

In 1949, after a civil war that had lasted more than 20 years, Mao Zedong and his **communist** revolutionaries won control of China. Mao's revolution was based on the communist ideal of a classless society in which workers control the government.

At this time, China was a poor country, having slogged through years of war, disease, and natural disaster. Its population was the largest in the world and growing. How would China feed and clothe all of its people? Against the recommendations of some of his advisors, Chairman Mao called for couples to have even more babies. "Of all things in the world," said Mao, "people are the most precious." More people, Mao thought, would mean more workers, and more workers would mean a stronger China. Birth control was discouraged.

One of Mao's early goals was to catch up economically with richer countries like the United States. To this end, people across the country were forced to abandon farming and help create an industrial China. This movement, called **The Great Leap Forward**, included a program to build backyard furnaces for making steel. But with too many furnaces replacing farms, China faced food shortages. A devastating famine killed an estimated 30 million people.

As a result of this disaster, Mao changed his mind about population and birth control and in the late 1960's, introduced the slogan, "Late, Long and Few." The idea was for couples to marry late, wait a long time before having children, and then, when they did have kids, have only a few. Marching behind this banner, China cut its **fertility rate** in half between 1970 and 1979. But even then, Communist Party officials feared that China's population, now close to one billion, was growing too fast. Their solution was government program called the **one-child policy**.

In general terms, China's one-child policy limits Chinese couples to one child each. However, there are a few exceptions. First, the one-child limitation only applies to **Han Chinese**, an ethnicity that makes up about 90 percent of the population. It does not apply to minority ethnic groups, who are permitted two or even three children. Second, the policy has not remained absolutely fixed. The Party has begun to worry that there will soon be more old people than young people in China. This possibility has convinced the Communist Party to allow urban residents who are single children themselves to have two kids. Also, the one-child policy has not been evenly enforced. In some places couples who have broken the one-child policy have had to pay large fines, or been punished with forced **sterilization** and abortions. In other places, couples covered by the policy have two or even three children without paying any penalties.

1. What was Mao Zedong's position on population growth?
2. In general terms, what is the one-child policy? What are two exceptions to the policy?
3. Why would rural people have trouble accepting the one-child policy than city people?

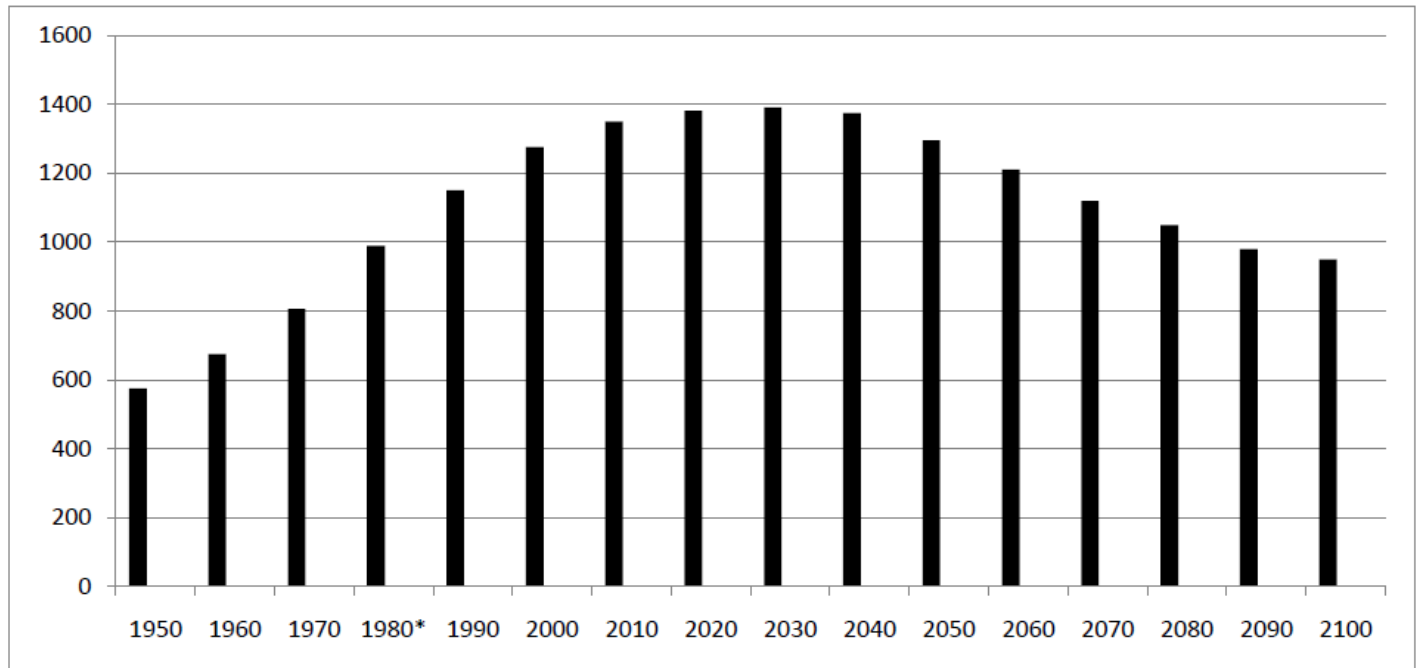
Perhaps the biggest beneficiaries of the one-child policy have been urban singleton daughters. Their parents' only treasure, since the 1980's single daughters in China's cities have enjoyed privileged childhoods little different from their male counterparts... With no brothers to compete for their parents' attention and resources ... these teens have been socialized to value educational and career success and provided the resources with which to achieve it. Anthropologist Vanessa Fong argues that this generation of urban singleton girls has been empowered to challenge some of the ...gender norms that have long dominated Chinese life...In cities such as Shanghai and Dalian, young women today enjoy a marriage market that favors brides and a job market with attractive opportunities earmarked for "feminine" applicants. Indeed, some of the hottest and best paying jobs in today's globalizing social services economy (bilingual secretaries, public relations, fashion models) are open exclusively to young women with good looks and sex appeal... For these young women, the one-child policy seems to be a real blessing.

