Xinran had visited along the river in 1989. The wife revered her mother-in-law, who, in contrast to others mentioned above, did not have a strict gender preference for her children or grandchildren. Yet, the kindness of her mother-in-law further made the wife feel trapped. "A good mother-in-law is hard to come by." She said, "For a woman like me who can't have a son, I don't have any way out, do I?"[86]

There are more signs that opinions are straying further away from these "at least one son practice." In a study conducted amongst rural women living in Jiangsu, Anhui, and Yunnan, some of the respondents noted that daughters were easier to raise and were more reliable for filial care—a view shared by urban couples. Women from the three provinces explained the advantages of having daughters are socioeconomic. One mother from Jiangsu reflected upon this preference with undertones of traditional gender roles:

> Boys spend more money than girls. They smoke, drink and play mahjong. But girls listen. Families have to help boys marry. That costs 10,000 yuan. But girls only need a little dowry. Give them 2,000-3,000 and let them go away...When a girl grows up, she can learn to embroider and make money. In my village, girls don't worry about jobs--they pick up the needle.[87]

The study, conducted during the years 1996-1998, revealed that 73-99% of women in all three provinces who had either a son or a daughter or two daughters were satisfied with their number of children, and that 93-99% of women with one son and one daughter were satisfied. The study also notes that women who had two daughters were more satisfied than those with one child, regardless of the sex. Vanessa Fong, who has conducted extensive research and ethnographies of singleton children in urban areas of China, shows that these attitudes are not exclusive to the countryside. Fong quotes a father after his daughter passed her college entrance exams as saying, "I was wrong to have wanted a son. A daughter like you is worth ten sons."[88]

More recent perspectives of gender preference show that, although the pressure from elders to have a son still exists, many Chinese mothers in urban areas are impartial, supporting the narrative found in Fong's literature. The following quotes from a 2003 study illustrate this impartiality amongst urban Chinese mothers:

> 她是我的一切。她是我的未来，我的希望。
- She is my everything. She is my future and my hope.[89]

- I thought that it didn't matter if the baby was a boy or a girl, or if it was beautiful or ugly. But it must be healthy. That was my only hope.[90]

- Perhaps older people prefer grandsons according to tradition. But now my husband and I both think a girl is better…because girls will have a closer relationship with the mother. Her heart is closer to the mother's heart (*xīntòng māmā* [心痛妈妈]) [*sic*]. Boys, in this aspect, are not as close.[91]

- I think most mothers, if they are well-prepared, will have the same feeling as me: excited, happy. No matter whether it is a boy or girl. I feel very happy because it is my own child.[92]

2.6 Sex Education And Unplanned Pregnancies

In addition to setting the marriageable age for women and men as 20 years and 22 years respectively, the Marriage Law also contains rhetoric identical to that of the family planning policy in its encouragement of "late marriage and late childbirth." Article 13 of the family planning policy asserts, "[Government] departments—such as birth planning, education, science and technology, culture, public health, civil affairs, news and publication, and radio and television—should organize propaganda-and-education for developing population and birth planning." Article 19

further dictates "the State shall create conditions guaranteeing citizens informed choice of safe, effective, and appropriate measures for preventing pregnancy and controlling birth (*bìyùn jiéyù cuòshī* [避孕节育措施]) [*sic*]."[93]

Despite these guidelines, the actual discussion of sex has only recently begun to become more open. Sex was traditionally not discussed, even between married spouses, because it was regarded as "dirty and bad."[94] The silence is starting to thaw with the implementation of reproductive health education programs, yet the quality and effectiveness of such programs is debatable. A 2010 study conducted amongst teenaged students in urban cities asserted how, generally, young people had inadequate knowledge of sexual health. Additionally, the study also found that, although there were supporters of having no sex before marriage, there were still students who approved of teenage sex, dating, one-night stands, and extramarital sex. The study also found there to be observably low use of contraceptives among Chinese teenagers.[95]

The openness to premarital sex and inadequate education about sexual health has contributed to the overall statistic of unintentional pregnancies. Due to the way that the family planning policy is implemented, citizens need "official permission to be pregnant" and these unplanned pregnancies are considered "illegal" pregnancies.[96] A 2001 study reads:

> In some regions, families that adhered to the guidelines of approved family size received free obstetric care services as a financial reward. Families that did not adhere to the one-child policy and had an unapproved birth did not receive this subsidy, and effectively paid higher prices for these services…In addition to facing the full cost of obstetric services, due to a lack of health insurance for obstetric care, families in some regions were fined when a pregnancy was found to be unapproved…These fines for unapproved births were substantial and typically were 10–20% of a family's annual income...[97]

The fines and lesser accessibility created by incentivizing prenatal care for married women with approved pregnancies has led many mothers to hide their pregnancies, often at the risk of their own health. Single young people are also among those excluded by state policy, "while health professionals are often uncertain about providing them with such services."[98] Extensive surveillance on pregnancies, in addition to the creation of birth quotas, has also exerted social pressures amongst women with unplanned pregnancies, causing them to have greater distrust in others and failure to acknowledge their pregnancy to themselves or the state. The same study indicated that the odds for maternal death amongst mothers who underwent illegal birth was over two and a half times as likely as those whose births had been approved. The researchers further hypothesized that contributors to these deaths are, "delivery by non-medical personnel…anxiety, social isolation, depression, and general psycho-social pressure which could lead to pregnancy complications and hence increased maternal mortality." [99]

