

THE FAMILY PLANNING POLICY IN CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC CHINA.

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China today is one of the most populous country of the world. In the early days after the founding of Peoples Republic of China, the latent pressure of the population of China was gradually realised. At that time as the after effects of war the economy was being rehabilitated and democratic reforms were being affected. Long neglected tasks were being addressed. The government believed that a large labour force was needed for reconstruction. Population pressure was not recognised as a problem and there was little thought of population control as a possible policy. This article deals with the family planning policy of the Peoples Republic China.

Chinese society has lived under the domination of Confucian thought for more than 2000 years. According to which the family system was a patriarchal one where father was the sole authority and for the son, it was essential to be filial to his parents and ancestors. It was important to have a male line of descendants.

In the later period of Imperial Dynasties till Tang, population was not such a big problem. The rate of increase was kept stable by the practice of female infanticide, but since "Sung Dynasty abandoned this practice the fertility rate increased greatly. By the end of the dynastic era the population of China grew rapidly. This increase resulted in severe economic depression. In order to save China from this crises some efforts were made to find ways and means of controlling the birth rate.

The Peoples Republic China embarked on a series of campaigns to deal with the issue, but until the late I 970s the population policy remained essentially a voluntary one. In 1975 the average fertility rate (the number of live births per women) was about 3.0. If that rate had continued, China's population would be 1 .42 billion by the year 2000. Even if the fertility rate

could be kept at the 1978 level of 2.3, the population would rise to 1.28 billion. This was a frightening prospect in a country so desperately short of land and resources, and to make matters worse, a "baby boom" was expected in the early 1980s as a result of high birth rates in the middle of 1960s.¹ It was clear to population planners that a drastic reduction in family size was needed. In an attempt to reach zero population growth by the year 2000 a 'one-child per family policy' was considered to be the only viable course of action,

Demographers were obviously aware of the problems in implementing such a policy in a country where there were 240 million women of child bearing age and where having a large family was the cultural norm. The demographers also pointed out that if a one-child policy was adopted for two decades, China's population structure would become grotesquely unbalanced, and each able bodied person would have to support two parents and four grand parents. Therefore, most people in the country side felt it impossible to support a one-child policy.²

To make this shocking new policy effective financial incentives were made to couples with one-child who would agree to sign a pledge, promising to have no more children, such as, the parents would receive a subsidy of Y5 per month, preferential access to nurseries and kindergartens, priority in medical care and preference in the educational and employment spheres. The family would also receive additional housing space or a larger plot of land in the country side. If the family broke the pledge, it would have to return the subsidy, and if a third child was born the family would end up paying a fine that was about 10 percent of its annual income until the child was fourteen years old.³

When the one child limit was first promoted in 1979, two basic methods were used to gain mass compliance. First and most important, the Chinese Communist Party relied on mass propaganda system in all available media, mobilization of all party cadres and activists to take the lead in pledging to have only one child, organization of medical teams to move into the countryside to carryout medical procedures and mobilization of the local

population for study of the new policy, followed by its immediate implementation under heavy pressure from local officials. Second, the party also offered political and economic rewards for compliance, including preferred housing, better jobs, longer maternity leaves, free medical care and educational opportunities.

In the early 1980s, these methods were effective in areas, of bearing gaining compliance. In urban couples child age were closely supervised in their work places and neighborhood. A permit system was established to determine who was allowed to have a child in a given year, those who did not comply with had to face heavy fines including loss of their jobs and apartments. Similar permit system was applied in rural areas, identifying couples who were eligible to have a child in a given year. Moreover, rural cadres, who controlled all aspects of the local economy, had the power to deny couples a means of livelihood or any source of income.

Most people living in the rural areas were expected to observe the one-child rule, but if they wanted a second child they could apply to their local birth control authorities. Permission was granted to couples who qualified in any of the following categories or if their first child was a girl.

- 1) If their first child is handicapped with a non-genetic disease and is unable to work as an able bodied person.
- 2) If they are married for a second time and only one of them had a child by the former marriage.
- 3) If they had a adopted child.
- 4) If both of them were only children.

