Mind the gap

Family planning policy through the eyes of China's global citizens

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介意差距

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Abstract

For more than 30 years, China's family planning policy has limited the reproduction of its population. Today, the consequences of this policy are becoming increasingly clear. While scholars are calling out for a policy relaxation, the Chinese government continues to demand population control. Stuck between scholars' encouragements of more children, and the government's persistent child limitations, what do the coming generation of Chinese parents think of family planning policy? This thesis explores how a small group of Chinese citizens with international experience view the family planning policy and its implications for the future of China's population. The study focuses on the impact of family planning policy on reproduction levels, as well as age, gender and socioeconomic gaps in China.

Although China's family planning policy allows certain citizens to have more than one child, several studies indicate that most young Chinese do not intend to have multiple children. This study argues that a *desire* to have two or more children is present among this young generation, but their impressions of own economic ability keep them from planning to do so. The participants in this study largely view the family planning policy as a necessary tool to slow population growth, which also coincides with their socioeconomic limitations. In their view, the unequal policy implementation has however led to increased socioeconomic gaps. Although few of the participants believe the policy will be terminated, most believe in a gradual relaxation towards a two-child policy.

These conclusions are drawn from data collected through 11 in-depth interviews with Chinese citizens aged 20 to 30, who studied and/or worked in the city of Oslo during the autumn of 2011. The interview data is compared to various census data and theory on population changes, as well as previous studies on the topic. Thus, this study builds on existing research on Chinese population policy and reproductive preferences, yet offers some new perspectives on the complexity of factors which affect the reproductive decisions of young Chinese today. By comparing these public views with scholarly recommendations and government policy on family planning, this study aims to provide further insight into the population challenges China is currently facing, and thus their possible solutions.

Acknowledgements

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During the writing process, I had the fortunate opportunity of visiting the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) on a NIAS SUPRA Scholarship. I offer my sincere thanks to all of the researchers I met there, who gave me valuable feedback and support. Special thanks to Cecilia Milwertz, who gave helpful insight into how I could draw a conclusion from the abundance of data I had collected.

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Contents

Introduction

The People's Republic of China is quickly becoming one of the largest economic, political and cultural powers in the world, and throughout these developments it has sustained the largest national population in history. Yet, the picture of China as the world's most populous nation, where the majority are rural residents, and the population growth so massive it takes a national one-child limit to stall it, is now rapidly changing. Not only is the size of China's population about to be surpassed by that of India, it is also for the first time ever mainly an urban population, and the average number of children per couple is at an all-time low. In this context, the debate on China's family planning policy has been rekindled, and the views on both its implementation and implications seem as complex as ever. This study explores how Chinese citizens with international experience view the family planning policy and its impact on the future of China's population. The thesis focuses on the impact of family planning policy on reproduction levels, as well as age, gender and socioeconomic gaps in China.

The need for family planning policy and population control has always been debated within the political leadership of the People's Republic of China, especially so the necessity of a one-child limit.[1] For more than 30 years, Chinese authorities have aimed to control population growth through various family planning programmes and birth limitations, with the so-called one-child policy being the most infamous of these measures. As China's population reached 1 billion people in the late 1970s, the government feared a population explosion would stand in the way of further economic development and modernisation. Thus, the Chinese government introduced a national family planning policy which allowed most couples to only have one child.

China is the only country in the world to implement such a strict nationwide family planning policy, for such a long period of time.[2] Although recently, there has been a lot of debates concerning its future, as its negative effects are becoming increasingly clear to government, academics and the general population. What has changed most in the family planning debate during the last years is perhaps the introduction of public voices through social and mass media. With these new participants, the debate has become a public debate, and the opinions perhaps more diverse and critical than before. Although the implementation of the family planning policy varies greatly across China, and the reactions to it are diverse

[1] (Milwertz 1997, 58)
[2] (Banister 1987, 1-2)

both within and outside the country, there exists a broad consensus on one subject – its implementation has intensified severe social and demographic challenges [3] Of these challenges, the population's age imbalance, gender imbalance and rural-urban development imbalance, appear to be the most alarming.

In the current family planning policy debate, both Chinese and foreign scholars of research fields ranging from economics through anthropology now support a relaxation of the birth limits. Among these are professor at Centre for Economic Research of Peking University, Zeng Yi, who emphasises the policy's intensification of population ageing.[4] Also, Professor of Global Health, Therese Hesketh, who suggests that the family planning policy increases gender selective procedures.[5] Professor of Anthropology Susan Greenhalgh also argues that the policy amplifies social polarisation in the Chinese population.[6]

On the one hand, Chinese authorities seem to agree with these suggestions, as they constantly increase the number of exceptions to the one-child rule.[7] When the one-child family planning policy was first introduced, it aimed to be near universal, exempting only ethnic minorities. However, further exceptions were quickly introduced, and included rural families where the first child was a daughter. Recently, the exceptions have increased to include families where one or both of the parents are themselves single children (*dusheng zinü* 独生子女).

On the other hand, in official statements by the authorities, the necessity of continuing the current policy is usually advocated for two reasons: the overall population of China is still too large, and today's low fertility rate will not continue if the policy is relaxed.[8] Although most studies show a national desire for few children per couple, or even just one child per couple in urban areas, both the government and the public still seem to fear a population explosion (*renkou baozha* 人口爆炸) if the family planning policy were to be terminated.[9] Since the government seems unlikely to fully abandon their efforts to control the population growth, the debate is now largely focused on adapting the current family planning policy rather than abolishing it. However, ultimately it is not only state policy on family planning

[3] (White 2006; Banister 1987; Peng 2011b; Poston Jr et al. 2006; Gu 2009; Greenhalgh 2008)
[4] (Zeng 2007)
[5] (Hesketh, Lu, and Xing 2011)
[6] (Greenhalgh 2010)
[7] (Zhang and Cao 2007, 32)
[8] (Zeng 2007)
[9] (Wang 王丰 2010, 77-78)

which will decide the future level of reproduction in China, but also the choices of the generation of young Chinese who are now starting their own families.

Understanding the variety of elements which affect a couple's family planning decisions is important in order to avoid the intensification of already serious consequences such as increased age and gender gaps. Furthermore, it should also be in the interest of the Chinese authorities to adopt a population policy which the people support in order to reach the goal of *harmonious society* (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会). However, this is not merely a domestic issue which should only interest the Chinese government and the Chinese people. As the world population recently passed 7 billion, and is quickly approaching 8 billion, population policy is as relevant as ever on an international scale. Hence, the future of population politics in the country with the largest population in the world is not only immensely relevant as a domestic issue for the nation in question, but also globally important, as it is so closely linked to the future of China as a political and cultural superpower, and thereby the future of our entire global society.

Alas, several outdated images of both Chinese and global demographic changes, as well as outdated cultural and socioeconomic assumptions about reproductive behaviour, prevail in popular opinions on China's population situation. Although China reached nationwide low reproduction levels as early as 1990, both domestic and international public discourse are still coloured by the ideas of an imminent population explosion and threat of economic crisis. Academic researchers however, increasingly emphasise the challenges of rapidly decreasing reproduction rather than rapid population growth (*renkou guokuai zengzhang* 人口过快增长). These new areas of attention do however not seem to reach all the way to public opinion and state policymaking. The outdated paradigm of causal effects between population size and poverty still dominate in media reports and policy justifications. The cultural and socioeconomic climate in China has been changing rapidly, and several scholars such as Susan Greenhalgh, Gu Baochang and Cai Yong, assume that both these factors affect reproductive behaviour.[10] Does this then imply that reproductive behaviour is able to change equally fast? With this question in mind, this study seeks to explore what the coming generation of Chinese parents think about the family planning policy.

There is little doubt that the implementation of family planning policy in China has affected the lives and private spheres of women and girls even more severely than men and boys. However, this study aims to maintain a gender neutral perspective, as thorough studies

[10] (Greenhalgh 2010; Gu 2009; Cai 2010)

on how women and girls have been affected by the policy have already been conducted by such scholars as senior researcher on Chinese gender studies Cecilia Milwertz, and Professors of Anthropology Elisabeth Croll and Susan Greenhalgh.[11] The consequences of the current family planning policy affect *all* parts of the Chinese population – regardless of age or gender.

Research objective

There exists a wide range of attitudes towards China's family planning policy, not only within China, but also among international observers. This study presents some of the views which exist within the group most affected by the policy at this point – the generation of young Chinese on the brink of starting families of their own. In light of the current policy debate, this thesis explores how a small group of young global Chinese citizens perceive the family planning policy, what plans they have for starting families themselves, and how they are affected by both policy and socioeconomic limitations.

What was first planned out to be a comparative analysis of the contrast between governmental, scholarly and public views on family planning policy, has evolved into a study of young Chinese people's views on family planning in light of the on-going policy debate. How do young Chinese view the family planning policy and its future impact on their lives? This change in focus is largely due to the successful interviews with a group of young Chinese, who elaborated on their own plans for starting a family, as well as which factors influenced their decisions to do so. Thus, the objective of this research is to present some indications of the views young Chinese hold towards family planning policy today, and what their own plans for starting a family are. By comparing these views to scholarly research, this study aims to shed some light on the complexity of the on-going policy debate, and the contrasts between the different views on the implications of family planning policy in China.

Thesis structure

The first three chapters of the thesis outline the scope and background for this study. *Chapter 1* outlines the research methods applied in this study, regarding both interview methodology and document analysis. It describes the sample of participants and the interview guide, as well as the data selection and analysis methods for document analysis. *Chapter 2* provides a theoretical framework for this study by giving a short review of literature on China's family

[11] (Milwertz 1997; Croll 2000; Greenhalgh 2001)

planning policy, but also by presenting theories used in some of the mentioned literature. It draws lines from the early population theory of Thomas R. Malthus, up to present-day consumer theory. Furthermore, the chapter defines family planning policy, and establishes its context in Chinese demographic development. *Chapter 3* presents a brief history of family planning during the People's Republic of China. It maps out the development of family planning policy from 1949 to the present, and recounts some of the reactions to the policy and its implications, as recorded by both Chinese and western researchers on the subject.

The analysis consists of four main topics, and represents some of the most crucial implications of the current family planning policy. *Chapter 4* focuses on the development in Chinese reproduction levels, and explores any differences between desired, intended and actual reproduction. *Chapter 5* focuses on the gap between the size of China's elderly population and its young population, as a result of dramatically reduced number of children per family. The chapter explores the impact of this age gap (*nianling chaju* 年龄差距) on both a national level and a family level. *Chapter 6* explores the effect of family planning policy and reduced fertility on gender gaps (*xingbie chaju* 性别差距), both with regards to the size of the male population compared to the female population in China, and possible impact on gender issues. *Chapter 7* discusses family planning policy's effect on socioeconomic gaps (*shejing chaju* 社经差距), and explores the significance of unequal implementation of family planning policy in urban and rural areas. All these four chapters analyse the causes and effects of each topic, and compare reactions to these as presented by interview participants and academic articles.

The final chapter offers a brief summary of the analysis findings and the views of young Chinese on family planning policy. It concludes that the combination of strict birth limitations imposed on Chinese couples for decades by the national family planning policy and the broad socioeconomic development have together decreased not only the actual level of reproduction in the population, but also created a socioeconomic environment where the future intended reproduction of young Chinese is extremely low. Their *desired* reproduction level is however significantly higher, and given better socioeconomic conditions combined with policy relaxation, reproduction levels might rise again to narrow China's age, gender and socioeconomic gaps. In sum, the participants largely view the family planning policy as a necessary tool to slow population growth, which also coincides with their socioeconomic limitations. In their view, the policy has been unequally implemented, resulting in increased socioeconomic gaps. Although few of the participants believe the policy will be terminated,

most believe in a gradual relaxation towards a two-child policy. Finally, the chapter presents possible future implications of these findings on the further development of China's family planning policy.

1 Research methods

This thesis is based on a comparative analysis of views presented by a group of young Chinese citizens with global experience, and both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars on the topic of China's family planning policy. The study compares views on the challenges and consequences of this policy, from written sources in Chinese and English, as well as oral interviews conducted in Mandarin Chinese. The methodology behind these interviews is the main focus of this chapter. The chapter describes the making of the interview guide, how the sample of participants was located, and how the interviews were conducted. Also, it provides a brief description of the document analysis, and the limitations of these research methods.

Document analysis

The data for the document analysis were collected throughout the period of the master's studies, beginning in September of 2010, and finishing in May of 2012. Among the documents used to provide background or analysis material in this study is Chinese government statements and statistics on population and family planning, academic articles by Chinese scholars written in both Chinese and English, and a selection of articles and books by scholars from outside of China.

Of the referenced books in this analysis, all are on the topic of population and/or China, but they belong to several different research fields. From broad demographic studies on population development, to in-depth anthropological accounts of family decisions, these books have provided both theoretical and historical background, as well as offered numerous perspectives of China's family planning policy. The referenced articles also belong to various research fields, but are in general of more recent date, and thus provide more information on the *current* family planning policy situation than the selected books. Due to time constraints, the number of English language articles chosen exceeds the number of Chinese language articles chosen on most topics. The sources in Chinese, both the academic articles and the interview responses are mainly used in the four analysis chapters, and to a lesser extent in the two framework chapters. For official Chinese political statements and statistics, I have used the relevant web portals of the Chinese government.[12] Generally, the government statements are used to represent official views on policy implementation, and the statistics are used to

[12] (NBS 2012b; NPFPC 2012)

show actual reproductive behaviour. The accuracy of Chinese national statistics is however somewhat debated,[13] or simply incomplete, thus other statistical sources are occasionally applied for comparison, or as a supplement to the Chinese statistics.[14] These written sources, along with the data material from the interviews, have been cross-analysed with regards to subject. This type of issue-focused analysis[15] applies triangulation of sources and data to analyse different sources' views on one topic, rather than one source's view on many topics. Together, they form the background and framework for the further analysis.

As this study is largely exploratory, and aimed at finding out *how* young Chinese view family planning, rather than examining *how many* young Chinese view family planning in a certain way,[16] I chose a qualitative research approach. At first I considered basing my analysis on family planning policy debates in blogs and other social media, as these serve may as outlets for public opinion on popular and controversial matters. However, I soon decided that I wanted to further reduce the distance between myself and the relevant parties in these debates, and observe the phenomenon closer. I therefore chose to pursue the research through personal semi-structured interviews with young adult Chinese, and my supervisor suggested that I could perform the interviews with Chinese living in the Oslo area. Not only was this a practical and time-efficient solution for me, but it also provided me with a unique group of highly open and self-reflective participants, whom fitted the age profile of this research perfectly.

Interviews

As Maria Heimer and Stig Thøgersen points out in *Doing fieldwork in China*, when sensitive Chinese political topics become popular areas of research, it is not only due to the topic's increased relevance, but also its increased attention from Chinese authorities.[17] Lately, the Chinese government has directed media and scholarly focus towards some of the most serious negative effects of its family planning policy, such as age and gender imbalance, and effectively set the standard for this discourse. The Communist Party discourse standard is reflected in the language used in both academic articles and news articles. In preparation for the interviews conducted in this study, I read about family planning policy debate in both

[13] (Banister 1987; Scharping 2003)
[14] (UN 2012c; CIA 2012a)
[15] (Thagaard 2003, 153)
[16] (Silverman 2010, 117-125)
[17] (Heimer and Thøgersen 2006, 13)

Chinese academic journals and mass media, in order to get a picture of Chinese views on the policy. Also, it helped me locate the Chinese terms for topics related to the family planning policy, and thereby enabling me to write a thorough interview guide in Chinese. However, since these writings were my main source for locating appropriate terms, they automatically also influenced the language in which I presented the interview questions.

Thøgersen emphasises the differences in language between official discourse and everyday-Chinese by labelling the two language standards as *Ganbunese* and *Baixingese* respectively.[18] These two language codes are similar to what Li Qiang calls public and private "discursive systems".[19] Li argues that when Chinese are asked questions of a political nature, they "relapse into the public discursive system and produce 'correct' replies in standard political terminology", as an old habit from the days of the Cultural Revolution.[20] Although Thøgersen finds this explanation somewhat excessive, he agrees to the language system dichotomy. When, or if, the participants in my study used this *Ganbunese* or public language code, they can hardly be accused of any "relapses", as I provided the initial language codes and political terms when I described the topic of the interviews and presented them with the list of questions.