As Emma Rafaelof notes, illegal and unreported births in China result in children who are "institutionally nonexistent, unable to receive a formal education, apply for jobs, get married, own property, or even to engage in public life at the risk of incriminating themselves and their parents for violating the one-child policy."[100] Another study discusses further how, "the law prohibits discrimination against children born outside marriage…[yet] children from illegal pregnancies may not be registered or treated equally until their parents pay the fines imposed as punishment."[101] Thus, women who are under marriageable age and become pregnant are faced with an ultimatum: marry before delivering the child or have an abortion. [102]

There are accounts of couples who illicitly give birth to children, a practice which is not favored because it offsets the birth quota for a village/city. These couples, known as "extra-birth guerilla troops," would evade the law, often by train or traveling outside of their registered area. Their conflicts of tradition and modernity were apparent in their unwillingness to kill baby girls, yet continued desire for a son. Thus, these couples would continue to have "extra" births in an attempt to have a son, creating a "floating" population as they abandoned any daughters they had while keeping from the eyes of the law.

Hiding from the authorities was made especially difficult due to the rigorous surveillance done by elderly women who ran neighborhood committees as well as existing government officials. However, because these couples were on the run, they traveled extensively. In addition to gaining knowledge of loopholes and corruption in the legal system, they were able to witness the growing disparities between urban and rural areas; between the rich and the poor, and thus understand the economic boom occurring in China better than their static rural counterparts.[103]

Xinran witnessed firsthand one of these "guerilla" couples abandoning their daughter at a train station shortly after introducing themselves. Upon realizing that the father was still on the train, she confronted him:

> "You…your own daughter—left on a station platform!"...
> "Yes, I gave her a bun. The stall holder will look after her."
> "Do you know the stall holder?"
> "No, I don't."
> "Then how can you possibly know she'll look after her? You're her father, don't you love her? What about her mother's feelings?" [sic].
> He looked close to tears. "She's our flesh and blood! Of course we love her. But the children were having a worse time on the run with us!" he said, swallowing hard.[104]

Fearing the loss of land and other benefits he would receive as the eldest son, the man had promised his parents he would have a baby boy within ten years to appease them. It had been seven and a half years since he made that promise, and the daughter Xinran had just met was the fourth daughter the man and his wife had abandoned. Noting that it was a "roaring trade," the father confirmed Xinran's suspicions of doctors whom performed unapproved deliveries and abortions for these "guerillas," finding profit "in the gap that existed between the law and family custom." The man explained how "guerillas" on the run would often stay in abandoned buildings and perform menial tasks to gain small sums of money which was reflected in he response to Xinran about the necessity of abandoning daughters:

> "But why do you need to abandon your daughters? Don't some people take their children with them as they keep moving?"
> "Take the children with you? If it's not your firstborn, then where would you go to have the baby? You can buy a birth permit—for tens of thousands of yuan—but where would we get money like that from? … If you go on the run with the child, you have to have the money to feed and clothe her as well as her mother. If her mother doesn't eat, the baby in her belly won't thrive, and if the mother does eat, what will the child eat?"[105]

Although, through Xinran's writing, the father seemed to be visibly pained by the act of "sacrificing" his daughters to society to keep with a tradition which had no room for them, he told of how this lifestyle had been impacting his wife:

> "After the child trafficker took our eldest daughter away, I was brokenhearted. And my wife cried for three months. When the second daughter was born, she had no milk. The baby nearly starved. We just managed to keep her alive by feeding her a little rice water…
> "When my wife got pregnant for the third time, we had a good talk and decided we had to take the second daughter to the city. At least there people were more educated and, who knows, she might end up with good folk!"
> …
> "Aren't you worried what might have happened to [your daughters]?"
> "What's the point in worrying? If they're very lucky, they'll survive. If not…Girls are born to suffer. It's too bad they're not boys."
> "But what about your wife? She's a woman too, after all."
> "Yes, she can't handle it the way I do. She cries almost every night, and says she's been dreaming about the girls. I don't really believe it. We work so hard all day, we don't have time to dream!"
> …
> "But your wife has suffered so much, physically and emotionally!"
> "A woman who doesn't have a son has nothing to live for. I'm good to her! She may be miserable, but I'm miserable too."[106]

After assuring the father that she would not report him to the authorities, Xinran returned to her seat, noting how the wife's suffering was visible in her face. "Men," she wrote, "will never understand the emotional bond between a woman and the baby she carries in her womb for nine months. Every injury to that child is ten thousand times more painful to the mother than cutting flesh from her own body."[107]

2.7 Orphanages And Adoption

The first orphanages in China were established by Western missionaries. Xinran notes that, prior to 1990, the Chinese orphanages she saw or heard of "were places society had forgotten; the country and its government simply could not be bothered with them. They were viewed as a national embarrassment by many officials, while the common people saw them as human rubbish dumps."[108] Orphanages in the late 1980s had disparate living conditions. While some may have had kitchens, orphanages overall had very little space or proper child-care equipment.