Preference for boys is evident all across China, but it is traditionally strongest in the rural areas. The major reason families prefer to have sons is economic-both to generate income and to provide security for the parents in their old age. As such, rural couples depended entirely on their sons for support during old age, by tradition, daughters would marry and become a part

of their husband's household. Although the government promised young couples that a new social security system would be in place by the time they reached retirement, a few were willing to depend on such a distant and uncertain solution. Some responded by defying the state and having two or more children particularly if the first child was girl. Others were simply unwilling to accept the birth of a daughter, therefore, in the early 1980s selective abortion based on the sex of the fetus became an increasingly common practice.⁴

Finally, with a changing social climate in the village, many couples worried that having only one child and especially a female one would leave them weak and vulnerable in their old age.

These cultural norms and economic realities generated great resistance to the one-child limit most vigorously in the early 1980s. In 1983 a major sterilization campaign got under way, targeted at all couples who were under 40 and had two children. Reasoning that this was the most efficient and effective way to make rapid progress on reducing population growth. Each locality was given a sterilization target, and mobile medical teams were sent into the countryside to perform sterilization on those who had been "mobilized". Although the campaign was a success in terms of the numbers of sterilization performed, it entailed heavy costs. On the other hand there were some negative consequences of the campaign first it was costly. Second, cadre-peasant relations became very tense at a time when rural stability was of the utmost importance to reformers. And third, the campaign created anger against the government.

By 1984 these unforeseen problems led to subtle but important changes in China's family planning policy, changes that were formalized in two policy documents issued in 1984 and 1985.⁵

Cadres were informed that heavy handed coercion was no longer accepted to enforce birth limits; peasants had to be persuaded, not forced, to comply with the policy. In addition, peasants demand for a second child was taken into account. By

1988 the state family planning commission declared that the policy of giving preferential treatment to "Single-daughter households" had become the standard policy across the country side, and by 1989 four distinct policies were in force, (1) a two child policy, (2) a one-son or two child policy (3) a one-child policy with some concessions for second birth and (4) a policy allowing two or more births per couple.⁶

The purpose of this relaxation of birth limits was to make the policy more "acceptable to peasants", and thus more enforceable by rural cadres, with sacrificing the overall national objective. As birth rates began to climb after 1985, however it became clear that rural enforcement remained problematic.⁷

The most important was the problem of early marriage and childbirth, with more early marriages came more "early births". By the late 1980s family planning officials were reporting that 10 percent of all births each year were to women under the legal marriage age of 20.⁸

The single-child policy remains the rule in China today, but there have been changes in emphasis both in its presentation and implementation. Instead of stressing the standardization of its regulations, their stringency and urgency, the authorities are now promoting flexibility 'controlled relaxation' and the evolution of appropriate rules to suit specific conditions and regions.

A major change is that a second child is now permitted in the countryside if either of the parents is an only child and in the cities when both the parents are only children. A second child is also now permitted in the rural areas where an only son gives birth to a daughter and where the continuation of the family life is threatened by the birth of a single daughter. These modifications make concessions to the strength of kinship ties and the rural areas. A major modification of the policy is the broader authorization of second child where couples find themselves in financial difficulties.

Optimists hope that the predictions of some demographers will come true in China during the 1990s, that

continued modernization will gradually reduce the desire of Chinese families to have children.⁹ As long as China continues to develop its economy and emphasize education, it will become easier with every passing year to encourage families to limit the number of children. This would give the government considerably more breathing space and more time to think out realistic alternatives to the current policy i.e. basically a "one-child only" plan with modifications. In its latest public announcements the government has promised that if the people strictly adhere to this policy for the rest of this century. Then the policy will be gradually relaxed as the overall growth rate declines.

CONCLUSION

Over population has always been a big problem for China presently the total population of China is estimated to be more than 1100 million. The world's most populous country has succeeded in slowing its population growth rate dramatically since 1970, but population control continues to be one of its most urgent task, Since 1979 China has pursued a policy of limiting most families to one child.

Today, the provision of basic health care services unquestionably has birth control as its main priority. The government's goal is a population of 1200 million by the 2000 and it strongly believes, this can only be achieved through a basic health care system focusing on an improved quality of life for children and the promotion of a healthy one-child family as the Chinese ideal. The sole child issuing from this carefully designed policy will be protected in a skillfully designed health maintenance' programme throughout its childhood to ensure that parents will never regret having put their faith in the government's birth policy, or being dependent on single child to support them in their old age.

Though the single-child policy remains the rule in China today, there have been relaxations in certain cases where couples are allowed to have more than one child.

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