The interviews were conducted during a two month period in the autumn of 2011, and all were performed in public areas, mostly for the convenience of the participants, as they were free to suggest a meeting place. Although most of the participants probably had the necessary language skills to be able to discuss the chosen topics in English, all interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. This was in order to make all participants answer the exact same questions, without translations and possible ambiguity. Also, the idea was that they might be more likely to speak their own mind when using their own language, instead of mimicking western rhetoric. One could argue that by using Mandarin Chinese, they were more likely to mimic Chinese Communist Party propaganda, or apply a *Ganbunese* vocabulary. In most cases however, the respondents' answers seem to be far from the expected propaganda rhetoric.

All interviews were recorded, and some notes were taken both during and immediately after the interviews. In order to maintain the participants' anonymity, all participants are given fictitious names in this study, and no information which can reveal their identity is published. Although most of the questions were not of a sensitive sort, all answers were given

[18] (Thøgersen 2006, 112)
[19] Referenced in (Thøgersen 2006, 116)
[20] (Thøgersen 2006, 14)

in confidentiality as to protect participants from possible negative consequences of questioning one of China's basic national policies (*jiben guoce* 基本国策). Although the number of questions in the interview guide were reduced after the two first interviews, all interviews lasted for approximately an hour, as the remaining questions were the ones receiving the most detailed answers. While most interviews were conducted one to one, two interview sessions were conducted with two interviewees in each. In the first of these double-interviews, the two participants took turns answering the questions. The first participant answered all questions, with just some short comments from the observing participant, and then all questions were repeated for the second participant to answer. They both made some comments on each others answers, and discussed their views during the interviews, but did not seem to be very influenced by what the other person answered. The second of these double-interviews was more dynamic, and more based on discussions and dialog between the two participants. This interview was conducted in a manner in which both participants answered the same question before continuing to the next topic. These two participants seemed to be more influenced by each others arguments, not in a way that made them assimilate their answers, but in a way that made them consider aspects they had not thought of beforehand.

Although I did not deliberately choose any *Ganbunese* or *Baixingese* language strategy for the interviews, I did apply some strategic language choice in my interview design. This strategy was mainly based on my assumption that if I asked the questions as extremely complicated sentences, the participants' answers would be at least equally complicated, thus difficult for a non-native speaker such as myself to understand. The questions were therefore constructed as simple and straight forward as possible, hopefully communicating my somewhat limited language abilities. This seems to have been a successful, as all interviews ended up as easy flowing dialogues with just a handful of interruptions where I had to ask the meaning of certain terms.

Milwertz mentions several Chinese and Non-Chinese scholars who fear that responses to questions on policy sensitive issues, such as family planning policy, may not reflect reality, as Chinese tend to "convey opinions in accordance with the social norm".[21] This is especially true, they fear, for question on family size preferences, "as fertility preferences are likely to be

[21] Milwertz refers to Chen Yiyun, Tan Shen, Martin K. Whyte and Albert I. Hermalin among others. (Milwertz 1997, 207)

under-reported in the view of the government population policy".[22] During the course of this study, some researchers have warned me that a majority of Chinese international students are members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and would present a rather skewed view on the state family planning policy. While Yunxiang Yan states that 28 per cent of graduate student in China were CCP members in 2003,[23] Vanessa L. Fong argues that foreign education could be seen as disadvantageous for those who aim for careers within the CCP.[24] As the respondents' answers vary greatly, and do not seem to mainly represent Party policy, possible party memberships will not be further debated.

Based on the review of literature as presented in the chapter *Theoretical framework*, the interview guide in this study was developed to research the validity of claims about desired fertility and the future of family planning policy in China. The main topics in the interviews were the participants' views on the current family planning policy, their experiences with it so far, and its potential impact on their future decision to have children. Also, questions about their personal views on desired number of children, and the preferred gender of these children, were included. Finally, follow up questions on such subjects as the future of family planning policy, the tradition of son preference (*nanhai pianhao* 男孩偏好) and implications of current policy were explored.

Though designed to give room for a semi structured interview[25], the initial interview guide consisted of rather long line of questions. These were reduced after a pilot test[26] during the first interview session, as some of the questions were found redundant or less relevant than others. The use of interviews rather than questionnaires was chosen in order to create a dynamic dialog between participants and researcher. These semi structured interviews took different forms, with some being characterised by a question-answer routine, while some were more like dialogues. This proved to be a very effective combination, where each interview could be adjusted to fit the form and length of the participant's answers. Although a list of questions was prepared, impulsive follow-up questions could be created during the interviews, and unpredictable answers could be elaborated on.[27]

This flexibility in method is an important part of performing inductive research, where the theory and hypothesis is not clear from the beginning, but evolves as data are collected

[22] (Milwertz 1997, 207)
[23] (Yan 2006, 258)
[24] (Fong 2011, 109)
[25] (Bailey 2007, 100)
[26] (Rudestam and Newton 2001, 101)
[27] (Thagaard 2003, 46-47)

and analysed.[28] The room for flexibility in both questions and answers is the main reason why interviews were chosen instead of survey questionnaires. A survey could easily be distributed to a larger sample of participants, and probably give an even wider range of responses. However, quantitative measures of views on family planning policy among Chinese students is not the aim of this study, rather it merely seeks to provide indications of the variety of current views on the policy. As Kevin J. O'Brien describes (with references to John Gerring's social science methodology, and Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss' grounded theory), this research approach is a form of exploratory analysis, [29] which focuses more on discovery than verification. This study could not aim to provide presentations of all views, therefore qualitative interviews were chosen in order to give deeper insight into only some of the factors effecting views on family planning policy in China today. Undoubtedly, a combination of surveys and interviews would offer even more insight on the topic, as any widening of data material would. Time constraints do however limit the size of data analysed in this study, and it should therefore only be seen as a small supplement to existing studies on the issue.

As O'Brien states, one of the greatest advantages of semi-structured interviews is the flexibility they offer.[30] When the participants are allowed a fair amount of freedom, the dialogue may take the course of most interest to them, thereby revealing what they truly find to be interesting about the subject. In this study, I was surprised to find that some of the questions I assumed would lead to heated discussions or lengthy answers were met with a somewhat indifferent attitude among most participants. In the same way, some of the questions I assumed to be far less relevant to the subject proved to be popular topics with a huge variety of different answers. Some of these surprises led me to make small adjustments to the interview guide, while others made me change the entire outline of my thesis.

Sampling

The interviews were conducted in Oslo with Chinese citizens who had come here to study or work. This group of participants bear several similarities with Vanessa L. Fong's participants in *Paradise Redefined*. She describes her respondents as transnational students who seek modernisation through learning foreign languages and cultures, and strive for "developed world citizenship",[31] or "global citizenship" as Greenhalgh calls it.[32] For me, the reason for

[28] (Rudestam and Newton 2001, 93)
[29] (O'Brien 2006, 28)
[30] (O'Brien 2006, 29-37)
[31] (Fong 2011, 40-41, 71-74)

choosing this particular group of individuals for this research is threefold. Firstly their age: as they are all between 20 and 30 years old, they are not only a product of the policy themselves, they are also at reproductive age. Their views and wishes on family planning are therefore the most relevant for this study. Secondly their education: they all have higher education and are therefore likely to have knowledge about both the policy's aims and effects. Thirdly their international experience, since they as international students have experienced the views presented both within and outside China concerning family planning policy. None of the participants had any children so far, but were all on the cusp of planning a future family.

Participants were located using a combination of convenience sampling criterion sampling. They all had to fulfil the criterions of being Chinese citizens and being born during the one-child campaign period. Also, they had to be willing to talk about not only the family planning policy itself, but also their personal views on starting a family. It proved easy to find people fulfilling the mentioned criteria, as most Chinese students in Oslo are within this age group. Finding willing participants on the other hand was a bit harder. Although this was not an extremely difficult task, it proved more challenging than first imagined.

Thagaard argues that people with higher education are more likely to agree to participate in research studies than others, and are more used to reflecting on their life situation.[33] Both these factors have made this study more successful, because not only was it possible to locate people willing to talk about this rather controversial topic, but most of the people who agreed to participate also rather enjoyed discussing the subject.

The participants were located through friends and fellow academics connected to the University of Oslo, who suggested other friends and acquaintances who would be applicable participants. This method of referral sampling, also known as snowball sampling, is being rather time-consuming at the beginning. While few persons are involved, it can take a while before you are referred to someone who is both qualified and willing to participate in the study. As more people get involved however, the number of referrals escalates, and very soon you may have more potential participants than there is time to interview. Most of the willing participants were female, probably due to the fact that the people who initially helped me locate participants also were female and asked their closest friends to participate. However, when this trend was detected, the participants were encouraged to suggest male friends who

[32] (Greenhalgh 2010)
[33] (Thagaard 2003, 54)

would be willing to be interviewed, thus some male participants were located to create a more diverse sample of respondents.

All participants were contacted beforehand, and given the opportunity to agree or disagree to participation before the initial meeting. A general written message was sent to all potential participants, which described the content and aim of the interview. All were then given the opportunity to withdraw from the research, or suggest a suitable time and place to conduct the interviews. This affirmation of informed consent was repeated at the beginning of each interview, where the aim of the research in general, and the interviews in particular were stated. At this point all participants not only agreed to partake in the interviews, but each of them also agreed to have the interviews recorded on tape.

A key actor in helping locate and prepare interviews was a Chinese friend studying in Oslo. This key actor, henceforth referred to as Li Ying, both helped clarify questions in the interview guide, as well as suggest several suitable participants. Her biggest contribution however was as test pilot in the interviews. As sociologist Carol A. Bailey points out, having a key actor can be important in the early stages of the research in order to build self-confidence and establish contact with the group you are studying.[34] Even though this research was executed in a familiar location, the different individuals and their cultural background were somewhat unfamiliar. Li Ying was however not the only gate keeper in this group, and as participants were located through an array of friends and colleagues, a certain diversity within this rather homogenous group was attained. Aside from Li Ying, none of the participants had any relationship to me prior to the interviews.

Li Ying was the first interview respondent, and a test pilot for the interview guide. At the time of the interview, she was in a relationship, which has now resulted in marriage. Her interview was conducted together with the second participant, Wang Ping, also married, who is the only participant of non-Han origin. The next two respondents is this study's only couple, though the two interviews were by convenience conducted separately. The husband, Liu Wei, and the wife Zhao Ai, have like most of the respondents spent the last couple of years in Norway or other Western countries. The participants Zhang Xue, Chen Bao and Yang Bi are all single women from urban China. Yang Bi was interviewed simultaneously with her friend Wu Cai, a young married woman who had just arrived in Norway. The last female participant, Zhou Chan, like many of the other participants originates from a large coastal city

[34] (Bailey 2007, 69)

in China, and was in a relationship at the time of the interview. The two remaining boys, one in a relationship and one single, are called Huang Hao and Xu Dong respectively.

The appropriate sample size is often said to be at the point where more participants would not contribute any fundamentally new insight or views on the topic.[35] This "theoretical saturation" was not reached in this study, nor was it an aim to reach it. The responses do nonetheless show a wide range of attitudes within this small, rather homogenous group. Naturally, an even a bigger sample would show even more diversity, and also give more indications of what general views exist on the subject. However, due to time constraints, the number of participants and hours of material needed to be limited.

Table 1: Participants

Name	Gender	Marital status	Siblings
Li Ying	Female	Relationship	Only child
Wang Ping	Female	Married	Only child
Zhang Xue	Female	Single	Only child
Liu Wei	Male	Married	Older brother
Zhao Ai	Female	Married	Younger brother
Chen Bao	Female	Single	Only child
Huang Hao	Male	Relationship	Younger brother
Wu Cai	Female	Married	Only child
Yang Bi	Female	Single	Younger brother
Zhou Chan	Female	Relationship	Only child
Xu Dong	Male	Single	Only child

Thus, the participants in this study are by no means a representative sample of the Chinese population, not even a representative study of Chinese students in Norway. They do however share some main characteristics. They are all between 20 and 30 years old, thus in their prime reproductive age,[36] and all except one belong to the ethnic Han majority of the Chinese population. All have stayed in Norway or other Western countries for more than one month, but less than five years. Most are in the process of attaining a higher education degree,

[35] (Rudestam and Newton 2001, 93)
[36] (Cai 2010, 429)

while some have recently started working. Some are married, some are single and some are in relationships, but none have children.

The selected sample of participants is neither sufficiently big, nor random, to draw any conclusions on divergences in views on family planning policy between male or female, urban or rural, or single-child or non-single-child respondents.[37] Thus, as the reach of the field research performed in this study is rather limited, triangulation with other source material is vital to understand and validate the interview results.[38] The findings of the interviews will be cross examined with previous research and national surveys in the analysis part of this thesis.

[37] (Thagaard 2003, 55)
[38] (Fangen 2010, 140-151)

2 Theoretical framework

Previous studies on the implementation and implications of family planning policy in China largely provide the theoretical framework for this study. It is based on studies by both Western and Chinese researchers, from a wide range of research fields, which together create a complex system in which the current views on China's family planning policy can be analysed. Due to the diversity of theories applied in the mentioned studies, this chapter will not present a thorough presentation of any one theory, but rather provide definitions and scope of the subjects on which this thesis work focuses.

First, a brief overview of the theory applied by other researchers to describe demographic development of the People's Republic of China is presented. Then, the role of population theory in China is discussed, followed by a presentation of what family planning, and especially state family planning policy, entails in the Chinese context.

Demographic development

According to demographic theory, change in population size and composition is influenced by the three main components birth, death and migration,[39] all of which have been subject to tremendous change since the People's Republic was established in 1949. Today, more than half of the population live in urban areas, while 87% were rural residents in 1950.[40] During the same period life expectancy has more than doubled.[41] The term total fertility rate (*zonghe shengyulü* 总和生育率) is used to measure reproduction, and describes average births per woman over the course of her lifetime if current age-specific fertility rates remained constant throughout her childbearing years. The current total fertility rate is usually taken as an indication of the number of children women are having at the present.[42]

In this context, the term fertility should not be confused with the term fecundity, which refers to a person's physiological capacity to produce children. Fertility however, concerns the actual reproductive performance of individuals, couples, or population, as measured by the production of live births.[43] Replacement level fertility (*shengyu gengti shuiping* 生育更替

[39] (Milwertz 1997, 36)
[40] (UN 2012e)
[41] (Stein 1995, 162)
[42] (UN 2009)
[43] (Banister 1987, 393)

水平) in a population is thought to equal slightly more than two children born per woman, resulting in relative stability in terms of total population numbers.[44]

In demography, actual fertility is assumed to be related to desired fertility, i.e. an individual couple's desire for a certain number of children. Zhang Li, Feng Xiaotian and Zhang Qingsong suggest that knowing the desired fertility patterns in China could help predict future fertility patterns and give useful information on effective population policy alternatives.[45] In China, a couple's desired fertility level (*shengyu yiyuan shuiping*生育意愿水平) is however less related to their actual fertility level (*shengyu xingwei shuiping* 生育行为水平) than theory predicts, as actual fertility is regulated not only by desire, but by law. Furthermore, although state policy and fertility desires may overlap, they are not certain to represent actual fertility. In addition to state policy, several socioeconomic aspects influence a couples' choice to have children, thereby presenting a third type of fertility projections, called intended fertility level (*shengyu dasuan shuiping* 生育打算水平). This intended fertility may overlap with both state policy and individual desires, or neither.

Professor Gavin Willis Jones is among the population researchers who have addressed this issue of desired fertility versus actual fertility.[46] Studies show that expressed fertility desires tend to be influenced by a universal conception of one girl and one boy being the ideal number children.[47] Together with Paulin Tay Straughan and Angelique Chan, Jones argues that expressed fertility desires do not correspond with actual fertility in low-fertility areas in for instance Europe. Hence, there is no guarantee that a lifting of fertility regulations in China would lead to fertility levels equal to those expressed by the population neither now or after the policy is abolished. The existence of an ideal of one boy and one girl is supported by Milwertz among others.[48]

Milwertz is among those scholars who repeatedly refer to the one-child family planning policy as a "demographic success"[49]. This might have been an accurate description if the only possible demographic challenge was overpopulation. Alas, the policy is not a demographic success at all, though an effective way of reducing births, it has intensified other

[44] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 97; CIA 2012c)
[45] (Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006, 89)
[46] (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009)
[47] (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009, 14)
[48] (Milwertz 1997, 140; Zhang 张国 2012; Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006)
[49] (Milwertz 1997, 31, 58, 198)

serious demographic problems such as age and gender imbalance. Demography is by definition not merely a subject of population size, but also distribution.[50]

Nigel Crook is among the researchers who state that the introduction of a one-child family planning policy was unnecessary to begin with, as the desired population development and size could have been achieved through a universal two-child rule.[51] Arguably, such a policy would have had huge benefits for the composition of the population today, as both gender and age imbalance could have been reduced. However, as Dorothy Stein argues, the Chinese government knowingly exaggerated the need to reduce fertility, as there was little faith in achieving a universal implementation of any one limit.[52] Either way, this study shall not focus on what should have been done differently in the past, but rather present indications of the variety of views presented in the current family planning policy debate.