There were many reasons for children ending up in orphanages. A retired orphanage worker Xinran interviewed explained the main causes for the better development of orphanages in the 1990s:

> Peasants leaving the villages in search of work were one reason. If families couldn't bring themselves to kill unwanted babies, then the workers brought them to the towns, in the hope that they'd be taken in and looked after. Then there were the families who only wanted a boy baby, not a girl, and couldn't have another because of the one-child-per-family policy. They knew where to go to have the baby and where to go to abandon it. Then there were the city girls that got pregnant before marriage. I saw that myself, and there were plenty of those. They would leave a memento with their baby: a letter or a book, or some token of those times. That wasn't something the peasants would do. There was another reason why orphanages developed, and that was the liberalization that made international adoption possible. It was foreign adopting families and the money they paid to the orphanages that made it possible to improve them.[109]

Indeed much funding for orphanages comes from foreign adoptions. In 2007, it cost foreigners $3000-$5000 (25,000-45999 yuan) to adopt a baby girl. Chinese families, however, were paying 200-300 yuan ($25-$39) to adopt a baby girl, and 10,000-50,000 yuan ($1,300-$6500) to adopt a boy.[110]

The rural wife whom had revisited Xinran at her radio station revealed that she had had two more daughters since she had "done" her first, and her father-in-law had given them up for foreign adoption. Xinran asked what she knew of the foreigners that adopted her daughters, the mother detailed the amount she had sacrificed in her attempts to maintain a balance between traditional customs and the modern policies and values of a "greater good."

> I don't know. My father-in-law said they were foreigners with colored eyes and big noses…My daughters were both as good as gold. The eldest was with me for the whole of the Birth Month….The second one was taken away in less than three weeks…It was all done in such a hurry, I didn't have time to tell the people who came for her to pass the message on that she slept best if you held her in your left arm…I can't do anything about the baby who was 'done' and died, but the next two lived, and I'm so worried about them. My heart hurts whenever I think about them. My husband says I'm heartsick.[111]

Although abandoned or unwanted baby girls are adopted by domestic couples who are either infertile or childless, the percentage is smaller than in previous years. This can be partially attributed to the low amount of state promotion for domestic adoption, but also to how international adoptions have been viewed as a "healthy alternative."[112] As a result, Rafaelof writes, "[t]he psychological impacts of the gender bias thus extend beyond the borders of the Chinese nation…"[113]

2.8 Gender Equality

The family planning policy established a new narrative of women's liberation in that it "has given women a way to talk back to their husbands, limit their fertility, and develop their intellectual potential."[114] However, at the same time the scope of the policy remains limited itself as it focuses primarily on benefiting privileged Chinese women in urban areas. It has thus helped to create or widen generation gaps and disparities between urban and rural areas of China.[115]

During Mao's time in power, he created a unisex society, abolishing gender binaries. As said before, this false "liberation" was a means of increasing the rhetoric of national savior and the empowerment of women. Ding Ling, a prominent Chinese feminist author, once iterated in the 1940s, "The party has proclaimed lofty theories of gender equality, but failed to deal with the actual conditions and attitudes that held women in an inferior condition."[116] The suppression of femininity meant that this unisex society did not equate to one which truly valued gender equality, although Greenhalgh does write that "Maoism at least championed the *goal* [*sic*] of gender equality."[117] Mao had

created a nation in which each citizen and couple had obligations to prioritize the state and party over their family construction. From her interviews, Greenhalgh learned that "all women's issues were viewed through the lens of Marxian women's theory, which started from the perspective not of women but of the party, state, or 'society as a whole.'"[118] One of her interviewees, Li Xiaojiang, upheld the position that "the population problem simply cannot be seen from an individual perspective, as Westerners are wont to do, because it is a national problem."[119]

Family planning has shaped women's personal lives and development, allowing them more social mobility and even changing their reproductive cycle. Zhu Chuzhu, a women's studies scholar, has conducted studies with her colleagues that have found "most women today complete their fertility before age thirty" and the average reproductive period for rural women has gone from being thirteen years to five. These studies also illustrate a perspective of how "Chinese women have enjoyed more colorful lives, improved social and economic status, and, in turn, enhanced autonomy and self-respect." However, Greenhalgh notes the lack of data present to back these claims. [120]

The generations in the mid-1970s did not experience the great national crises such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, and their only knowledge of the loss of life and culture during those times was secondhand. This resulted in what Rafaelof call "a marked generational gap; where the youth cannot remember, the old wish to forget."[121] The older generations had a reactionary response to gender equality, coming to associate it with Mao's revolutionary movements that they had endured and survived. In other words, if it was "revolutionary" under Mao to repress individuality and traditional ideas of femininity, then to stray away from the negative association meant to not only revere these values but strongly so. As a result, there has been a subsequent adoption of Neo-Confucianism and the sexes have been separated into spheres comparable to the traditional *inner* and *outer*. In what she phrases as the "cultural celebration of motherhood," Greenhalgh writes of the results of these conservative means to stray from Maoist gender equality:

> …in trying to extract feminism from Maoist state feminist discourse, which overemphasized similarity, women's studies scholars have found themselves stressing gender difference. In theorizing difference, they have reconstructed a biologically based, essentialistic gender binary that sees women as inherently (physiologically and psychologically) different from men…This theoretical thrust in Chinese feminism, which sees women as tethered to their reproductive physiologies and destined to give birth, would also seem to discourage the development of critical perspectives of reproduction.[122]

