

ONE-CHILD POLICY—A policy adopted in 1979 allowing each couple only one child. The policy was enforced with an array of incentives and punishments, which varied according to your ethnicity and residency.

“We will spare no effort to solve the most specific problems of the utmost and immediate concern to the people and strive to create a situation in which all people do their best, find their proper places in society and live together in harmony, so as to provide a favorable social environment for development,” Hu said.

SHIFTING ROLES AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLICY, CINEMA, AND LITERATURE

As the nation with the largest population in the world, the Chinese leaders quickly realized the urgency of implementing clear policies to forestall the country’s population from overwhelming their resources. In the Chinese context, the question of family planning, delayed marriage, and the one-child policy is inevitably, if inequitably, one largely about women. The rationale for stringent birth control has evolved from one of revolutionary and socialist concerns (13.4) to the social repercussions of a one-child policy and, finally, back in more recent years to worries about the country’s declining fertility rate (13.7). Ultimately, literary and cinematic depictions of women in the 1980s and 1990s shifted from the one-dimensional revolutionary heroes typical of the 1960s and 1970s to more realistic (and sometimes humorous) portrayals. In one of her most striking, yet unglamorous, roles, China starlet Gong Li portrays a Shaanxi peasant in Zhang Yimou’s *The Story of Qiu Ju*. The film challenges both government portrayals of their new legal reforms as much as the complex position of women in rural society (13.5).

13.4 ONE COUPLE, ONE CHILD (1980)

*By the 1970s, the Chinese government had growing concerns regarding China’s population growth and the effect it would have on its modernization and economic goals. From the outset, the **one-child policy** was controversial. In response to widespread concerns, the Central Party Committee took the extraordinary step of issuing an “open letter” to clarify the program for restraining the country’s population growth. The concerns faded but never entirely disappeared. Many Chinese worried about the social effects of an entire generation of “only children” raised without siblings and of having more males than females when they reached maturity. The situation (like many dimensions of modern Chinese society) is complicated by the widely varying conditions in the urban and rural sectors of society. The one-child policy tended to be more strictly enforced in the city, including numerous disincentives such as school fees and insurance for all children beyond the first. On the other hand, rural families who exceeded local quotas or sought to have children without the approval of the village leaders could and were severely punished by local officials. The following is a synopsis that appeared in the Beijing Review.*

Question

- 1. In what ways does the 1979 family-planning policy differ from that of 1972?**
- 2. What concerns does the article raise if the population is not brought under control?**

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has issued an open letter calling on all members of the Party and the Communist Youth League to take the lead to respond to the call of “one couple, one child.”

The letter has also urged them to publicize among the people the importance of this call. The aim is to keep the population within [1.2 billion] by the end of this century.

The letter said: "The State Council has already issued a call to the people of the whole country, encouraging each couple to have only one child. This is an important measure which concerns the speed and future of the four modernizations and the health and happiness of the future generations. It is a measure that conforms to immediate and longer-term interests of the whole people."

The letter recalled that in the 30 years since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, China's net populations increase was 430 million. This was the result of the improvement of health work and people's living standards, which greatly reduced the mortality rate. In those years, the state did not take adequate measures to control the birth rate. The rapid growth of population is causing increasing difficulties for the people in food, clothing, housing, transportation, education, public health and employment, and makes it difficult for the state to bring about a change to the country's poverty and backwardness within a short time.

What is even more aggravating is the fact that young people under 30 now account for 65 percent of the total population. This means that in the coming years an average 20 million people will reach the marriageable and childbearing age every year. If efforts are not made to bring the population growth under control, China's population will swell to 1,300 [1.3 billion] after 20 years and will surpass 1,500 million [1.5 billion] in 40 years if the present rate of 2.2 children per couple continues. This will definitely hinder the modernization program and give rise to difficulties in improving the people's standards of living.

Such being the case, the letter said, the most effective way to solve this question is for one couple to have one child only.

Some people worry that if each couple has only one child, new problems will arise, such as the average age of the population will increase, the male population will outnumber the female population and a large number of old people will have to be supported. Some of these worries result from their misunderstanding while others can be solved if necessary measures are taken in good time. For example, the phenomenon of the population getting older will not appear in this century because at present half of the population are under 21 and those over 65 are less than 5 per cent. The problem of the population getting older will crop up only after 40 years. But of course, measures can be taken in advance to prevent such an occurrence.

The Party and the government have decided to take concrete steps to control the population growth, the letter said. Special considerations will be given to the only children and their families. These include enrolment in nurseries and schools, special medical care, priority in getting employment and housing, equal pay for equal work.

In conclusion, the letter stressed that family planning is a matter that concerns the interests of every household and that the method of persuasion and education should be adhered to. In the case of people having actual difficulty in meeting policy requirements, they may be allowed to have two children. The practice may be relaxed among the people of minority nationalities.

Remin Ribao and other newspapers with a nationwide circulation have all published the full text of this letter.