The gender ratio of a population is defined as the number of males per 100 females. This ratio varies among population groups due to differential migration and/or mortality by gender.[53] According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the biologically normal gender ratio at birth is approximately 102–106 boys for every 100 girls.[54] This ratio however can also show variations between different populations groups, as modern medicine and technology have made it possible to achieve biased gender ratios at birth. When the current family planning policy was introduced in 1979, China's gender ratio at birth was estimated at between 106 and 107 boys born per 100 girls, which is just slightly above the normal ratio.[55] This ratio increased along with the degree of policy implementation, reaching 115 in 1990, and 120 in 2000.[56] This relationship between the introduction of the family planning policy and increase in gender ratios at birth are thought to be more than coincidental. Family planning policy is however just a piece in the puzzle explaining both the increased gender ratio at birth, and the reduced desired fertility throughout China. Cultural, social, economic and industrial transformations have also affected these trends.

A large portion of the literature on China's family planning policy focuses on its impact on the female part of the population, being it mothers, daughters or family planning cadres. Stevan Harrell writes that "It is not that Chinese women necessarily always wanted lots of children, but that their position in the patriarchal family system gave them little leeway

[50] (Merriam-Webster 2012)
[51] (Crook and Timæus 1997, 146)
[52] (Stein 1995, 165)
[53] (Milwertz 1997, 47)
[54] (UN 2011b)
[55] (Banister 1987, 43)
[56] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 252)

to control their fertility. Now the state gives them almost no leeway not to control their fertility."[57] This focus on women as main decision makers in reproductive choices, and prime victims of birth limitations might be unintentionally put forward, and heavily influenced by Chinese state authority discourse which label women as the "main reproducers".[58] In fact, the need for male involvement in childrearing is required by Chinese law, as having children in accordance with the family planning policy requires marriage between a man and a woman. The right for single men or women, or even homosexual couples, to have children is not manifested in the family planning programme.

Population theory

Population is not only a question of demography, but a political, social and cultural question as well, as Greenhalgh argues in *Cultivating global citizens*.[59] Greenhalgh further argues that China's views on population governance not only are influenced by a variety of theories on population and modernisation, but are also influenced by elements of, for instance, Confucianism and social-Darwinism, through traditional son preference and assumptions of competition between populations respectively.[60]

In *Just One Child*, Greenhalgh describes the development of population theory in China, based on a competition between Marxist ideology and neo-Malthusian views on birth planning. The state programme of family planning policy in China was established after lengthy debates on the issue of population growth. Within the Chinese government, these debates were largely influences by two opposing concepts of population theory, one characterised by the views of Thomas R. Malthus, and the other by Marxist theorists such as Friedrich Engels. While the Malthusians feared there existed a "constant tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it."[61], the Marxist ideology supported Engels' view that "the productive power at the disposal of mankind is immeasurable. The productivity of the land can be infinitely increased by the application of capital, labour and science."[62]

[57] (Harrell 2001, 148)
[58] (Greenhalgh 2010, 42)
[59] (Greenhalgh 2010, x)
[60] (Greenhalgh 2010, 29)
[61] Thomas R. Malthus, "An Essay on the Principle of Population". Referenced in (Tobin 2004, 2)
[62] Friedrich Engels,"Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy". Referenced in (Tobin 2004, 7)

According to Malthusian population theory however, the size and growth of a population are the root cause of all social and economic problems.[63] Malthus argues that "population tends to increase at a faster rate than its means of subsistence, and that widespread poverty and degradation of the lower classes inevitably result unless the population growth is checked by sexual abstinence or by disease, famine, or war."[64] Theories on demographic momentum expressed "the tendency of a population to continue past demographic trends into the future, owing to the time it takes for major demographic changes to occur and to transform the current size, composition, and gender-age structure of the population."[65] Marxian ideology utilised Friedrich Engels' ideas of reproduction as a form of production, and if production could be planned, so could reproduction. This relationship between planned economy (*jihua jingji* 计划经济) and planned births (*jihua shengyu* 计划生育) thus became part of state ideology and applied population theory.

After the death of Mao, ideology was however largely replaced by science to legitimise population control and state family planning,[66] and Chinese authorities proclaimed family planning to be "the requirement of modernization".[67] Although arguably similar to Malthusian population theory, the Chinese government thus created its own population theory, allegedly better suited for their social system.[68] Greenhalgh shows how a one-child limit was regarded as the only solution to a *population crisis* (*renkou weiji* 人口危机), and how this limit was based on scientific calculations rather than social or ideological considerations.[69] Nonetheless, James Z. Lee and Wang Feng state that "Malthusian or neo-Malthusian theory continues to provide virtually the sole justification and motivation for China's unprecedented family planning program",[70] and Malthus' essay on population still influences China's academic discourse.[71]

The looming threat of widespread poverty, and even war, as the population size rapidly increased, lead the Chinese government to declare population growth to be a *population problem*. Influenced by demographic theories on momentum and transition, a state run family planning programme was initiated to limit population growth and secure China's

[63] (Milwertz 1997, 2)
[64] (Banister 1987, 394)
[65] (Banister 1987, 393)
[66] (Greenhalgh 2008, 68-73)
[67] (Population and Family Planning 1990)
[68] (Neurath 1994, 160)
[69] (Greenhalgh 2008, 160-250)
[70] (Lee and Wang 1999, 21)
[71] (Su 苏剑 2010, 13-14)

modernisation. The theory of demographic transition predicts a "shift from a traditional pattern of relatively high mortality and fertility to a modern pattern of a relatively low mortality and fertility.[72] Since the decline in mortality usually comes before the decline in fertility, there is a temporary period of rapid natural population increase during the transition period. Transition theory further predicts that low fertility is not only the last level in demographic development; it is also irreversible, and assumed to be an inherently good thing.[73]

Transition theory is a version of modernisation theory, and focuses on the social and economic forces behind change, rather than the political and cultural ones. In modernisation theory, culture is sometimes linked to traditional values which stand in the way of the ultimate goal of modernisation. In China, the Confucian traditions of strong kinship culture and son appraisal are often thought to stand in the way of modernisation in population development. Greenhalgh is among the scholars who argue that the roles of culture, history and politics are often overlooked in studies of reproduction.[74] Although this study cannot provide a thorough account of all aspects of reproductive behaviour in China, it aim to shed light on some of the factors which should be considered when predicting the future of China's family planning policy.

In addition to demographic theory, this thesis also applies concepts from anthropology, political science and economics to study the implementation and implications of China's family planning policy. Concepts of culture, history, gender and power are integral parts of understanding changes in reproductive behaviour, perhaps especially in the case of China. There, the decision of having children is not only influenced by socioeconomic factors similar to those facing couples all over the world, but is also controlled by a powerful State which limits the timing and number of births. In these circumstances, the influence of political economy becomes important. The outcomes of the State's regulations are affected by cultural norms on gender and family, for instance the prevailing son preference across rural China.

Today fertility theory is often regarded as a version of consumer choice theory,[75] and the questions of desired and intended number of children are often linked to questions of actual costs, opportunity costs, and perceived value of the time and money resources allocated in childrearing. This theory of utility maximisation is applied both when we explain our own

[72] (Banister 1987, 393)
[73] (Greenhalgh 1995, 16)
[74] (Greenhalgh 1995, 3-28)
[75] (Greenhalgh 1995, 8)

fertility desires, and when we try to understand the fertility desires of others. However natural this train of thought may seem to us, it is based on the simplification of humans as rational beings. It does not take into account the spontaneity and ambiguity that characterises human life and decisions.[76] As Zhang Li, Feng Xiaotian and Zhang Qingsong argue, the most economically rational decision in modern societies would be to have no children at all, as resources increasingly flow from parents to children, and not the other way around.[77] In studies of western family construction, the historian Steven Ruggles states that "decisions about the family are probably less often rationally calculated than virtually any of the other major decisions people make".[78]

Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler apply Michel Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopolitics to explain the practise of population control in China today. Governmentality is understood as a modern form of government which views population enhancement as both means and aim of its policies. Through biopolitics, the Chinese government aims to both administrate and optimise China's population, by controlling reproduction at a collective level. Greenhalgh and Winckler describe how China's population policy developed from Leninist biopolitics, which focused on limiting population quantity at any cost, towards neoliberal biopolitics, which rather focused on increasing population quality.[79]

Family planning

Family planning is a deliberate control of reproduction, often based on socioeconomic calculations of the costs and benefits associated with having children.[80] In China, these calculations are not only performed by individuals and couples who are considering reproduction, they are also performed on a national level by a government eager to maximise its economic development and the quality of its population. Family planning is in fact not only an important part of Chinese state policy, but also state ideology.[81]

China's family planning policy is often referred to as the one-child policy, especially in the West. For more than 30 years, China's family planning policy has been called the one-child policy (*yihai zhengce* 一孩政策 or *yitai zhengce* 一胎政策) because its main objective

[76] (Greenhalgh 1995, 22)
[77] (Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006, 106)
[78] Referenced in (Kertzer 1995, 43)
[79] (Greenhalgh 2011, 146-155; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005)
[80] (Lee and Wang 1999, 4)
[81] (Lee and Wang 1999, 16)

is to reduce population growth by allowing only one child per couple. However, the term one-child policy is not accurate for the implementation of family planning policy throughout China in this period, and in recent years the policy has moved closer to a universal two-child rule than a one-child rule. Early in this family planning policy period, minorities were exempt from the one child limitation, and today several other groups are allowed, or even encouraged to have two children. More than two children is however still not a norm, thus *two-child policy* (*ertai zhengce* 二胎政策) seems to be the most fitting name for the current family planning policy in China.

Throughout this thesis, the term family planning policy will be used for the Chinese term *jihua shengyu zhengce* (计划生育政策). Although one might argue that the correct translation would be closer to "birth planning policy", the term family planning policy is both the official translation used by the Chinese government, and a recognised expression in the Western world. Also, it implies that having children is a family decision, both with regards to traditional family values in China, and with regards to the law which stipulates that you have to be married in order to have children, thus creating a family. China's family planning policy is however not merely a birth planning policy which aims only to reduce the size of the population; it is in reality a population planning policy,[82] broadly aimed at increasing population quality (*renkou suzhi* 人口素质). Greenhalgh states that one of the objectives of China's current population policy is modernising and globalising of society and individuals.[83]

In the West, family planning is often merely concerned with information about, and access to, contraception and health services. In the Chinese context however, these aspects are just two components of the vast family planning policy machinery. In addition to education about birth control, a complex system of incentives and disincentives are implemented to assure the people's compliance to the national family planning policy, and the achievement of planned population numbers.[84] Anthony T. Carter describes the two concepts of agency often associated with fertility decisions, one being active and one being passive agency. "The active concept of agency sees people as deliberately choosing the level of fertility through some form of abstract rationality", while "the passive concept of agency sees people as adhering to conventions or following rules".[85] Although limited by the family planning policy's birth limitation, couples' decisions to have children in China include both types of agency. The

[82] (Tien 1985, 132-134)
[83] (Greenhalgh 2010, xii-xiii)
[84] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 348)
[85] (Carter 1995, 55)

passive is influenced by state regulations, cultural tradition and family conventions, while the active is steered by socioeconomic restraints and financial limitations. Lee and Wang however assume reproduction planning to be rational decision making.[86] Not only do they assume human behaviour to be rational, they also assume that individuals are fully aware of all the costs, benefits, consequences and opportunities related to the decision of having children.[87]

Some studies show that cultural conditions, rather than socioeconomic ones, determine the onset of fertility decline. In areas with similar cultural setting, i.e. language, ethnicity, religion and region, changes in fertility will occur in similar times, while the same is not necessarily true across areas with similar socioeconomic conditions.[88] Within China, both cultural and economic conditions vary greatly, and both factors do probably affect the fertility levels. Pinpointing what these cultural factors are, as well as why and how they affect fertility is a challenge in need of more attention. At this point however, understanding the complexity of these factors, rather than leaning on classic transition theory may be crucial to understand the further development of fertility patterns in China, with or without a family planning policy.

[86] (Lee and Wang 1999, 10)
[87] (Lee and Wang 1999, 17)
[88] (Kertzer 1995, 32-33)

3 The history of family planning policy

In order to understand the population challenges China faces today, one should consider its demographic development in general and the development of state family planning in particular. This chapter will present a short summary of these two aspects of population history in the People's Republic of China, from its establishment in 1949 to present day. For more thorough accounts of demographic development during and prior to this time period, I refer to such writers as Thomas Scharping, Tyrene White, Deborah Davis, James Z. Lee and Wang Feng.[89] This chapter will pay special attention to the introduction and implementation of state family planning in China, in order to supply a frame of reference for the analysis of family planning policy implications on the participants in this study. I have based my work on the relevant studies by Cecilia Milwertz, Susan Greenhalgh, Judith Banister, Elisabeth Croll and Dudley L. Poston Jr.[90]

The historical population development of China is an integral part of global population development, and many of its traits are similar to those of population development in the rest of the world. Like many of its neighbouring countries, for instance Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, China has experienced a marked fertility decline and is now exhibiting low fertility rates, increased life expectancy and rapid urbanisation. One thing which is, however, unique to the population development of China is the fact that national authorities have maintained a compulsory family planning policy across the country for more than thirty years, and does not show many signs of abandoning it any time soon.

Planned production, planned reproduction

Around the time of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the end of both civil and world war, combined with rapid increase in health and sanitation campaigns led to a massive mortality decline.[91] Already in its early years, the new Communist government and the first Premier Zhou Enlai, voiced concerns about the rapid population growth which followed this rise in life expectancy.[92] Between the establishment of the People's Republic in

[89] (Lee and Wang 1999; Davis and Harrell 1993; Scharping 2003; White 2006)
[90] (Poston Jr et al. 2006; Croll, Kane, and Davin 1985; Greenhalgh 2008; Milwertz 1997; Banister 1987; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005)
[91] (Banister 1987, 8)
[92] (Hansen and Thøgersen 2008, 43)

1949, and the introduction of the one child family planning policy in 1979, state family planning programmes were however characterised as an on-again-and-off-again cycle.[93]

During the era of Mao Zedong, the notion of a *population problem* started to take form, but it was yet to become a national concern. The population debate was heavily influenced by the Malthusian argument that food production could not keep pace with population increase, but Mao disputed this argument and continued to advocate rising population numbers as a sign of a strong nation.[94] Mao was perhaps somewhat correct to doubt the applicability of Malthusian theory on China's population, as China had experienced a vast decline in mortality and increase in living standards, even though its population had quadrupled since the time of Malthus.[95]

Due to the ruling Marxist state ideology, the problem of imbalance between population size and production output could not be solved through the use of Malthusian population policy. While Malthusian theory viewed the population primarily as consumers, it was not compatible with the ruling Marxist ideology which viewed the population primarily as producers. Marxism therefore, did not hold any theory which could legitimise a control of the population growth, as more people simply would mean more producers.[96] Hence, even though there might exist a broad consensus among scholars and politicians on the existence of a population problem, it was not an easy task to reach any conclusions on whether this problem was mainly a problem with the size of the population and its production, or merely an issue of the distribution of population and production.

This uncertainty concerning the existence of a population problem and the possible reasons for it led to a non-linear development of both population theory and family planning policy in China. The case of Peking University professor Ma Yinchu (马寅初) is a good example of the on-again-off-again acceptance amongst the political elite of the existence of a population problem and a possible solution. Ma Yinchu expressed his support for Malthusian population theory, and opposed Mao Zedong's Marxist views. Ma, who specialised in economy, argued at an early stage that "China's huge population and its rapid growth rate were the chief obstacles to economic development."[97] As he disputed Mao's arguments, he was heavily criticized for his views, and lost his position at the university because of them. After Mao's death however, there seemed to exist a wider agreement amongst politicians and

[93] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 348)
[94] (Milwertz 1997, 39)
[95] (Lee and Wang 1999, 12-13)
[96] (Milwertz 1997, 40)
[97] (Milwertz 1997, 42)

scholars that the population problem in China indeed was a problem of population *size*. Thus, Malthusian ideas were brought back in from the cold, and Ma Yinchu was reinstated as Professor at Peking University, as "population growth itself came to be perceived as the main obstacle to improving standards of living."[98] At this point it became easier to discuss a solution, as China's political leaders agreed on the root of the problem – the population was growing too fast. Thus, the idea of combining the Communist state planned production, with state planned reproduction started to unfold.