Primarily urban women in modern China face a "glass ceiling" in the marriage and job markets. Contrasting the "good wife, wise mother" is the "successful career woman" (nu qian ren [女強人]). These are the women who are "highly educated, dominant in the professional world, but often portrayed as tough, un-feminine spinsters."[123] This unfavorable attitude toward career-driven women is also mirrored in attitudes toward educated women. Rafaelof notes that, "for women, higher education can be a good thing, but their marriage prospects narrow as their level of education exceeds a potential male partner's." She further details that these attitudes contribute to an "internalized misogyny" amongst Chinese women:

> In order to marry, they must hold themselves back or undervalue their achievements relative to potential male partners. Neither option holds any long-term benefits and both are unfortunate in sight of the intense pressure put on young urbanites of both genders to succeed academically and professionally. The potential of women who hold themselves back can thus be interpreted as a "negative return" on the investment of their parents, the state, and their own efforts.[124]

2.9 Parenthood

Article 21 of the Marriage Law dictates the family structure regarding children and again mirrors the standards found in the family planning policy:

> Parents shall have the duty to bring up and educate their children; children shall have the duty to support and assist their parents. If parents fail to perform their duty, children who are minors or are not capable of living on their own shall have the right to demand the costs of upbringing from their parents. If children fail to perform their duty, parents who are unable to work or have difficulty in providing for themselves shall have the right to demand support payments from their children. Infanticide…and all other acts causing serious harm to infants shall be prohibited.[125]

Along with the encouragement for later marriages, this added sense of responsibility and duty has led many Chinese citizens to pursue their personal goals rather than concentrate on building a family. The family planning policy does outline measures to be taken for those in poverty, yet one mother expresses, "When you have a baby, you have to save a lot of money. But for us, it is such a great burden. When I think about it, I am so worried that I cannot sleep."[126] The burden has not been that a couple is impoverished before having a child, but rather that the cost of raising a child is an investment in the future. The pressures to raise their only children in modern day China have resulted in increased anxiety amongst parents.

There are also a marked generation gaps between the youth, who have grown up in a market-based society and their parents who witnessed one based on Marxism. An only daughter whom was born in the 1980s, expressed her frustrations with her mother: "There is no way that she could understand; she doesn't have the experience to understand…My mother and her generation just can't understand that separating from a boyfriend is painful. She got married and that was it, she has never been through such a separation, she just thinks that I have separated and should just get on with life."[127] From the opposite perspective, a mother whom struggled to connect with her daughter found that "although she accepted that her daughter lived in a cultural environment that was very different to her own, she felt confused, even bewildered, about how to respond to a world of young consumerist desire that she felt unable to comprehend."[128]

However, there have also been Chinese daughters whom have bridged this generational gap by having children and becoming mothers themselves. The following quotations are from mothers whose perspectives have been changed by giving birth to their own children:

- You are not able to appreciate your parents if you don't have your own child. Only if you are a mother can you understand how hard it was to give birth to you. You can love and understand her, and feel closer to your mother…and my husband and I are much closer. Now we have the result of our love.[129]

- Having my own child gives me a new understanding of my relationship with my family and parents. What I didn't realize before, like the hard work my parents did to nurture me, I realize now. The child's development is a result of the parent's hard work.[130]

Although these realizations of parenthood are not specific to China, the family planning policy has altered the perception of motherhood for Chinese women. Yahui Zhang writes, "Chinese women are conscious that they change their habits and identities because of the arrival of their babies. However, they gladly make the changes of themselves and accept their identity of being mothers in relation to their children."[131] This is mostly consistent with the overall findings of Greenhalgh's interviews with Chinese feminists, in which she found three different positions her interviewees took on the family planning policy: actively supporting the government's narrative, placing the official narrative off the agenda, or supporting the official narrative while quietly questioning parts of it.[132] Susan Young concludes, "Whether she makes sacrifices in her health, her career, or her morals, Chinese mothers have appeared to do it out of a combination of unyielding maternal love and an extreme sense of loyalty and obligation to the nation."[133]

2.10 Education

In historical China, specifically during the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), there was a significant expansion of the educational system. Civil service exams, which concentrated on Confucian thought, were used as a means of determining one's intellectual capabilities, and education was a large determinant in social class.[134] Traditional education suffered many hardships over time, especially under Chairman Mao. During the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards sought to abolish the "Four Olds." Revolutionaries zealously championed the rhetoric of Mao Zedong, which sought to propagandize and weaponize artistic and literary expression by subordinating it to CCP policies. Dubbed "young generals,"[135] these revolutionaries "violently attacked all old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits."[136] Nanchu, in her memoir, described the desolation of schools and discord of students during this time. "From the start of the Cultural Revolution," she wrote, "the state-run propaganda machine had never ceased proclaiming that 'the ignorant are the greats' and 'the more knowledge one has, the more counterrevolutionary one becomes.' Lies told a thousand times became irrefutable truth."[137]