**Source:** Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population*, 2005.

4. How have urban singleton daughters benefitted from the one-child policy?

## China's Population

Post – 2010 estimates based on United Nation's projections. Numbers rounded to the nearest million.



5. In what year and at what number is China's population expected to peak?
6. Between 1960 and 1980, a growing number of Chinese planners became worried about population growth. How does this document explain their concern?
7. Does this document support the claim that China's one-child policy is working? Explain.

The one-child policy relies on a mix of sticks and carrots (punishments and rewards). Depending on where they live, couples can be fined thousands of dollars for having an “extra” child without a permit, and reports of forced abortions or sterilization are common... The law also offers longer maternity leave and other benefits to couples that delay childbearing. Those who volunteer to have only one child are awarded a “Certificate of Honor for Single-Child Parents.” Since 1979, the law has prevented some 250 million births, saving China from a population explosion the nation would have difficulty accommodating.

But critics of the policy note its negative social consequences, particularly gender discrimination. With boys being viewed as culturally preferable, the practice of female infanticide – which had been common before 1949 but was largely eradicated by the 1950's – was resumed in some areas shortly after the one-child policy went into effect.

The resulting gender imbalance widened after 1986, when ultrasound tests and abortions became easier to come by. China banned prenatal gender screening in 1994. Nonetheless, an April 2009 study published in the *British Medical Journal* found China still has 32 million more boys than girls under the age of 20.

The total number of young people is a problem as well; factories have reported youth-labor shortages in recent years, a problem that will only get worse. In 2007 there were six adults of working age for every retiree, but by 2040 that ratio is expected to drop to 2 to 1. Analysts fear that with too few children to care for them, China's elderly people will suffer neglect.

**Note:** Ultrasound is a technology that enables doctors and parents to see a picture of the fetus when it is in the mother's womb. The fetus's gender can be detected through ultrasound. Infanticide is the purposeful killing of infants.

**Source:** Laura Fitzpatrick, “A Brief History of China's One – Child Policy,” *Time*, July 27, 2009.

8. How is the ratio of working adults to retirees expected to change?

**Note:** An internet survey of 7,000 Chinese only children between the ages of 15 and 25 found that 58 percent admitted to being lonely. A majority also describe themselves as being selfish; However, many enjoyed being the “sun” around which the family revolved. (Source: NPR, November, 2010)

**Xiao Xuan:** The high cost of the one-child policy is felt deeply by Beijing resident Xiao Xuan, and only-child daughter of a college professor and shopping mall manager. Xiao, 22, says she was blessed with all the attention and resources showered at her from childhood.

Still, she says, she had a mostly lonely childhood. "I used to cut myself on my wrist after being yelled at by my mom and dad because I didn't know who I should talk to or turn to," she says. "I was like that for almost two years, but I am very tough so I made it through."

"I hate to say it but the one-child policy should partly be blamed for some social issues of youth today," she adds. "It's been ridiculous government interference on family issues."

She wished she had a brother or a sister to share all the attention.

**A.J. Song:** A.J. Song, 23, is the only child in his family, which is from a small village in Guizhou province. Song says his parents gave him everything, and his cousins, most of whom have siblings, are very jealous of him. He says he probably would not be living in Beijing if he had had to share his parents' attention and resources.

"I really appreciate [being the] one child, especially from the countryside... "My parents, they give me everything. I'm the center of attention in the family. My mother has seven brothers and sisters; my father has six brothers and sisters. Most of my parents' brothers and sisters have two kids. They are all very jealous about me being the only child," he says.

"If I had a sibling, I probably wouldn't be who I am now. Probably I'd still be in my small village, getting married and having kids. If you have more kids in your family, probably they're lacking in education, lacking food, lacking any kind of support, no matter emotional or financial. Basically everybody is going to be average," he says.

...Chinese research finds advantages to being an only child: They tend to score higher on intelligence tests and are better at making friends.

9. How does Xiao Xuan feel about the one-child policy? What are her reasons?

10. How does A.J. Song feel about the one-child policy? What are his reasons?