In the early 1970s, the problem of population growth had become more or less an established truth, not only in China, but also within Western research societies such as the Club of Rome.[99] Although the arguments from the Club of Rome were largely ridiculed by Chinese authorities, they soon advocated widespread family planning and birth control. By 1973, state family planning programmes were practised across the nation, and the wan-xi-shao (晚稀少) family planning policy was made official, advocating later marriage, longer spacing between births, and fewer births altogether.[100] The effect of the wan-xi-shao policy is debated, as its implementation period coincided with vast socioeconomic changes in China. Therefore, it is hard to ascertain how much of China's decline in reproduction levels during this period was caused by the wan-xi-shao policy, and how much was simply caused by change in living standard amongst the Chinese population. Also, how the wan-xi-shao policy was implemented, and to what extent it included coercion, is somewhat unclear,[101] but Judith Banister states that already in the early 1970s "a strong element of compulsion was incorporated into the family planning program".[102]

Professor Pi-chao Chen is among the few scholars who view the rapid fertility decline in China to be caused solely by family planning programmes, and not by socioeconomic development and modernisation.[103] Hill Gates, on the other hand, argues that the rapid fertility decline was a result of coinciding popular sentiment and official ideology. When state intervention strengthened existing practice of birth control, family planning was widely adopted.[104] The combined effect of socioeconomic development and policy implementation

[98] (Milwertz 1997, 51-52)
[99] (Neurath 1994, 177)
[100] (Greenhalgh 2010, 16)
[101] (Milwertz 1997, 50-52)
[102] (Banister 1987, 165) For more on forcible policy implementation and policy resistance, see (Perry and Selden 2003; Nie 2005; White 2006; Scharping 2003)
[103] (Chen 1985, 135)
[104] (Gates 1993, 274)

are thus thought to explain the rapid fertility decline.[105] Although the impact of family planning programmes on reproduction rates are debated, there is no doubt that a broad fertility decline did coincide with policy implementation.

During the reform and opening up period (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) of Deng Xiaoping, the aim of population control was to reach the Four Modernisations (*sige xiandaihua* 四个现代化) as soon as possible.[106] This meant developing China's economy through modernisation of the national agriculture, industry, defence, and science and technology sectors. According to the post-Mao authorities, population growth clearly stood in the way of growth in these four sectors.[107] However, between 1970 and 1979, the national total fertility rate had already decreased by more than 50 per cent, from 5.8 or 5.7 to 2.8,[108] reaching near replacement level fertility with an average of just over two births per woman. In the biggest cities, fertility had declined prior the introduction of family planning programmes, and in Beijing fertility fell well below replacement level by the mid-1970s.[109] Demographic momentum does however imply that a "population will continue to increase long after replacement level fertility has been achieved, because the young age structure of the total population will produce large cohorts in the childbearing ages for decades to come"[110] and with this is mind, the Chinese government was eager to install a family planning policy which could reduce the population growth considerably.[111]

The one-child family planning policy

With the reform period introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China opened its economy from a strictly planned economy to a more market influenced economy. The elements of population control and state family planning were however not affected by the new reform and opening agenda. Simultaneously with opening of its economy, China did in fact experience a tightening in terms of population control. By 1980, the population *problem* had become a population *crisis* according to state authorities, and this crisis posed a major threat

[105] (Guo and Chen 2007, 70)
[106] (Greenhalgh 2008, 32)
[107] (Croll, Kane, and Davin 1985, 23)
[108] (Peng 2011b, 159; Lee and Wang 1999, 93)
[109] (Milwertz 1997, 26-27)
[110] (Milwertz 1997, 53)
[111] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 257)

against China's modernisation. The Malthusian idea of too many people with too few resources quickly became state argument for reducing reproduction levels.[112]

In 1980, China's State Council issued "a request for the implementation of the one-child family policy,"[113] and applied Marxist theory to argue that "planned economy necessarily leads to family planning"[114]. Milwertz writes that "the one-child family policy is basically an intensified continuation of the wan-xi-shao policy", and that the main difference between the two policies was a reduction in allowed births from two to one.[115] Banister however, argues that the family planning policy developed into a far more coercive practise in the early 1980s.[116] The elements of compulsion and coercion were among the main foci of Western accounts on China's family planning policy in the 1980s and 1990s, as stories of forced abortions and forced sterilisation reached media and scholars. Banister strongly disagrees with the notion of it being voluntary, as she emphasises the negative consequences of early policy implementation through late abortions and intrauterine device insertions on women, as well as forced sterilisations on both genders.[117]

The fear of an impending population disaster worked as an effective instrument for legitimising both policy implementation and party rule. When the policy of "one child per couple" was introduced, the authorities presented an estimate of China's future population size, showing an expected population of 4.8 billion by the year 2080.[118] As China's population rapidly approached the 1 billion mark in the early 1980s, this frightening image of a population explosion helped justify the drastic new birth limitation and family planning policy implementation.

With the introduction of the one-child rule, an elaborate set of incentives and disincentives was applied in order to make the people follow the family planning policy. The incentives included monetary rewards, promotions, preferential treatment in education, housing and health services.[119] The disincentives ranged from monetary fines, demolition of housing, and demotion or dismissal in the work place.[120] The monetary reward for having only one child was not simply seen as an incentive to follow the family planning policy, but

[112] (Greenhalgh 2010, 16-17)
[113] (Milwertz 1997, 4)
[114] (Population and Family Planning 1990)
[115] (Milwertz 1997, 51)
[116] (Banister 1987, 191)
[117] (Banister 1987, 192-215)
[118] (Greenhalgh 2010, 17-18)
[119] (Population and Family Planning 1990)
[120] (Lee and Wang 1999, 95)

also as a financial support to secure the upbringing of *high-quality children* (*gaosuzhi haizi* 高素质孩子) which the government aims to obtain through this policy. The reward should be spent to improve the fostering of the child, especially through nutritious food and health services, and was therefore views as a form of subsidy.[121] A common denominator for many of these incentives and disincentives is how they are influenced by market economy, as opposed to political ideology as seen under Mao's regime. At that time, incompliance with central policies and ideology would not only make you an enemy of the nation, put therein also an enemy of the people who at times where free to punish you for your "crimes". Throughout the family planning policy period, these incentives have been used to convince or coerce the public to follow policy regulation.

The duration of China's infamous one-child policy differs between various sources. Greenhalgh explains that the confusion concerning when the policy started is due to the implementation of a one-child family planning slogan prior to the formal introduction of the policy. According to Greenhalgh, the one-child policy became a national policy in September 1980, but the idea of "one-childization" (*yitaihua*一胎化) did not last for many years. Within the mid-80s, a number of exceptions were introduced, and most rural families were allowed a second child if their first born was a girl. This policy version, which Greenhalgh calls a "one-and-a-half-child policy" (*yitaiban zhengce* 一胎半政策) was formalised in 1988.[122]

The one-and-a-half-child policy was introduced to countermeasure resistance towards the policy in rural areas, where son preference were strong. Banister states that ethnic minorities originally were explicitly exempt from state family planning, but came under policy control during the 1980s. All 55 minority groups were however still allowed to have more than one child.[123] Exceptions to the one-child limit were also given to couples who had a handicapped or ill first child, and to couples where one of the spouses was handicapped, ill, remarried a fisherman or son of a revolutionary martyr.

The reactions to China's family planning policy by Western scholars and media have been varied, to say the least. On the one hand, they seem to be appalled by the strict and forceful implementation of the policy, and on the other hand they seem impressed by its "effectiveness". The policy have gotten quite a lot of international praise, much with the same phrases as the Chinese government first introduced the policy, such as "it's the only solution

[121] (Crook and Timæus 1997, 142)
[122] (Greenhalgh 2008, 30-33)
[123] (Banister 1987, 248-250)

to the population problem".[124] During the 1980s and 1990s, when Western scholars did oppose the family planning policy in China, the criticism mainly addressed the human rights breeches in the *implementation* of policy, and did not focus on human rights breeches in the formulation of the policy itself. Milwertz however concludes that "violation of human rights is implicit in the policy itself."[125]

John S. Aird is among the scholars who early on feared the long term consequences of a strict family planning policy. He admitted that for the government, the short term advantages of the one-child policy were many, as both the problems of education, housing and unemployment could expect large improvements within 20 years of policy implementation. The long term negative effects however, especially that of aging population, might take more than 50 years to unfold.[126] The Chinese scholar Zeng Yi largely concurred with these statements, and advocated a universal two-child policy already in the 1980s.[127] His views again are partly shared by Greenhalgh, who questions the reasoning behind the introduction of a one-child policy in the first place.[128]

Population problem redefined

Estimates from the United Nations show that China will be surpassed by India as the world's most populous nation by 2030, with populations of 1.458 billion and 1.506 billion respectively.[129] In China, there has been a declining pattern of desired number of children for several decades, especially in large cities like Beijing and Shanghai,[130] and the national total fertility rate has been below replacement level since the beginning of the 1990s.[131] By the year 2000, urban China had literally conformed to the one-child policy, with a total fertility rate of 1.0,[132] and in 2007, national fertility was 25 per cent below replacement level of approximately 2.1.[133]

Despite these low fertility levels across China, the population numbers continue to rise due to declining mortality rates and increased life expectancy. From 1950 to 2000, infant

[124] (Milwertz 1997, 10)
[125] (Milwertz 1997, 7)
[126] (Aird 1986)
[127] (Milwertz 1997, 6)
[128] (Greenhalgh 2008)
[129] (Gu 2009)
[130] (Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006, 97)
[131] (Peng 2011b, 160)
[132] (Lee and Liang 2006, 160)
[133] (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009, 7)

mortality fell from 200 per 1000, to less than 50 per 1000,[134] and by 2012 China reached a life expectancy of 78.84 years.[135] The effects of demographic momentum means that China will not face decline in total population numbers until after the first quarter of this century.[136] Sociologist Gabe T. Wang argues that China, despite its "great success" with population control still faces an "overpopulation problem".[137] By most other scholars however, both Chinese and non-Chinese, population growth is no longer viewed as the main obstacle to Chinese development and prosperity. Rather, the long term consequences of its family planning policy are. Today, the negative effects Aird foresaw are unfolding, and they are increasingly threatening the *quality* (*suzhi* 素质) of the population. The term *suzhi* is used both by the authorities and the public to describe everything from a population's level of education, nutrition, income and moral, to its level of modernisation. Raising *population quality* (*renkou suzhi*人口素质) is now among the main goals of Chinese population policy. Thus today, China's biggest population problem is not rapid population growth, but rather a highly imbalanced population, experiencing large gaps in birth rates by gender, and a rapidly increasing number of aged citizens.

Table 2: China's population composition by the end of 2011

	Population size	**Proportion %**
National Total	1 347 350 000	100.0
Urban	690 790 000	51.3
Rural	656 560 000	48.7
Male	690 680 000	51.3
Female	656 670 000	48.7
Aged 0-14	221 640 000	16.5
Aged 15-59	940 720 000	69.8
Aged 60 and over	184 990 000	13.7

Source: China's National Bureau of Statistics[138]

According to government targets from year 2000, the gender ratio at birth was expected to have normalised by 2010.[139] Nevertheless, the gender ratio at birth was measured

[134] (Lee and Wang 1999, 36)
[135] (CIA 2012b)
[136] (Zhao and Guo 2007, 5)
[137] (Wang 1999, 206)
[138] (NBS 2011)

at 117.78 males per 100 females in 2011,[140] still far above the normal range. Ageing populations is a global phenomenon these days, and China is not alone in experiencing such a rapidly increasing proportion of elderly in its population. Some of China's neighbouring countries, which are also encountering the implications of steep fertility decline, have already redefined what the *population problem* or *population crisis* entails. Taiwan and South Korea for instance, are now using these phrases to describe the current extremely low fertility rates and its consequences on population composition.[141]

In 2001, the family planning policy became part of national law, and the one-child families became a legal request for most of China's population.[142] Edwin A. Winckler describes how the national family planning law from 2001 emphasises both the rights and the responsibilities of individuals in complying with state policy and birth limitations. They have the explicit right to reproduce, but also the responsibility to do so without jeopardising China's future development and the rights of future generations.[143] Nonetheless, this new emphasis on family planning policy being one of China's basic national policies (*jiben guoce* 基本国策), did not stop the introduction of further exemptions. While one-child requirements were relaxed in rural China, and strengthened in urban areas during the 1980s and 1990s,[144] today's situation is a bit different. Below replacement level birth rates in urban areas have led the government to allow, or even encourage more than one child per couple. In Shanghai, couples are even allowed to register children born out of wedlock.[145]

Peng Xizhe divides the implementation of the current family planning policy into five categories. The first category covers all urban residents and is known as the one child policy, which gives very few exceptions in allowing two children. The second category is the so-called 1.5 child, which applies for most of China's rural population. This category allows for a second child if the first one is a girl. The third category allows two children for many rural couples, as long as they follow the government's recommendation on birth spacing. The fourth category applies for most rural minorities, and allows two or three children. The last category concerns the rural Tibetan population, whose fertility at this point has no numerical

[139] (China's population and development in the 21st century 2002, 11-12)
[140] (NBS 2012a)
[141] (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009, 3)
[142] (Greenhalgh 2010, 2)
[143] (Winckler 2002, 407)
[144] (Milwertz 1997, 6)
[145] (Greenhalgh 2010, 75)

regulation.[146] Again, it might be worth remembering that actual implementation not necessarily coincide with formal policy, as suggested by Greenhalgh in *Just one child*.[147]

In 2007, state authorities concluded that national fertility levels were still "at realistic risk of rebounding", and population growth remained strong across the nation despite local variations of policy implementation.[148] Although originally designed to only last for 30 years, the family planning policy of China continues to be in effect, and to date, the Chinese authorities regularly proclaim that the family planning policy will not change.[149] And in the same way as early policy rationale was based on frightening calculations showing an impending population explosion, the current figure of 400 million avoided births so far help legitimise the continuation of family planning policy today.[150] Lee Liu refutes this estimate, and argues that it is based on total fertility rates from the early 1970s, when Chinese couples in average had six children.[151]

Thus, the implementation of state family planning does not follow a linear path of development. Rather, the level of population control fluctuates depending on the government's notions of *population crisis*, as well as the population's level of acceptance. In times when the size of the population was the main worry, strict implementation of the one-child rule was applied. As the effects of this kind of rigorous population control became evident, through rural resistance, increased gender ratios at birth and ultra-low fertility leading to rapid population ageing in urban areas, the policy implementation was somewhat relaxed. The role of state family planning in China has evolved from being an influential family planning *programme*, the wan-xi-shao in the 1970s, towards a coercively implemented family planning *policy* by 1980, the infamous one-child policy, reaching the level of family planning *law* in 2001. Today, there are numerous versions of the family planning policy, applied differentially to various sections of China's population, and the different levels of implementation within these groups seem immeasurable. Although the exemptions to the one-child rule are many, Gu Baochang, Wang Feng, Guo Zhigang and Zhang Erli argue that "the one-child policy remains a core element in China's fertility policy".[152] The overall aim of the family planning policy does however seem to develop in one particular direction; from mainly controlling population *quantity*, to increasingly controlling population *quality*.

[146] (Peng 2011b, 164; Attané 2007, 257; Saich 2011, 305)
[147] (Greenhalgh 2008)
[148] (Greenhalgh 2010, 22)
[149] (NPFPC 2011b)
[150] (NPFPC 2011a)
[151] (Liu 2010, 298)
[152] (Gu et al. 2007, 144)

4 Fertility gap

While the total size of China's population is still growing, both annual population growth percentage and annual number of birth are decreasing steadily.[153] Since the introduction of family planning programmes, population surveys by China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) have shown national fertility levels close to replacement level fertility of approximately two children per couple.[154] Several scholars do however suspect that fertility is even lower, and as the negative effects of this low fertility are becoming increasingly apparent, both Chinese and non-Chinese researchers are asking themselves if the fertility levels will ever rise again.[155] Is there a gap between China's reported fertility and its actual fertility? Furthermore, is there a gap between the population's actual fertility and their desired fertility?