In spite of these tragedies, the traditional values of education, which have been defined as "scholarship, recognizable success realized in examinations, and the means for entering officialdom,"[138] have withstood the tests of time and continue to exist in contemporary China. These values have increased societal pressures on mothers to give their children the best environment in which they can learn and grow. These pressures have resulted in some

mothers—often at considerable expense and self-sacrifice—educating their children in numerous disciplines outside of standard schooling, often at an early age. One mother detailed in her blog how her daughter had taken part in numerous extracurricular activities.[139] When she was three years old, her daughter started to learn English, at four years old she started learning mental mathematics, drawing, and dance, and when she was five she was introduced to chess and violin.[140] [141] The mother wrote of how "she only wanted to use the extracurricular education to improve her daughter's intellect…to [help her] be physically fit…to cultivate her tastes…and to help her get a head start on those subjects that she has to learn when she starts her formal education" in the hopes that she "would become someone who is useful to the country, to the people, and to her family."[142]

Vanessa Fong wrote of a particularly self-sacrificial mother she met in Dalian. The mother's daughter, Sun Wei, was taking an entrance exam which would determine her future school. Sun Wei's mother, already hospitalized due to problems with her kidneys and blood pressure, focused more on her daughter's academic success and wellbeing than her own health. Fong's account reads:

> As the high school entrance exam drew near, Sun Wei's mother grew increasingly anxious…The anxiety took a toll on Sun Wei's mother's already bad health. A few weeks before the exam, she saw a doctor who said that her kidney problems and high blood pressure were serious enough to require hospitalization. She refused because she worried that her absence would cause Sun Wei to do badly on the high school entrance exam. The doctor prescribed Western pharmaceuticals…but she purchased less expensive Chinese herbal medications instead. When I gave her money to help with medical expenses, she spent most of it on special foods and dietary supplements to prepare Sun Wei for the exam.
>
> While I waited with Sun Wei's Mother for Sun Wei and Yang Shu to come home from school, Sun Wei's mother's sister came by to visit. "Sun Wei's exam is important, but so is your health," she chided Sun Wei's mother. "You should be hospitalized. Sun Wei can take care of herself. You shouldn't sacrifice your body just to stay around her."
>
> "If I stay in the hospital, Sun Wei will be anxious, and she won't be able to concentrate on her studies…I can't abandon my daughter at the most critical time of her life. I have just one child, and I love her more than I love my own life."[143]

2.11 Little Emperors/Empresses

Especially in metropolitan areas, there has been much psychosocial speculation about the development and livelihood of only children. Parents of only children especially worry about their only child becoming lonely due to lack of siblings as well as detrimental effects on their social skills and mental health. At the same time, parents are able to focus on one child the attention and resources they would traditionally have divided amongst multiple offspring. Parents also have high expectations for their children and exert pressure on them to excel academically and be successful. The desire for the success of their child is not only for the good of the nation, but also because of the traditional Chinese family model. Children were traditionally raised with the Confucian value of filial piety (Xiào [孝]) in which they were expected to care for their ancestors, including their parents, grandparents, and in-laws. Thus, children are a kind of "social security."[144]

As part of this desire to focus on the success of their children, parents do not encourage them to do the chores that they themselves had to do in their youth under a traditional household.[145] However, because they are pampered and spoiled by their parents to make room for their studies, there have been cases of singleton children who do not become familiar with basic household duties and instead begin to gain a sense of entitlement to these luxuries their parents provide them. In her book *Only Hope*, Vanessa Fong writes of one student in Dalian:

> While Wang Song was in high school, his parents seldom asked him to do chores. His father told me that he sometimes brought Wang Song fruit and drinks while he was studying so that he would not waste time walking to the refrigerator. His mother told me that she put toothpaste on his toothbrush every morning before waking him up, to save him a few precious seconds as he prepared to go to school. In 1999, the summer after he failed to get into college, however, his mother tried to get him to help with chores.
>
> "Turn the TV off and come help me make dinner!" Wang song's mother told him while he was watching a television drama with me in the living room.
> He refused because he did not want to miss the show. "Stop talking!" he told his mother. "I can't hear the TV!"

> "Don't you feel sorry for your Ma, who works all day to earn money to send you abroad and then comes home just in time to make dinner? I wouldn't ask you to help if you were actually studying English with Teacher Fong, but right now you're just watching TV! You're not doing anything important!"
> "This show is important to me!" Wang Song insisted.
> "My son is too lazy," his mother lamented to me. "I've spoiled him to the point where he takes me for granted."[146]

Fong also tells of a young man named Yu Tao, whom did not hold the traditional value of filial piety as his previous generations did. He assumed his parents would aid him unconditionally and took it for granted as he continually bullied and extorted other students. Although he was ungrateful towards her, his mother continued to defend him because he was her only chance in motherhood.

Only children, however, are not only subject to high expectations from their parents, but also discrimination among employers. The stigma against only children is attributed to the common perception that due to their lack of siblings they have impaired social skills and can be "self-centered, less cooperative, and less likely to get along with peers."[147]

A scientific study was conducted in 2013 amongst Beijing residents that examined the behaviors between generations whom had grown up before and after the implementation of the family planning policy. The results confirmed some of the concerns surrounding the impacts of the policy on children. Although respondents raised after the introduction of the policy displayed better academic performance, they were also found to be less trusting, less optimistic, more neurotic, and less likely to take risk than their pre-policy counterparts.[148]

2.12 Absentee Mothers

The family planning policy prioritized education and careers over family in order to incentivize a more modernized China while simultaneously curbing family size.[149] In urban areas, a significant issue resulting from the policy has been what is known as the "4-2-1 problem." In a one-child family, the value of filial piety would burden a single child with the responsibility for caring for their parents as well as both pairs of grandparents. However, this dynamic also had several benefits for mothers.