Low fertility

The gap between the fertility levels of the Mao era and the fertility levels of the family planning era is historically unique, as no other country has so far experienced an equally rapid fertility decline. During the first decades of Communist Party rule, Mao Zedong largely encouraged population growth, thus fertility levels were relatively high across China during his reign, with an average total fertility rate of 5.8.[156] When the cohort of this high fertility period came of age and started having children themselves, the positive effects of population growth were questioned. A Fudan University teacher once told me that she looked fondly back at the time when Mao was the country's leader. Alas, she said, he made *one* large mistake, and that was encouraging unlimited population growth.

During the years when Deng Xiaoping ruled at the top of China's political hierarchy, low fertility became a sign of development and modernisation. According to Fong, China was too impatient to wait for the low fertility expected to accompany modernisation, and rather chose to accelerate the modernisation process by forcing low fertility.[157] Thus, China made

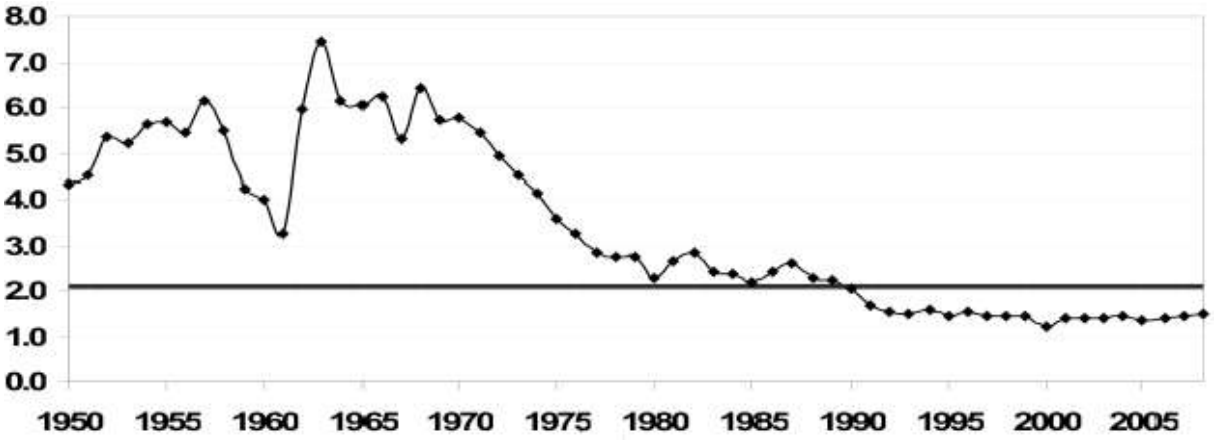
[153] (Gu 2009, 74)
[154] (Peng 2011a, 581; Crook and Timæus 1997, 145)
[155] Among others: (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009; Cai 2010; Gu 顾宝昌 2010; Xu 许静 2010; Wang 王丰 2010)
[156] (Peng 2011a, 581)
[157] (Fong 2004, 3, 70-79)

low fertility both the goal and the means of the nation's grand modernisation plan, by introducing national family planning programmes.

In addition to the historic gap between the fertility rates during the Mao era, and the current fertility rates, there are also numerous indications of a gap between China's *reported* fertility levels and *actual* fertility levels. Thus official calculations on total fertility rate (TFR) by NBS are somewhat debated. [158] Gu Baochang shows how different TFR estimates range from 1.35 to 2.3 in recent years.[159] The United Nations Statistics Division calculates China's TFR to be 1.60 in 2010,[160] and the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates a decline to 1.55 in 2012.[161]

Zhongwei Zhao and Wei Chen are among those who argue that the United Nations estimates are largely based on China's official statistics, and thus are dissatisfactory. They present their own calculations, which indicate a national total fertility rate below 1.45 for the last ten years.[162] Lee Liu argues that even with an estimated TFR between 1.70 and 1.80, China's national statistics reveal a total fertility rate below 1.50 for nearly a billon of the country's population, making it the largest very low fertility population in the world. [163] Regardless of which of these calculations are most precise, one thing is abundantly clear: China has a low national fertility, well below replacement level.

Figure 1: China's total fertility rate (TFR) from 1950 to 2008



Source: Gu 2010.[164] The straight line marks replacement level fertility.

[158] (*China's Total Fertility Rate Grossly Overestimated* 2011; Banister 1987, 12-49; Milwertz 1997, 30-31)
[159] (Gu 2009)
[160] (UN 2012b)
[161] (CIA 2012c)
[162] (Zhao and Chen 2011, 823)
[163] (Liu 2010, 290-292)
[164] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 98)

Some argue that the reported low fertility level in China is the result of widespread underreporting of children in order to avoid family planning policy sanctions against unauthorised births.[165] Peng presents surveys conducted in Shanghai and Jiangsu which show that more than 90 per cent of all births were registered with local authorities. In some rural locations however, more than 20 per cent of births were not properly registered.[166] Zhao and Chen on the other hand refute the underreporting argument, and believe it to mainly be a sign of scholarly inability to accept surprisingly low fertility levels.[167] Similarly, the Chinese government is still focused on controlling fertility rates, but unwilling to see that the fertility rate they assume to be 1.8, perhaps is higher than both the actual and the desired fertility level among the population. As Zhao and Chen write, Chinese authorities insist on maintaining today's fertility rate for another 30 years, without even discussing the possibility that it might decline even further.[168]

Lee and Wang argue that fertility has never been especially high in China, and that the level of fertility within marriage historically has been below that of pre-transition societies in the West. While women in western societies had an average of between 7.5 and 9 births before modern contraception was introduced, married Chinese women had average of 6 or less.[169] They explain this phenomenon with long traditions for controlling and limiting reproduction in Chinese families.

Policy determinants

Naturally, China's family planning policy is thought to be a major factor in the nation's fertility decline, as it has supplied the nation with, and occasionally forced the population to utilise, a broad spectre of free or inexpensive birth control methods.[170] Penny Kane argues that the mere availability of contraception led to much of the reduction in fertility, as Chinese had been practising birth control for more than 2000 years, and are largely accepting the fertility limitations.[171] John C. Caldwell and Zhao Zhongwei argue that there are several reasons for broad family planning policy acceptance. Firstly, there is long tradition for strong authoritarian influence in China. Secondly, reproduction has historically not been viewed as

[165] (Zeng et al. 1993)
[166] (Peng 2011b, 160-161)
[167] (Zhao and Chen 2011, 828)
[168] (Zhao and Chen 2011, 830)
[169] (Lee and Wang 1999, 8)
[170] (Neurath 1994, 166; Fong 2011, 126)
[171] (Kane 1985, 84-97)

an individual choice. Thirdly, at the time of policy introduction, and still today, there exists a popular demand for family planning methods and birth control.[172] Nadia Diamond-Smith and Malcolm Potts agree that contraception is the main component of fertility reduction, and should be further diffused to limit population size and environmental strain.[173] Wei Chen argues that China's abortion rate actually is quite moderate by international standards, and has had a lower impact on fertility reductions than in South Korea and Japan,[174] thus emphasising the role of *preventive* birth control.

Gu Baochang argues that there is broad acceptance for family planning and birth limitation across China, and shows how most provinces have an observed fertility rate which is below the level of fertility allowed by the local family planning policy.[175] Low fertility is thought to be a sign of modernisation, related to the diffusion of individualism through the rise of capitalism. Some have even argued that market economy is necessary for individualistic demographic decision making.[176] Greenhalgh however, argues that the rise of self-optimising and self-governing individuals amongst its population is a deliberate outcome of China's population policy.[177] Thus, the policy aim is no longer mere population control, but rather human development.[178] Although more and more young men and women are choosing education, careers and self-fulfilment over traditionally valued marriage and family life, this does not necessarily reflect an increasing influence of individualisation among young Chinese.[179] It might be a consequence of the government's focus on population quality (*renkou suzhi* 人口素质), where high education and successful careers provide just as much *renkou suzhi*, or perhaps even more, than traditional family roles.

Lee and Wang claim that "Chinese individuals constantly adjusted their demographic behaviour according to collective circumstances to maximise collective utility."[180] Tony Saich questions this conclusion and points to a clear lack of collectivism in fertility decisions, as he argues that although most Chinese agree with the necessity of the policy, "many also have specific reasons about why it should not apply to them."[181] Nonetheless, having children has traditionally been regarded as a process engaging the entire family, where young couples have

[172] (Caldwell and Zhao 2007)
[173] (Diamond-Smith and Potts 2010)
[174] (Chen 2007, 101-106)
[175] (Gu 2009, 79)
[176] (Lee and Wang 1999, 18)
[177] (Greenhalgh 2010, xiii)
[178] (Greenhalgh 2010, 26-28)
[179] (Chu and Yu 2010, 269)
[180] (Lee and Wang 1999, 9)
[181] (Saich 2011, 305)

been heavily influenced by their parents and grandparents, both in regards to number, gender and rearing of children.[182] As this thesis shows however, few of the interviewees seemed to be especially concerned about their parents' wishes on how many children they should have and when. Several of the participants actually viewed their parents' attitudes as old-fashioned and non-modern, stating that their parents did not understand the amount of resources needed to raise children today. Li Ying, one of the interview participants in my study, rather jokingly said that even her boyfriend did not have any say in the timing and number of any children they might have.

Mette Halskov Hansen and Pang Cuiming argue that the participants in their study of young rural Chinese views on family, showed a combination of highly individualistic opinions and collective awareness.[183] This is also true for many of the participants in my study. On the one hand they largely accept state family planning policy and state ideology on *suzhi*, at the same time their reasons for preferring a certain number of children are based almost exclusively on their own individual opinions about ideal family size. However, since the actual family size decisions are still in the future for my respondents, it is too soon to tell if they will end up following the path of collectivism or individualism when starting a family.

Lee and Wang argue that demographic decisions never have been an individual decision in China, hence resistance to the family planning policy and forced compliance is rather limited, as the individual is used to yielding to the collective good.[184] Hill Gates and Fong however argue that resistance have mainly been seen in rural areas, as family planning policy limitations largely coincided with individual socioeconomic restraints in urban areas.[185] Of the participants in my study, none were familiar with any use of force (*qiangzhi*强制) by authorities towards their family in order to assure policy compliance. However, as both Milwertz and Greenhalgh note, the concepts of *force* (*qiangzhi* 强制) and *voluntary* (*ziyuan*自愿) may have other connotations in Chinese, where *force* implies *physical force*, and *voluntary* can be understood as *not physically forced*.[186]

Nonetheless, according to the participants in my study, their parents were heavily influenced by the family planning policy when they decided on how many children they would have. The participants themselves however, seem largely ambivalent towards the

[182] (Milwertz 1997, 77-79)
[183] (Hansen and Pang 2010, 49)
[184] (Lee and Wang 1999, 10)
[185] (Gates 1993; Fong 2004)
[186] (Greenhalgh 2010, 44-45; Milwertz 1997, 185-186)

policy's effect on their plans for having children, as suggested by Fong.[187] Their concerns are rather based on personal and financial conditions. This ambivalence towards policy impact may be due to the fact that many of the participants view having children as something which is still far into their future. Possibly, it might also imply that they feel the policy do not affect them much, as they are mostly single children (who sometimes are allowed to have two children) and/or transnational students (who often are exempt from the policy).[188] Many also expect the policy to be gradually relaxed, thus their own low fertility desires are likely to be in accordance with any future variations of the policy. While most demographers agree that China's family policy needs adjustments, most Chinese policymakers and administrators advocate retaining the current policy for two reasons: the overall population of China is still too large, and today's low fertility rate will not continue if the policy is relaxed.[189]

In Yilin Nie and Robert J. Wyman's study of family planning policy in Shanghai, there is a distinct difference between the answers from the older and the younger participants on the topic of policy compliance. The older respondents, who were at reproductive age when the policy was first introduced, say there were many different reasons for just wanting one child in that period, among them fear of overpopulation and possible mass starvation as seen during the Great Leap Forward. The younger people Nie and Wyman interviewed also expressed acceptance of the family planning policy, but their reasons for policy compliance were somewhat different. They were all largely content with having no siblings, as well as only being able to have one child themselves. Nie and Wyman thus sum up their interview objects' expressed opinions in the following way: the older generations say they approved of the family planning policy primarily based on a focus on the national good, while the younger generations say they approved of the policy based on personal interests.[190]

The reasons for reducing individual fertility levels have thus changed during the family planning policy period. In the 1990s, Milwertz wrote that several studies show how the main reason for having only one child in China is the policy restrictions imposed by the government, and not personal preferences.[191] This statement is supported by the participants in my study, many of whom say that their parents limited their fertility mainly to comply with state policy, while they themselves base their fertility decisions more on their own socioeconomic situation. Many of the interviewees in my study were rather clear on the fact

[187] (Fong 2011, 159)
[188] (Landinfo 2012; Scharping 2003, 158)
[189] (Zeng 2007, 216-217)
[190] (Nie and Wyman 2005, 318-326)
[191] (Milwertz 1997, 12)

that the reason they have no siblings is because their parents chose to, or had to, adhere to the one-child limitation. When explaining their own desires and plans for preferred number of children, very few stated that their choices were based on the recommendations of current family planning policy. Nevertheless, some of the participants rather jokingly expressed that a suitable partner would have to be a single child, in that way they could choose to have more than one child when they decided to start a family. Although, several of the interviewees seemed to be unsure of how the current regulations would affect them, as the exceptions to the one-child rule are both numerous and complicated. Most did however explain their ideal number of children on the basis of limited personal and national resources. They did not think they would be able to earn enough money to support more than one child, nor afford an apartment which could house more than one child.

In Milwertz' study, 62.9 per cent of the women stated that they would choose to have only one child whether or not there existed a one-child rule, and none said they would choose to have more than two.[192] This implies that there already existed other powerful factors, besides family planning policy, which limited their fertility. According to Gu's more recent survey, among those who were allowed to have two children, less than 40 per cent expressed a desire to do so, and the main obstacle was reported to be economic conditions.[193]

Socioeconomic determinants

The reasons for China's low fertility level are numerous, as not only its family planning policy, but also a variety of socioeconomic factors are believed to have fuelled the fertility decline. Judith Banister points to China's major rise in per capita income, rural-urban migration and women empowerment to explain how socioeconomic conditions affect low fertility.[194]

Martin Werding claims that scholars are yet to find a universally accepted theory which explains the long-term fertility decline seen across the developed world today. He argues that the theory of demographic transition does not explain fertility decline, but merely describes it.[195] Werding draws on economic theories to help understand the individual behaviour which results in reduced fertility, three of these being especially relevant in the Chinese fertility decision setting. These theories are Becker's Quantity-Quality Interaction,

[192] (Milwertz 1997, 70)
[193] (Gu 2009, 84-86)
[194] (Banister 1987, 127-131)
[195] (Takayama and Werding 2011, 15)

Willis' theory on opportunity cost, and Cigno's theory on fiscal externalities.[196] In China, a couple's decision to have children might be explained by all the above theories. The desire to rear a *high quality child* (*gao suzhi haizi* 高素质孩子) is often related to a quantity-quality trade-off. Furthermore, parents will consider the opportunity cost of having children, as it affects not only raised costs, but also lost employment income. Through fiscal externalities such as public pension schemes, parents may calculate the value of a child supporting them in old age, compared to the value of public pensions.

In my research, the participant Huang Hao was one of interviewees who emphasised the importance of education and quality (*suzhi*) when he explained why he himself, and probably most other Chinese, agreed to limit their number of children. With a higher degree in technological studies himself, he certainly wanted his own children to have the same opportunities as his generation had. The young man Xu Dong also emphasises increasing *suzhi* as one of the most important aspects of reducing fertility. Both participants seem to focus more on the benefits of having *suzhi* for the child itself, rather than on its benefits for the entire community or nation.

C. Y. Cyrus Chu and Ruoh-Rong Yu also apply economic rationales to explain fertility decisions in China. They argue that in developed areas, quantity-quality trade-offs are often regarded as the greatest concern when considering how many children to have. This implies considering if the quality of a child's education and upbringing will be negatively affected by competition from a sibling given the parents' resource limits. In developing areas on the other hand, considering the marginal gains from an additional child's contribution to a family's labour and income is more important.[197] Some of China's areas arguably fall into the developed area category, while some are still in the developing process. Thus, analysing Chinese fertility using just one of these models may give misleading conclusions. Among the participants in my study however, the quantity-quality trade-off model was clearly the most applicable. Assumptions of utility maximizing seemed to affect many of the participants' explanations for why a limited number of children were desirable, both for themselves and the children.

Peter McDonald argues that low fertility in all of East Asia is influenced by at least three socioeconomic factors; late marriage, high costs of childrearing and high housing costs. He also presents three "European" explanations, based on research which explains low

[196] (Takayama and Werding 2011, 21-34)
[197] (Chu and Yu 2010, 62)

fertility in Europe, but might also be applicable in East Asia; work-family balance and gender equity, economic risk, and lack of family support systems.[198] Lee Liu on the other hand, argues that fertility decline not necessarily is linked to vast economic growth, as South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam all have been experiencing rapid fertility decline without reaching the same level of economic growth as China.[199]

Of the women surveyed in Milwertz study, almost 75 per cent stated that their family could only support one child, few could support two children, and virtually none could support more than two.[200] Even in cities like Shanghai, which is one of China's most economically developed cities, economic restraints still keep many couples from having more than one child. As a Shanghai woman shares her experiences with Nie and Wyman in an interview: "I need to worry about everything from school, to music lessons, tutoring, to English lessons, and so many other things. I really can't afford to have more than one child."[201] Parents who only have one child are able to spend all their time and money on that one child, and in fierce competitive societies like in Shanghai, other parents are driven to do the same, and quickly realizing that a second child would not only compromise the potential of the first child, but would also have less opportunity for success itself. Another interviewee explains to Nie: "I can support two kids, but I would not be able to give them the best standard of living that I can. That would not be fair."[202]

It has indeed been possible, to some extent, for families wanting two children to *buy* permission for a second child by paying a *social maintenance fee*. According to the Population and Family Planning Commission, the social maintenance fee is "an administrative charge imposed on citizens who give birth to babies not in compliance with the provisions that compensate for the insufficient public funds for social causes".[203] Thus, families who want - and can afford - more than one child, may have the option to do so. Still, several other socioeconomic determinants affect both rich and poor, both urban and rural couples.

Greenhalgh emphasises the importance of understanding not only the political and economic context of reproduction behaviour, but also the social and cultural context.[204] Of the social and cultural factors affecting fertility, marriage is among the most important. Jones et

[198] (McDonald 2009, 33)
[199] (Liu 2010, 298)
[200] (Milwertz 1997, 123)
[201] (Nie and Wyman 2005, 330)
[202] (Nie and Wyman 2005, 331)
[203] (SHPFPC 2009)
[204] (Greenhalgh 1995, 17)

al. argue that marriage and childbearing are often viewed as two definite elements of a couple's future in East Asia, and "to marry without the intention to have children is still considered aberrant behaviour throughout this region."[205] Gu Baochang however states that for many of the young Chinese women in his study, "marriage and child-bearing were no longer assumed life-course obligations".[206] Currently, the national age limit for marriage is 20 years women and 22 years for men.[207] Later marriages are however increasingly common, for both men and women, in urban areas as well as rural ones. The national average age of marriage rose from 22.23 in 1990 to 23.14 in 2000, and the rise has been even bigger in the larger cities.[208] Although these numbers are rising, they are still far below the mean age of marriage in South Korea and Japan, where the average age for women to marry in 2000 was 27.1 and 28.6 respectively.[209]

Adjusting the allowed age of marriage is indeed an effective way for the government to influence the time and number of births per couple, without the coercive force of birth limitation,[210] and this is especially true for China where marriage and registered childbirths are connected by law. The Chinese government has in fact already adjusted both the allowed and the encouraged age of marriage on several occasions in order to influence population growth. In the future, Chinese authorities could more actively use this type of legislation to adjust birth rates, as it is far less disputed than family planning policy. However, such limits must take into account the physical limitations of childbearing and the consequences of late childbearing on the health of the children.

Among the participants of my study, the practise of delayed marriage, and especially delayed childbirth seems to precede both policy and norm. Many of the participants believe that having children in your late twenties is too late; still they plan to postpone their own reproduction several years, even though they are already in their twenties. Fong states that this is rather typical for Chinese transnational students, who tend to be delayed in both marriage and childbearing as a result of their studies abroad.[211] As both men and women generally spend more time now than earlier on education and finding a career, by the time they are ready to start a family they may be too old to have several children. Hence, timing of important life events, such as education, career and marriage, all affect an individual and a

[205] (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009, 13)
[206] (Gu 2009, 83)
[207] (UN 2012a)
[208] (Peng 2011b, 169)
[209] (Zhang and Gu 2007, 136)
[210] (Zhang and Gu 2007, 126)
[211] (Fong 2011, 95-141)

couple's reproduction opportunities. Also, the increased life-expectancy of the older generations may cause young couples today to choose to have fewer children, as much more of their time and money are used to care for their parents.[212]

Thus, with the family planning policy, the Chinese government may indeed have induced what demographers call a low-fertility trap (*diyu gengti shuiping de xianjing* 低于更替水平的陷阱),[213] where low fertility over time have led to substantial demographic, social and economic changes that reinforces and continues the low fertility.[214] For instance, as children with few siblings are more likely to grow up healthy, desired fertility is reduced as a larger portion of the born children are expected to survive.[215] However, McDonald argues that as long as the ideal number of children has not dropped to the level of actual fertility, there is no need to fear that the low fertility is irreversible.[216]

Fertility preferences

The norm of small families with few children is now widely accepted in China, especially among the young urban population,[217] and even on a national level the average family household size was only 3.1 in 2010.[218] A study by Gu Baochang shows that more than half of all respondents who were allowed to have two children still viewed one child as the ideal, and younger respondents were the ones most likely to prefer only one child.[219] In a study by Zhang Li et al., most rural respondents prefer two children, while most urban respondents desire one child.[220]

Feng Xiaotian, professor at the Department of Sociology at Nanjing University, presents surveys conducted in five of China's biggest cities. These show that about 60 per cent of the couples asked (whether they are themselves have siblings or not) would prefer just one child, and between 30 per cent and 40 per cent would prefer two children. Only about one per cent of the couples asked said they would want three children, and about two per cent said they did not want any children at all. However, the numbers for Beijing alone shows that more than 15 per cent of the couples who do not yet have children, do not desire any children

[212] (Gu 2009, 89)
[213] (Liu 2010, 293; Gu 顾宝昌 2010)
[214] (McDonald 2009, 25)
[215] (Fong 2004, 76)
[216] (McDonald 2009, 29)
[217] (Peng 2011b, 175)
[218] (Peng 2011a, 581)
[219] (Gu 2009, 83)
[220] (Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006, 93-98)

either, and the average number of desired children in Beijing is well below the average number for all the five cities seen together.[221]

The findings in the interviews of my study largely support what Nie Jing-Bao writes about fertility preferences and family planning policy acceptance in *Behind the Silence*. Most would prefer to have two children, one boy and one girl, but concur that limiting their fertility will benefit both the nation and their own individual allocation of resources. Like Milwertz, Nie Jing-Bao thus concludes that policy acceptance is conscientious,[222] but he also argues that the acceptance is insufficiently informed, as neither individuals nor national government seem to fully acknowledge the negative implications of strict family planning policy implementation.[223]

Among the respondents in my study, only the non-Han Chinese woman Wang Ping, and the newly married woman Wu Cai said they intended to have at least two children. The majority of the other interview participants clearly stated that under different socioeconomic conditions they would consider - or even prefer - to have more children. As Xu Jing points out, in today's China couples are constantly considering the opportunity cost of having children. Thus, they do not merely calculate what they achieve by choosing to have children, but also what they are missing out on if they do. As long as having more than one child is perceived as too expensive, having two children or more children will be a luxury reserved for the wealthy, and not a goal obtainable by the urban masses.[224] Greenhalgh agrees that having more than one or two children has become a symbol of wealth and status in some of areas,[225] where having a second child is possible despite of local one-child limits, as long as certain fines and economic sanctions are accepted. Two of the female participants did however suggest that they might not want children, but if they did have any, they would prefer to have two.

National survey numbers from 2007 presented by Xu Jing show how 23.71 per cent of the surveyed women would prefer one child, 66.01 per cent would prefer two children, and 10.10 per cent would like to have three children if there did not exist a family size limit. Under the current policy however, 19.40 per cent would prefer one child, 73.21 per cent would prefer two children, and 7.38 would still like to have three or more

[221] (Feng 风笑天 2010, 62)
[222] (Milwertz 1997, 183-199)
[223] (Nie 2005, 251)
[224] (Xu 许静 2010, 35)
[225] (Greenhalgh 2010, 66)

children.[226] According to an article on the National Population and Family Planning Commission of China's own website, national numbers from 2010 show that nearly 78 per cent of Chinese people want to have two children if the country's family planning policy would permit it, and only 18.3 per cent would prefer a single child.[227] Although the numbers presented by the National Population and Family Planning Commission of China seem to show a desire for two children among the majority of the population, Feng's surveys show that this development do not clearly represent the largest urban areas where 60 per cent of the parents still prefer one child.[228] This shows that though there is a wide support for allowing a two-child policy in China overall, this is not necessarily the case in the areas where the government is most eager to introduce it. The majority of urbanities express a wish for just one child, though it might be too drastic to say that "virtually all urbanities and growing numbers of rural people want only one child",[229] as Greenhalgh puts it. In urban China today, the one-child family seems to be a reflection of people's desires, thus its status as a legal requirement may be far less relevant.[230]

Milwertz states that although the family planning policy has been successful in reducing number of births in China, and the majority of urban women only give birth to one child, there still exists a national preference for more than one child. She refers to numbers which show that 99 per cent of rural women and 75 per cent of urban women wanted at least two children in the early 1980's, and concludes that there is a "big gap between the one-child ideal being advocated and actual fertility preferences" throughout China.[231] Today however, I believe that this gap has narrowed. Due to socioeconomic restraints, many couples now state that one child is more than enough, and two would be an absolute maximum. A national survey from 2002 however, show that Chinese in average desire 2.05 children, and 17.3 per cent of the respondents express a wish for more than three children.[232]

Milwertz also suggests that the discrepancy between fertility preferences and policy limits may be even greater as people participating in surveys may adjust their answers to fit better with national policy and ideology.[233] This might also of course be true today. Perhaps people adjust their answers both in national surveys and in the interviews performed in my

[226] (Xu 许静 2010, 33)
[227] (NPFPC 2010)
[228] (Feng 风笑天 2010, 64)
[229] (Greenhalgh 2008, 327)
[230] (Nie and Wyman 2005, 314)
[231] (Milwertz 1997, 11)
[232] (Peng 2011b, 169)
[233] (Milwertz 1997, 12)

study, in order to present their own opinions as closer to the official policy than they truly are. However, the answers obtained through the interviews presented in my study show that not only do people admit to desiring more children than the policy allows, but some also state that they would be prefer to have no children at all, even though that has never been the aim of China's family planning policy or the ideology behind it.

As Xu Jing concludes, in order to understand the difference between desired fertility and actual fertility one must understand all the aspects which determine how many children a couple actually bring into the world. In addition to policy limitation, one must take into consideration socioeconomic, cultural and physiological aspects, as both voluntary and unwanted childlessness will naturally affect fertility levels.[234]

Several scholars report a growing number of both young men and women who do not wish any children at all.[235] In a Jiangsu survey presented by Gu, 64.4 per cent of the respondents aged 21-25 stated that the ideal number of children was only one. Among those aged 26-30, a slightly smaller percentage of 55.9 agreed than one child was optimal. The difference between these two groups reflect a larger trend of older people preferring two children, and younger people preferring one child, as shown in the other age groups of Gu's study.[236] These findings are also reflected in Fong's study from 1999, and follow-up surveys between 2008 and 2010, which show that the group of respondents were more likely to want children as they got older. In 1999, 32 per cent of the female participants and 16 per cent of the male participants said they never wanted children. When the same people were surveyed again years later, only 10 per cent of the female and 7 per cent of the male respondents answered the same.[237]

In Nie and Wyman's Shanghai study, a young man called Liu Zhanghui says that although he and his wife qualify for two children, they just want one. In fact, according to him, other Shanghai residents who are permitted to have two children may in fact opt to remain childless instead. Some of the women in the same study also say that they do not want to sacrifice their education, career or body figure for a child.[238] This voluntary childlessness may be an important reason as to why fertility rates remain low in Shanghai, despite the government's relaxation of policy enforcement in the last decade. In western countries voluntary childlessness is not uncommon, and the Chinese government should take notice of

[234] (Xu 许静 2010, 34-35)
[235] (Greenhalgh 2010, 64)
[236] (Gu 2009, 85)
[237] (Fong 2011, 159)
[238] (Nie and Wyman 2005, 328)

the spread of these kinds of ideas in China when trying to calculate future fertility rates. Banister explains that there are no economic benefits for those who choose to have no children, even though childless families are a greater contribution to reducing population growth than one-child families. This shows how the family planning policy is implemented under the assumption that everyone wants to get married and have children.[239]

Dorothy Stein argues that although earlier studies show that less than one in thousand Chinese women do not wish to have any children, voluntary childlessness will surely increase as the population urbanises.[240] Lee Liu concurs, and states that the number of childless families, the so-called DINK (double income, no kids) families, is already increasing.[241] In this respect, it might be worth noting that childlessness reached a level of 15.2 per cent among women in Hong Kong in 2002, rising from a mere 2.1 per cent in 1982. Taking into account that medical technology has made it easier to overcome unwanted childlessness, most of these women are likely to be voluntarily without children. If China experiences just some of that development, it will have an enormous effect on fertility rates.[242]

Arguably, limiting the population growth in China can still be advantageous. Although China is a vast country, land resources are limited and especially arable land and water resources is scarce. A glance at China's neighbouring countries however, for instance Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, could give indications of where China's fertility level would be if the authorities were to abolish the current family planning policy. All these countries, as well as the Chinese diasporas living in them, now experience very low fertility.[243] Even pro-natalist campaigns with economic incentives, i.e. campaigns which aim to support and encourage births rather than to limit them, have not been able to turn this trend around.[244] Thus, assuming that at least parts of China will follow this pattern regardless of birth limitations is by no means unrealistic, as China may very well approach the point where higher fertility not only needs to be allowed, but even encouraged.[245]

Many Chinese scholars, such as Gu Baochang, Wang Feng and Zeng Yi, support the idea of introducing pro-natalist campaigns or policies.[246] In *Options for fertility transition in*

[239] (Banister 1987, 184-185)
[240] (Stein 1995, 106-107)
[241] (Liu 2010, 293)
[242] (Yip, Law, and Cheung 2009, 134)
[243] (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009, 1; Caldwell and Zhao 2007, 283; Tu, Yuan, and Zhang 2007, 85)
[244] (Liu 2010, 299)
[245] (Caldwell and Zhao 2007, 284)
[246] (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009, 6; Gu 2009)

China,[247] Zeng proposes four alternatives to the current policy, all of which are versions of a two-child policy. With these alternatives, he shows how the age imbalance can be considerably less severe if two children become the family standard. However, reproduction is not a simple supply and demand issue, and allowing two children per couple does not ensure that all couples will choose to have two children. It does not even guarantee that *most* couples will have two children, as long as socioeconomic conditions stand in the way. Economic sanctions, or even economic incentives, aimed at encouraging two children per couple seem at this point to be a far-fetched idea, also among the participants of my study. Gu and Jones argue that China's lack of response to the already low level of fertility can be explained by three factors. Firstly, due to demographic momentum the population is still growing, hence low fertility is still viewed as positive. Secondly, anti-natalism is deeply embedded in the mindset of both government and population after decades of population control. Thirdly, demographic theory lacks a model for explaining further fertility decline after replacement level fertility is reached.[248] As Aird states, if all birth limits were abolished, one would probably see a quick rise in birth rates as all those who had wanted more children would rush to have them. Yet further down the road, fertility may decline well below the assumed desired fertility levels of today.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that China undoubtedly has reached a low national fertility level, regardless of which of the total fertility rate estimates for one assumes to be correct. Furthermore, the combination of family planning policy practise and socioeconomic conditions has reduced not only actual fertility for the current generations of parents, but also the intended fertility of future parents. I conclude that even though the gap between state planned fertility levels and the population's actual fertility levels has been narrowed, the population's desired fertility seems to exceed both policy limit and intended fertility. Furthermore, even within the rather homogenous group of participants in this study, fertility preferences are highly complex. Thus, making projections of future fertility levels for the entire population is an extremely difficult task, with or without a family planning policy.