In her BBC article "Viewpoint: What Chinese women really need," Xinran described the difference between modern Chinese parenthood and the "Red China" she was raised in where "[parents] were encouraged to believe that [they] should not care about their children more than their work." She detailed the struggles of completing her book about the first generation of the family planning policy because it was difficult for her to gain enough information about mothers from their children's memories. "This," she wrote, "was because their parents were too busy to cook, read to them or even be with them; the children were too lonely to understand that they could have more from family besides inherited money."[150] This conflict of traditional and modern family structures has led to disjointed parent-child relationships. Rafaelof writes:

> The child may likely resent the absence of the parents, especially the mother, or feel a need to maintain distance due to a lack of familiarity. Either case creates additional stress for the mother who…may be perceived either by herself and/or the surrounding community as having failed in her maternal duties because of the parent-child tension.[151]

However, it was not just the children who had been victimized by this broken family dynamic. One mother, who had returned to work after having a daughter, expressed:

> I felt very regretful for my daughter because I had to leave her all day and I missed her. Because I was very busy at work I had no time to think of her; but when I did have a rest, I felt of her at once, immediately. And I felt very sorry. It is the same situation for all the working women…On the one hand you have the good working experience and on the other one you have the good family. Both aspects are important to you: work and family.[152]

Another mother, in her blog entry, explained the anxiety caused by the dissonance between choosing between a career-oriented and a domesticated lifestyle, as well as the worry of being away from raising her daughter:

> Orange's mother was an executive manager…When her maternity leave was almost over, she didn't feel like going back to work at all. Ideally she wanted to be a full-time mother for three years because so many

> sources told her that these are the crucial years for early childhood development. But at the same time she did not want to stay at home forever. The contradictory feelings she experienced were resolved temporarily by her determination to be a good stay-at-home mother…[But] when the head of the branch company asked her to come back to work, she took the offer… On her first day of work, she was tortured by the thought that her mother-in-law would not be able to keep an eye on her daughter all the time because of her age…There were countless worries and concerns. To her great relief, everything turned out fine and now she is learning to balance work and family life.[153]

Migrant mothers on the move for work, as opposed to factory girls, also worry "about their children having no school to go to in the city where they work, either because of the high cost (a school term costs over $1,600 – more than what they earn over three years) or the school's policy to only take children who are from that city." Grandparents and family members are often left with the responsibility of raising their grandchildren in their mother's absence. In rural areas especially, this places a further double-burden on grandmothers, who must continue the farm labor in addition to properly raising a young child. Xinran expressed, "Such women are not part of the picture of the new China that is being built up and they tell me they have no idea how to comprehend the city life they hear about from their city-worker children."[154] Grandparents also discipline their grandchildren differently than they would have with their own children or the way the mothers would with their own children.

3. Conclusions

Even with the recent alterations made to the family planning policy allowing parents who are both singletons themselves to have a second child, there has been a visible preference for limiting the number of children.[155] The following quotations are from urban Chinese mothers expressing their thoughts on having a single child:

- In China there is the One Child Policy. It's different from other countries where they can have many children. If you have too many you won't treat them like we do. Because we can have only one child we are more nervous in caring for it and treasure it.[156]

- The family used to be two members. Now it is three. With the coming of the third member the family now seems complete.[157]

These findings are not meant to imply that such narratives of self-sacrifice and nationalism have been adhered to without pain. While Xinran was visiting the rural family and saw the results of "doing" female infants, the older woman also said to her, "Any woman who's had a baby has felt pain, and the mothers of girls are all heartsick too!"[158] In spite of her comments about daughters, her comments about pain are shared by a study which found that, "even though rural women were undergoing such abortions, they did not think this was right and felt that it represented unfair treatment of girls."[159] Furthermore, the former midwife whom Xinran had interviewed also revealed her regret of her own former practices.[160]

The female suicide rate in China is one of the highest in the world.[161] While there are other sociopolitical pressures on women in China, the emotional consequences of infanticide, abortion, or abandonment are legitimate factors in this statistic. Xie Lihua, one of the specialists Greenhalgh interviewed, told of how her grandmother, who, "unable to bear a son, saw her husband take a second wife. The second wife, failing to produce a son, committed suicide."[162]

Previous government policies such as the Great Leap Forward were reported to have "exacted a 'high price in blood.'"[163] While it has not been a devastating, crippling reform in the same way as the Great Leap Forward, the family planning policy has resulted in significant gender and population costs which were not necessarily part of its aims to taper the fertility rate.

As previously stated, this can be attributed to the constant ways in which the PRC contradicts its national goals with the implementation of its own policies. The shocking effects of the family planning policy and its implementation became apparent in the early 1990s. With fertility among the Chinese population falling below the "replacement level" of 2.1 child per woman, "commission leaders began to grow concerned about the social, physical, and political price that had been paid for pushing the numbers down so fast."[164] The continued narratives of self-sacrifice, state savior, and women's liberation have nevertheless been repeatedly used—at great cost—as means of gathering support for the Party and allegiance to working towards a "greater good."

The sex ratio imbalance, caused by gender biased practices, has resulted in a disproportionate amount of unmarried men compared to women in China. Rafaelof notes several outcomes to this imbalance. The first is similar

to the predictions of Vanessa Fong, in which women will gain a better sense of agency and partner selection because "they are, as ever, the keys to continuing the bloodline."[165] However, Rafaelof also notes that Chinese men are also marrying foreign brides, with many women being kidnapped from Southeast Asia and being married to men in rural China.[166]

The original mapping of the family planning policy was one where, "a whole generation would sacrifice its freedom of reproductive choice for the benefit of 'the nation as a whole' and 'future generations to come.'"[167] However, it seems the struggle to control population growth has pitted tradition against modernity and has resulted in greater cognitive dissonance, confusion, and resistance among China's growing, diverse population. While families remain affected as a whole, it is especially mothers who bear the brunt of carrying out their filial duties while simultaneously also raising their children and competing in the workforce. This paper has sought to detail the creation and implementation of the family planning policy and its effects on the Chinese family model. In particular, the paper has specifically attempted to expound upon the enactment of related laws in coordination with the policy and how they affected mothers and the very concept of motherhood itself.

4. Endnotes

1 Emma Rafaelof, "Births of a Nation: Liberation and the One-Child Policy for Women in Urban China," *Colorado Journal of Asian Studies* 2, no.1 (2013): 92.

2 Susan Greenhalgh, "Fresh Winds in Beijing: Chinese Feminists Speak Out on the On-Child Policy and Women's Lives," *Signs* 26, no.3 (2001): 851.

3Patricia B. Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 24.

4 Rafaelof, "Births of a Nation," 98.

5 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 29.

6 Rafaelof, 103.

7 Yan Ruth Xia et al., "Family Policy in China: A Snapshot of 1950-2010," in *Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe*, ed. Mihaela Robila, (Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 258. Accessed November 8, 2014.

8 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 50.

9 Rodney L. Taylor and Howard Yuen Fung Choy, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism: N-Z* (New York, NY: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2005), 496.

10 Dongmei Xu, "Heroines of the Everlasting Tales: A Comparative Study" (PhD diss., Purdue University Graduate School, 2008), 72-73.

11 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 24-7

12 Ebrey, *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (1993), 57-9.

13 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 37-44.

14 Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2003), 24.

15 Sarah Elizabeth Schrell Young, "Motherhood in China: A Study from Late Imperial China to the People's Republic of China" (PhD diss., San Diego State University, 2012), 76.

16 Rafaelof, "Births of a Nation," 98.

17 Young, 61.

18 J. M. Gentzler, "The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China," eds. David G. Atwill and Yurong Y. Atwill, *Sources in Chinese History: Diverse Perspectives from 16644 to the Present* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2010), 260.

19 Ibid., 261.

20 It is worth noting that later amendments removed much of the specific exclusionary traits such as impotence.

21 Rafaelof, "Births of a Nation," 100.

22 Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008.), 93.

23 Rafaelof, 100.

24 R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011), 385.

25 Greenhalgh, "Fresh Winds in Beijing: Chinese Feminists Speak Out on the On-Child Policy and Women's Lives," *Signs* 26, no. 3 (2001), 866.

26 Greenhalgh, “Managing ‘the Missing Girls’ in Chinese Population Discourse” in *Cultural Perspectives on Reproductive Health*, ed. Carla Makhlouf Obermeyer (Oxford University Press, 2001), 138.

27 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 866.

28 Elina Hemminki, Zhuochun Wu, Guiying Cao, and Kirsi Viisainen, “Illegal births and legal abortions – the case of China,” *Reproductive Health* 2, no. 5 (2005). doi: 10.1186/1742-4755-2-5

29 Xia et al., “Family Policy in China,” 262.

30 Hemminki et al.

31 M. Giovanna Merli and Adrian E. Raftery, “Are Births Underreported in China? Manipulation of Statistical Records in Response to China’s Population Policies,” *Demography* 37, no. 1 (2000): 113.

32 Ibid., 121.

33 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 98.

34 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 854.

35 Rafaelof, 112.

36 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 870.

37 National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China, “中华人民共和国人口与计划生育法,” Last modified December 30, 2001, accessed November 8, 2014, http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2001-12/30/content_282850.htm

38 Edwin A. Winckler, “People’s Republic of China Law on Population and Birth Planning,” *Population and Development Review* 28, no.3 (2002): 579.

39 Hemminki et al., “Illegal Births and Legal Abortions”

40 Xia et al., “Family Policy in China,” 262.

41 Hemminki et al.

42 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 110.

43 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 181.

44 Rafaelof, 100.

45 Karen Hardee, Zhenming Xie, and Baochang Gu. "Family Planning and Women's Lives in Rural China," *International Family Planning Perspectives* 30, no.2 (2004): 71.

46 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 870.

47 Hardee, Xie, Gu, 71.

48 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 870.

49 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation” 100.

50 Hardee, Xie, Gu, 71.

51 Ibid.

52 Robin Kartchner and Lynn Clark Callister, “Giving Birth: Voices of Chinese Women,” *Journal of Holistic Nursing* 21, no. 2 (2003): 106.

53 Ibid., 103

54 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 175.