[247] (Zeng 2007)
[248] (Gu 2009, 91)

5 Age gap

For the last 30 years, rapid economic growth, mortality decline and fertility decline have gone hand in hand in China, and facilitated its quest for modernisation. These three factors have accelerated each other, making their impact on society both more speedy and intense than most predicted. One of the consequences of this development, which is rapidly changing China's population, is the increasing gap between the size of the elderly population and the young generations.

On a national level, the age gap peak is still in the future, with 36.8 per cent of the population expected to be above the age of 60 in 2075.[249] On a family level however, the age gap became apparent as soon as the first generation of single children started to come of age, and were faced with the expectations from, and responsibility for, both two parents and four grandparents. How do these changes in population structure impact the coming generation of parents in China, and the population as a whole?

National level age gap

In the model Aird used in 1986 to foresee population development in China, life expectancy at birth in the year 2000 was estimated to reach 68.66 years for the male and 71.47 years for the female population.[250] According to CIA's *The World Factbook*, China has already reached a life expectancy of 72.82 years for male and 77.11 years for female.[251] These numbers are in fact closer to the estimates Aird used for the year 2080, which was 73.90 years for male and 77.50 years for female, thus showing how life expectancy in China has risen far more rapidly than earlier projections calculated.[252] In 2000, more than 21 per cent of the world's population aged 60 or older lived in China. If this older population represented a single country, it would be the eighth largest country in the world.[253] According to the UN figures used by Dudley L. Poston Jr. and Leon F. Bouvier, by 2020 there will be more than 1 billion people over the age of 60 in the world, a quarter of which reside in China, and by 2050 these numbers will presumably be close to doubled. Also, close to one quarter of all older people above the age

[249] (UN 2012d)
[250] (Aird 1986)
[251] (CIA 2012a)
[252] For more on the factors effecting the declined mortality rates and increased life expectancy: (Banister 2007; Zhao 2007)
[253] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 256-257)

of 80 will also be Chinese in 2050, which is higher than the number of people over 80 alive in the entire world today.[254] Arguably, China leads the way in the ageing of the global population, both with regards to numbers and speed.

According to calculations by China's National Bureau of Statistics, as presented by Peng Xizhe, the proportion of the population aged 0-14 was 33.6 per cent at the beginning of the 1980s.[255] After three decades of rather strict family planning policy implementation, this number decreased to 16.6 per cent in 2010. The percentage of the population which is over 65 years of age rose from 4.9 to 8.9 during the same period. Thus, the proportion of children in the total population more than halved, and the proportion of elderly nearly doubled since the introduction of the family planning policy. At the turn of the millennium, China became an internationally recognized aged society, with more than 10 per cent of its population aged 60 years or above.[256]

Table 3: Projections of population ageing in China

Year	Aged 60+ (%)	Aged 80+ (%)
1950	7.5	0.3
2000	10.2	1.1
2025	20.2	2.2
2050	33.9	7.6
2075	36.8	11.5
2100	34.1	11.4

Source: United Nations, 2012. [257]

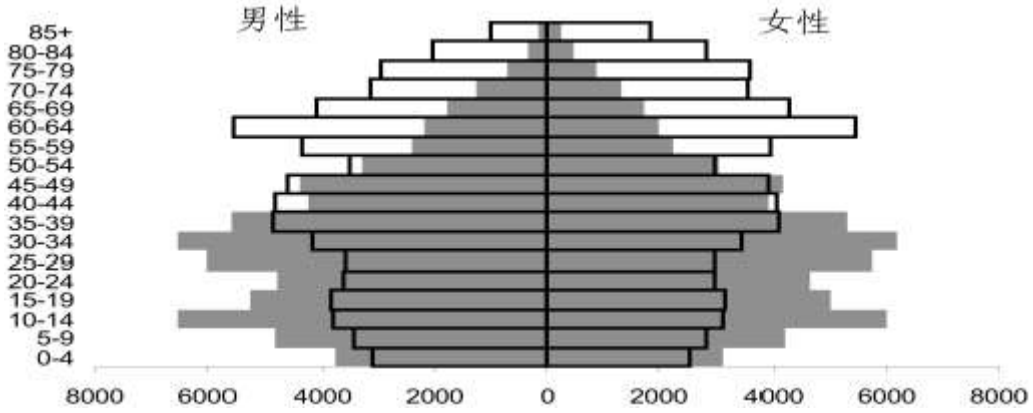
Table 3 is based on the United Nations' medium-fertility projection of China's population, which assumes that the total fertility rate will approach and stabilise at 1.85, that mortality will only decline modestly, and that migration will follow certain predicted patterns. The table shows how population ageing is not only going to increase rapidly in the coming decades, but also continues to increase towards the end of the century.

The proportion of China's population aged 65 or above is expected to exceed 20 per cent by 2050,[258] and reach more than 35 per cent in urban areas.[259] The highest life

[254] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 259)
[255] (Peng 2011a, 581)
[256] (Saich 2011, 306)
[257] (UN 2012d)

expectancy in China is found in the largest cities, such as Shanghai where the combined life expectancy rate for men and women is 79 years,[260] thus age imbalance is expected to affect urban and rural areas differently. Wang Feng and Andrew Mason argue that urban China will experience a more rapid ageing of its population than rural China,[261] as the fertility decline was steeper in most urban areas than in the rural ones. Also, as life expectancy is more than 5 years longer for China's urban population than its rural population,[262] meaning that not only a larger group, but also an even older group of elderly population will exist in cities. Peng however argues that the vast migration from rural to urban areas helps slow the ageing in larger cities, and intensify the ageing of the rural population who is left behind.[263] The age imbalance does however not only appear to affect urban and rural areas differently, but also imply different challenges for men and women. Because women tend to live longer than men, women will be highly overrepresented in the rapidly increasing group of citizens aged 80 or above.[264] The below figure shows how a traditional population pyramid becomes both top-heavy and tilted due to imbalance in age and gender distribution.

Figure 2: China's population composition in 2000 and 2050



Source: Gu 2010.[265] The figure shows estimated population composition by age and gender (male on the left and female on the right), in 2000 (grey) and 2050 (clear).

The rapid population ageing is thought to be a major demographic challenge[266], and to have severe effect on China's economic future. China has for a long time been reaping the

[258] (Wang and Mason 2007, 178)
[259] (Wang and Mason 2007, 183)
[260] (Peng 2011a, 582)
[261] (Wang and Mason 2007, 182)
[262] (Banister 2007, 148)
[263] (Peng 2011a, 583)
[264] (Gu 2009, 89)
[265] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 99)

fruits of economic growth induced by the favourable demographic situation where the size of the working age population grows considerably faster than the size of the old age population. This phenomenon is called the *demographic dividend*, and is widely accepted as the explanation for the relationship between age distribution and economic growth.[267] As the proportion of China's elderly population will rapidly increase in the coming years, some fear that China will experience an economic slump, and enter a period of *demographic deficit*.[268] Lee Liu thus argues that the role of the demographic dividend is overplayed as a positive influence on economy, as it is inevitably followed by demographic pitfall.[269]

Unlike most developed countries, China is becoming old before it is becoming rich (*wei fu xian lao* 未富先老).[270] Other rapidly ageing countries in Asia, such as Japan, Singapore and South Korea, have a much higher income per capita than China, and will arguably have less economic difficulties providing for their increasingly aged populations.[271] Although China definitely has experienced rapid economic growth, the newfound riches are not sufficient to provide for the increasingly large portion of retired citizens. Thus, the question of whether the population should be viewed as primarily consumers or primarily producers resurfaces. Many of the calculations on proportion of aged population define old and non-working-age as above 65, even though retirement age still is 60 years for men and merely 55 for women. Saich and Peng among other, argue that adjustments to these retirement levels are long overdue, as they were set in the early 1950s, and life expectancy has nearly doubled since then.[272]

Wang Feng argues that the challenges represented by the population's rapid ageing is unprecedented, and may prove to be a high price for the experienced economic growth in China.[273] As the proportion of retired citizens increases, and the proportion of young working-age citizens decreases, the old age dependency ratio will increase substantially within 2050.[274] Zhao and Chen estimate that there is less than 12 people aged 65 or above per 100 working-age people at present, but they expect this ratio to reach 42 retirees per 100 workers within the

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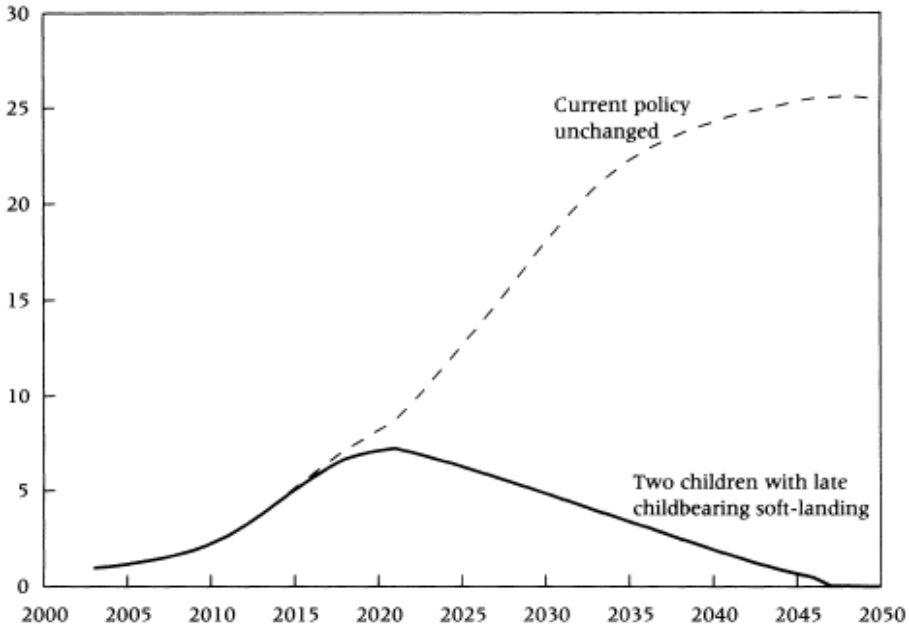
[266] (Zhao and Guo 2007, 7)
[267] (Liu 2010, 289-290)
[268] (Liu 2010, 300)
[269] (Liu 2010, 301)
[270] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 109)
[271] (Liu 2010, 294)
[272] (Peng 2011a, 585; Saich 2011, 307)
[273] (Wang 王丰 2010, 72, 80)
[274] (Zhao and Chen 2011; Zhang 张国 2012; Peng 2011b, 171)

mid-21th century.[275] The costs of supporting these older generations fall both on the individual family members, and the state as a whole. Today, the Chinese government provides some state pension to its citizens, and some monetary subsidies to those who only have one child, but these funds will be exceptionally strained if they are to continue into the future. Many scholars thus suggest a universal two-child policy,[276] in order to relieve both government pension funds and family savings from the economic challenges of providing for an increasingly larger portion of retired citizens.

The following figure shows government expenditures on subsidies to rural couples aged 60+ who have only one child or two daughters. The figure shows estimated expenditure development between 2003 and 2050, under two different fertility policy scenarios; the current policy and Zeng's two-child policy option.

Figure 3: Projection of government spendings on rural old-age subsidies



Source: Zeng Yi.[277] Shows projected spendings in billion yuan

Zeng discusses several possible versions of a two-child policy, and concludes that the "two children with late childbearing soft-landing" option is the most appropriate one. This option assumes a smooth transition period until around 2014, when all couples in China would be allowed to have a second child with appropriate spacing, except some rural couples

[275] (Zhao and Chen 2011, 827)
[276] Among others: (Zeng 2007; Greenhalgh 2008; Gu 顾宝昌 2010)
[277] (Zeng 2007, 235)

who can have three children.[278] Zeng advocates abandoning the current family planning policy as soon as possible, and suggests that a universal two-child policy would not only decrease the age and gender gaps, but also allow government funds to be allocated more efficiently.[279]

While the surplus of older citizens result in higher state pension expenditures, the low numbers of young citizens could result in a labour supply deficit. Li Chaozhi et al. are among those who suggest that China should not only further develop a sustainable old-age security system, but restructure the labour market to encourage employment of older workers, and thus make use of the human capital which the older age groups represent.[280] Aird meant that the "fears in some Chinese quarters about future labour shortages do not seem to be justified". According to his calculations, neither labour shortages nor any rapid change in labour supply is likely to occur, no matter what type of birth limitations China chooses to implement.[281] As Peng states, "the working age population in China will remain enormous, both in terms of absolute size and as a share of total population."[282] Gu however argues that although the sheer size of China's labour force will remain vast, there will be a definite shortage of young labour force (*nianqing laodongli huang* 年轻劳动力荒), as the proportion of population aged 30 years or younger will decrease in the years to come.[283] According to Lee Liu, "population ageing depresses the rate of technological and organisational innovation, and the degree of entrepreneurship", as these phenomena are mostly associated with young adults.[284] He further fears that immigration cannot fully relieve the age distribution problem of China, as the entire world, and especially many of China's neighbouring countries, are also ageing fast.[285]

Wang and Mason on the other hand, actually predict some positive economic effects of population ageing. They argue that it will lead to a rapid accumulation of capital, as has happened in other ageing societies in East Asia.[286] As China's economy evolves from a labour-intensive industrial and agricultural economy, towards a knowledge based economy, the decrease in labour force size is not necessarily a severe problem, as long as it is checked

[278] (Zeng 2007, 219)
[279] (Zeng 2007, 234-241)
[280] (Li 李超志 et al. 2012, 36-37)
[281] (Aird 1986)
[282] (Peng 2011a, 584)
[283] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 108)
[284] (Liu 2010, 296)
[285] (Liu 2010, 300)
[286] (Wang and Mason 2007, 187)

by an increase in human capital.[287] However, Gu also argues that even though the low fertility rates combined with broad economic growth may have increased the proportion of people with higher education, the total number of students attending higher education is decreasing,[288] thus reducing China's total knowledge capital.

Family level age gap

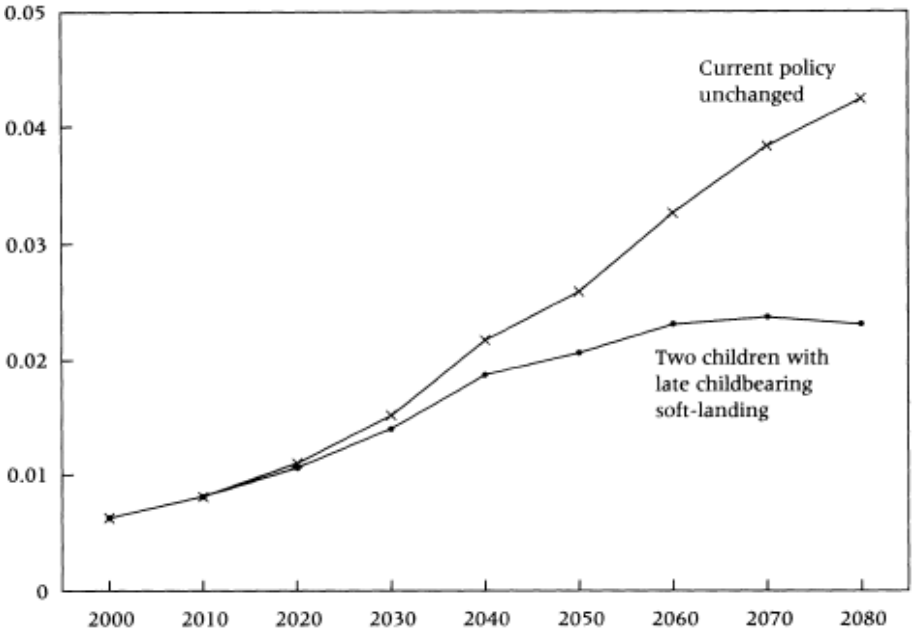
In China, children have traditionally been seen as a way of securing one's own old-age care (*yang er fanglao* 养儿防老), and since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, taking care of elderly parents have actually been required by law.[289] Fong describes parents' views on their children as future retirement plans and long term investments,[290] while Gu on the other hand argues that this view is somewhat weakened, due to the low number of children per family, as well as increasing migration and family separation.[291] Xu Jun, Xiao Fuqun and Feng Xiaotian show how most couples in the coming decades will consist of at least one single child, and in 2030 close to 35 per cent of marriages will be between two single children.[292] For these couples, the burden of caring for the elderly will be the heaviest. The previous chapter mentioned how single children are potentially very desirable partners, as it would allow a couple to have more than one child. When considering the increased responsibilities for parents and parents in law however, finding a partner with siblings might prove just as advantageous.