55 Young, “Motherhood in China,” 89.

56 Kartchner and Callister, 104.

57 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 175.

58 Ibid.

59 Kartchner and Callister, 103-4.

60 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 175.

61 Kartchner and Callister, 104.

62 Ibid., 110.

63 Young, “Motherhood in China,” 89.

64 Ibid.

65 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 179.

66 Young, 80.

67 Ibid., 81.

68 Ibid.

69 Hardee, Xie, Gu, “Family Planning,” 72.

70 Greenhalgh, “Managing ‘the Missing Girls,’” 134.

71 Xinran, *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2010), 80.

72 Kartchner and Callister, “Giving Birth,” 102.

73 Wei Xing Zhu, Li Lu, and Therese Hesketh, “China’s Excess Males, Sex Selective Abortion, and One Child Policy: Analysis of Data from 2005 National Intercensus Survey,” *The British Medical Journal* 338, no.1211 (2009): 4.

74 Hemminki et al., “Illegal Births and Legal Abortions”

75 Zhu, Lu, Hesketh, 4.

76 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 871.

77 Zhu, Lu, Hesketh, 4.

78 Hardee, Xie, Gu, “Family Planning,” 72.

79 Xinran, *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother,* 49.

80 Ibid., 26-9.

81 Ibid., 33-4.

82 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 871.

83 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 112.

84 Hardee, Xie, Gu, “Family Planning,” 72.

85 Ibid., 90.

86 Xinran, *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother,* 34.

87 Hardee, Xie, Gu, 72.

88 Vanessa L. Fong, “China’s One-Child Policy and the Empowerment of Urban Daughters,” *American Anthropologist* 140, no.4 (2002): 1098.

89 Kartchner and Callister, “Giving Birth,”108.

90 Ibid., 109.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., 110.

93 Winckler, “Law on Population and Birth Planning” 580.

94 Xinran, “Sex in Chinese Culture,” *The Guardian*, May 5, 2005. Accessed November 8, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/may/06/china.gender

95 Juping Yu, “Teenage Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour in China: A Literature Review” *Health & Social Care in the Community* 20, no. 6 (2012): 563-76..

96 Hemminki et al., “Illegal Births and Legal Abortions”

97 Jim P. Doherty, Edward C Norton, and James E. Veney, “China’s One-Child Policy: The Economic Choices and Consequences Faced by Pregnant Women,” *Social Science and Medicine* 52, no.5 (2001): 745.

98 Yu, 579.

99 Doherty, Norton, Veney, 746-47.

100 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 114.

101 Hemminki et al. “Illega Births and Legal Abortions”

102 Huan He, Robert W. Blum, “Prevalence of Unintended Pregnancy and its Associated Factors Among Sexually Active Never-Married Youth in Shanghai,” *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 49 (2013): 913.

103 Xinran, *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother*, 80-1.

104 Ibid., 91.

105 Ibid., 92.

106 Ibid., 94-95.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., 98.

109 Ibid., 113-14.

110 Ibid., 114.

111 Ibid., 32-3.

112 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 113.

113 Ibid., 113.

114 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 869.

115 Rafaelof, 94.

116 Hardee, Xie, Gu, “Family Planning,” 75.

117 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 875.

118 Ibid., 876.

119 Ibid., 864.

120 Ibid., 869-70.
121 Rafaelof, 104.
122 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 876.
123 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 107.
124 Ibid.
125 Young, “Motherhood in China,” 78.
126 Ibid., 79.
127 Ibid., 87.
128 Ibid., 88.
129 Kartchner, 108.
130 Ibid., 110.
131 Ibid., 97-8.
132 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 863-65.
133 Young, “Motherhood in China,” 98.
134 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 1-3.
135 Ibid., 451.
136 Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past*, 281.
137 Young, 73.
138 Yahui Zhang, “Layered Motherhood for Chinese Mother Bloggers: A Feminist Foucauldian Analysis,” (PhD diss., Graduate College of Bowling Green State University, 2008), 62.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
141 Young, 84.
142 Zhang, “Layered Motherhood,” 62.
143 Vanessa L. Fong, *Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China’s One Child Policy*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 40.
144 Ibid., 83.
145 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 110.
146 Fong, *Only Hope*, 164.
147 Lisa Cameron, Nisvan Erkal, Lata Gangadharan, and Xin Meng, “Little Emperors: Behavioral Impacts of China’s One-Child Policy,” *Science* 339 (2013): 953-57.
148 Ibid.
149 Young, “Motherhood in China,” 81-2.
150 Xinran, “Viewpoint: What Chinese Women Really Need,” *BBC News China*, November 10, 2012. Accessed November 8, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-20134699
151 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation” 111.
152 Kartchner and Callister, “Giving Birth,” 107.
153 Young, “Motherhood in China,” 83.
154 Ibid.
155 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 114.
156 Kartchner and Callister, “Giving Birth,” 108.
157 Ibid., 109.
158 Xinran, *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother*, 29.
159 Hemminki et al., “Illegal Births and Legal Abortions”
160 Xinran, *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother*, 51.
161 Rafaelof, “Births of a Nation,” 113.
162 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 862.
163 Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past*, 338.
164 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 855
165 Rafaelof, 113.
166 Rafaelof, 113-4.
167 Greenhalgh, “Fresh Winds in Beijing,” 853.