The low fertility levels across China have led to substantial changes in family structure, and the 4-2-1 family (*si-er-yi jiating* 四二一家庭) have become a widespread phenomenon. This structure implies that one child is cared for by two parents and four grandparents when growing up, and must support both two parents and four grandparents when of age. The 4-2-1 family has produced what is popularly known as little emperors (*xiao huangdi* 小皇帝) or little suns (*xiao taiyang* 小太阳).[293] These are single children who relish in the attention from six caregivers when they are young, and carry the burden of having six persons depending on them for emotional and financial support when they are grown up. There have been several studies on the topic of this first generation of single children, as

[287] (Greenhalgh 2010, 20-21)
[288] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 109)
[289] (Zhan, Feng, and Luo 2008, 545)
[290] (Fong 2004, 128-140)
[291] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 109)
[292] (Xu 徐俊 and Feng 风笑天 2011, 58; Xiao 肖富群 and Feng 风笑天 2010b, 48)
[293] (Fong 2004)

many seem worried about the pressure these children are under, as well as any selfish personality traits they may develop.[294] Feng Xiaotian however believes that the negative images of little emperors are somewhat exaggerated, as his research shows few differences between the personal skills of children with siblings and children without siblings.[295] According to Xiao and Feng, as the single children come of age, the differences between them and those who have siblings become even less distinct, almost non-existent.[296] Wang Xiaolu and Feng do however acknowledge that the responsibilities and pressure facing the single children may be heavier than those facing non-single children,[297] especially when it comes to education and caring for their elders.

Figure 4: Projected proportion of elderly aged 65+ living alone



Source: Zeng Yi.[298] Shows the proportion of China's total population who are aged 65 or above and living alone.

The figure above shows the projected proportion of elderly aged 65 or above in the total population who will be living alone in the coming decades, under the two previously mentioned policy options presented by Zeng.[299] He argues again that implementing a two-child policy would relieve single children of much emotional and financial stress. Lin Jiang

[294] (Wang 王小璐 and Feng 风笑天 2011; Xiao 肖富群 and Feng 风笑天 2010b; Fong 2004; Goh 2011)
[295] (Wang 王小璐 and Feng 风笑天 2011, 45)
[296] (Xiao 肖富群 and Feng 风笑天 2010b, 47)
[297] (Wang 王小璐 and Feng 风笑天 2011, 42)
[298] (Zeng 2007, 225)
[299] (Zeng 2007, 225)

however, who is referenced by Stein, calculates that due to improving child survival rates, the number of women with no surviving children when they reach old age will be lower in the future, even though the average number of births is strongly reduced. By 2030, only 2.5 per cent of the elderly women will be childless, while in the mid 1990s 8 per cent of elderly women were childless, despite an average of 6 births each during their lifetime.[300]

Relying on support from your children in old age, especially with regards to emotional security and care, is by no means a unique trait of neither Chinese culture nor Chinese economy. A Norwegian friend of mine recently told me that if she were to have kids, she would have at least two, preferably three. The reason for this, she told me, was that single children, or even two siblings, would not have sufficient time to visit her and take care of her when she was old. She could accept having no children, but would not want a single child to bear all the responsibility of looking after her in old age. This sentiment was shared by several of the respondents in my study. The reasons for wanting more than one child were in fact often related to the positive effects of having siblings for the children, and were rarely based on the individual's explicit desire to have more than one child. Huang Hao emphasised that siblings would keep a child from feeling isolated and lonely (*guli* 孤立), and Yang Bi would like her child to have a sibling to play with like she had.

Thus, the decline in family size does not only have socioeconomic effects, but also cultural consequences. The abolishment of sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, alter the entire family network and kinship structure.[301] Looking back at the time when I started to learn the Chinese language, I remember how much time and energy we used on learning the appropriate Chinese names for all family members, including the father's younger brother, the family's oldest son, and the mother's older sister. Arriving in China in our third semester of study, knowing these family titles proved rather purposeless. It seemed like everyone we met either had only one sibling, thus making it redundant to specify this sibling's birth order in relation to other siblings of the same gender, or they did not have any siblings at all. While we noticed that some family titles, like older sister (*da jie* 大姐), could be transferred to women outside the family, most of the family titles we had practised so hard to use correctly were now rather useless. Similarly, a young woman tells Nie and Wyman that since she did not have any siblings while growing up, she used the words meaning older sister, younger sister,

[300] (Stein 1995, 106)
[301] (Wang and Mason 2007, 177)

older brother and younger brother on her cousins.[302] In that case, the titles of close family members remain, but with new meaning, and the expression for various cousins disappear.

The huge drop in the number of children has also affected China's educational system. The interviews in my study show how some of the participants are worried about the closing of local schools, and how the policy then indirectly has negative effect on primary education opportunities. Aird feared that "the decline in numbers of children of elementary school age may not mean a corresponding surplus of teachers and facilities if the authorities take advantage of the opportunity afforded them to improve the level of actual enrolment and the quality of primary education". Fong however emphasises the positive effects of reduced family size on the education, and especially the new opportunities presented for girls.[303] She states that "prior to the one-child policy, most girls were raised to be losers".[304]

The participants in my study largely viewed population ageing and the possibility of labour shortage as inevitable results (*biran jieguo* 必然结果) of family planning policy and modernisation. Most of them did however expect a transition towards a two-child policy as suggested by Zeng, and almost everyone supported such a development. Although none explicitly feared the little emperor syndrome, those who had siblings tended to emphasise their importance during childhood years. The participants' views on age gap thus seemed to be more related to the family micro level, than the national macro level. On both micro and macro level the age imbalance is however becoming increasingly clear. On a micro level, the gap can be reduced already for the participants' generation if family planning policy shortly becomes more relaxed. On the macro level however, the consequences of Mao-era baby booms and family planning era fertility will increase the age gap and affect the population's age distribution for decades to come.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the increasing age gap between the young and the old generations is changing both economic and cultural aspects of the Chinese society. On a national level, the age gap mainly represents reduced labour force and increased pension expenses, both of which are almost inevitable consequences of rapid fertility decline. These challenges are not easily reversible either, as large population trends take decades to pass. On a family level

[302] (Nie and Wyman 2005, 324)
[303] (Fong 2004, 114)
[304] (Fong 2004, 107)

however, a rapid fertility change sees an almost equally rapid change of implications. For the participants in this study, that means they are the first generation in their family to be with few or no siblings, and potentially responsible for the welfare of both parents and grandparents in decades to come. I do however conclude that while both government and scholars worry about the long-term effects of vast age gaps, the participants in my study are less concerned. They are largely content with growing up in small families, and view the age imbalance as an inevitable consequence of *avoiding* population crisis, rather than *being* a population crisis in itself.

6 Gender gap

In China, worries about old-age security are not only linked to a vast age gap, but also an imbalance in the perceived value of gender. Boys are traditionally thought to be a better economic investment than girls, and the fear of lacking financial support in old age still affect couples views on preferred gender of their children. This traditional son preference has been one of the largest obstacles to the implementation of a universal one-child limit across China,[305] but also one of the elements which severely increases the negative demographic and cultural effects of the family planning policy. China has the largest gender gap among infants in the world, with approximately 120 boys per 100 girls,[306] and it has maintained a severely abnormal gender ratio at birth longer than any other country.[307] But why is China's gender composition so imbalanced, and why is the gap larger in the younger generations? And what are the consequences of this wide gender gap over a long period of time?

Gender preferences

Across the world, the number of boys being born is generally slightly higher than the number of girls, giving a normal gender ratio at birth between 102 and 106 boys per 100 girls.[308] In most societies this gender ratio balances out with age, as more boys die at a younger age than girls. In China however, the opposite is true.[309] Not only is the gender ratio at birth alarmingly high, but the mortality of girls is not any lower than that of boys in their first years of living.[310] According to figures from China's National Bureau of Statistics, the population totalled at 1.34 billion in 2010, of which 51.27 per cent were male, and the gender ratio in the total population then being approximately 105.20 males per 100 females.[311] According to UN population figures, China's population in 2010 was a little bit more gender imbalanced than the NBS figures show. The UN estimates that approximately 51.91 per cent of the population was male at that point, with male population reaching 696.34 million and female population about 644.99 million.[312] By these estimates there are already over 50 million more males than

[305] (Davis-Friedmann 1985, 153)
[306] (Greenhalgh 2008, 1)
[307] (Gu 2009, 90)
[308] (UN 2011b)
[309] (Hansen and Thøgersen 2008, 46-47)
[310] (Gu 2009, 90)
[311] (NBS 2011)
[312] (UN 2011a)

females in China. The gender ratio among children aged 0 to 4 rose rapidly in the 1980s, and have stayed well above normal level since. This rise has largely been explained by gender-selective abortions, female infanticide and neglect, as well as underreporting of female offspring.[313] Although son preference and gender selective behaviour is not considered a new phenomenon in China, it is widely agreed that its impact on actual fertility has been amplified by the birth limitations imposed by family planning policy.[314] When the government became aware of the magnitude of this gender imbalance, gender selection of infants became illegal. According to the 2010 census, gender ratios at birth were however still severely heightened, and scholars are thus becoming increasingly concerned by the causes and effects of this gender imbalance.

Although there have been a large number of surveys trying to determine the preferred fertility in both urban and rural China throughout the policy period, few surveys investigated the *preferred gender* of children during the policy's early years. The few surveys which did inquire about gender preference (*xingbie pianhao* 性别偏好) showed that one boy and one girl seemed to be the preferred combination all over China.[315] As a majority of the surveyed population stated that they wanted two children, one boy and one girl, the issue of gender imbalance did not seem to be impending. However, as a large part of the population was forced to limit their number of children to only one, preferred gender became an immensely important issue. Yet Greenhalgh argues that the threat of rising gender gaps was not an unforeseen consequence of the strict birth limitations, rather the topic of son preference was too politically sensitive to discuss in the early days of policymaking, and its plausible implications were therefore poorly handled.[316]

The preference for sons has long traditions in China, and dates back to the origins of ancestral worship thousands of years before our time. Because sons were the only ones who could carry on the family name, and sacrifice to the ancestors, daughters were not only an economic loss, but also culturally inferior to sons.[317] Son-preference in China is often explained by rural traditions, and the need for manual labour in rural communities, yet son-preference is not necessarily limited to rural areas.[318] As the urban girl Zhou Chan told me during the interviews, the belief that male heirs are superior to female heirs still prevail in

[313] (Cai and Lavely 2007, 109-110). For more on these issues see (Scharping 2003; Nie 2005; Banister 1987; Poston Jr et al. 2006; Zhao and Guo 2007; Hesketh, Lu, and Xing 2011)
[314] (Cai and Lavely 2007, 111)
[315] (Milwertz 1997, 12)
[316] (Greenhalgh 2008, 267)
[317] (Lee and Wang 1999, 47-48)
[318] (Croll 2000)

China. This belief is based on both traditional views of sons as the only ones who can continue the bloodline and family name from the father, but also newer arguments of sons providing the best financial security for the family through paid work.

The tradition of women marrying into the man's family and taking the man's family name has been common in both rural and urban areas.[319] These customs are however all experiencing changes due to widespread low fertility and increased gender equality. In some cases, a man will marry into the woman's family, and their children will then often take the woman's last name to carry on as the family name.[320] When I interviewed the two girls Wu Cai and Yang Bi, they told me that it is also becoming increasingly common for children to take the family name of both father and mother, thus having only one daughter will not affect a family's ability to continue the family name when this daughter has children.

According to the UN, the national mean age of marriage for Chinese women reached 23.3 in 2000,[321] and the National Population and Family Planning Commission of China claims it passed 24.2 in 2001, up from 20.8 in 1970.[322] The highest mean age of marriage is found in the largest cities, and in Shanghai the average age of marriage for women reached 29.77 in 2010.[323] Thus, especially in urban areas, young women can support their parents both financially, and with household labour, for a much longer period than before.[324] In this respect, having a daughter is now a better investment than it used to be. Most of the mothers in Fong's study continued to help and support their parents even after they "married out" and had children of their own.[325] This is largely due to widespread low fertility, which enables mothers to spend more time working and earning money than earlier, thus having more to contribute to their parents financially.[326] The traditional female role of "virtuous wife, good mother" (*xianqi liangmu* 贤妻良母) prevails, even though it contradicts the official policy of gender equality, and is less compatible with women's current education and career opportunities. As women and girls are viewed as good caregivers, daughters are thought to be a valuable investment as well for old age care.[327] The study of young rural Chinese by Hansen

[319] (Banister 1987, 122)
[320] (Hansen and Thøgersen 2008, 47)
[321] (UN 2010)
[322] (NPFPC 2006)
[323] (*Getting married later in life is a modern trend* 2011)
[324] (Banister 1987, 123)
[325] (Fong 2004, 130)
[326] (Fong 2002, 1098)
[327] (Fong 2004, 133)

and Pang also shows a tendency among its participants to view daughters as equally responsible for supporting parents in old age.[328]

Eklund argues that the ageing of the Chinese population might actually reduce son preference, as grandparents often take on many of the household chores usually performed by the mothers, thereby freeing the mother's time to work and earn an income.[329] This levels out the gap between male and female income opportunities, and could thereby also level out the gender preference. Naturally, this largely depend on the health of the grandparents, whom Eklund describes to be "relatively healthy" throughout China.[330] Stein on the other hand actually suggests that son preference is increasing, as the economic benefits of having a boy still are greater than those of having a girl.[331] Lisa Eklund however argues that the high gender ratio at birth not necessarily reflects an increased son preference, but rather the existing son preference becomes more visible as fertility rates decline.[332] As Eklund shows, the gender ratio at birth increases with parity. In 2000, the gender ratio at birth for the second parity was 151.9 boys per 100 girls, and a staggering 160.3 for the third parity. By 2005 the ratios had decreased to 143.2 and 156.4 respectively, but were still high compared to normal gender ratio and gender ratio for the first parity.[333]

Tang Zhaoyun and Guo Zhenzhen claim that China's high gender ratio at birth is a consequence not only of family planning policy, but also the process of economic development. Their argument is based on similarities with the economic development and fertility development in Taiwan and South Korea, which both experienced a decline in gender ratio at birth after reaching a certain level of economic growth. Tang and Guo predict the same development in China, but suggest that a policy relaxation could facilitate further population balance, as both the one-child policy and one-and-a-half-child policy intensifies the use of gender selection (*xingbie xuanze* 性别选择).[334] A small indication of both the existence of son preference and the effects of the one-and-a-half-child policy can be seen even within the limited sample of participants in my study. Of those who had a sibling, all had a brother, and the only one who had an older brother was male himself. Thus, none of the

[328] (Hansen and Pang 2010, 47)
[329] (Eklund 2011, 93)
[330] (Eklund 2011, 93)
[331] (Stein 1995, 162)
[332] (Eklund 2011, 55)
[333] (Eklund 2011, 45-46)
[334] (Tang 汤兆云 and Guo 郭真真 2011)

families had two daughters, none of the participants had any sisters, and none of the female participants had an older brother.[335]

Although traditional preferences lean towards sons as the optimal offspring, the notion of equal gender value is widely represented in the interview responses of my study, and daughter preferences have been noted by several scholars. When I lived in Shanghai recently, I did not encounter any signs of son preference at all, and daughters seemed to be utterly popular, as little princesses walking around dressed in brand new pink clothes from head to toe. These girls, whether new born babies or approaching school age, would receive the undivided attention of both parents and grandparents, and even random passers-by would stop to complement the family on the adorable child. Fong supports this observation, and argue that daughters in urban areas have benefited tremendously by the family planning policy, giving them better education and opportunities than they would have had if they competed with a male sibling.[336]

Despite wide recognition of the existence of son preference, especially in rural areas, and the desire for the second child to be a boy if the first one is a girl, there are some indications that having more than one son is not necessarily desirable. This is due to the high expenses involved in attaining housing for the son and his wife when they marry, which is a prevailing custom in China, regardless of the number of sons in a household.[337] In both mine and Eklunds studies however, several of the respondents come from families with more than one son.[338]

Contrary to what the long-lasting tradition of son preference might suggest, gender roles have not been static throughout China's several thousand years of history. This is emphasised by my two interview participants Liu Wei and Zhao Ai, who are married to each other. The husband, Liu Wei, tells me that China has a tradition for valuing men over women, and gives an example of how one man could have several wives and concubines in ancient China. At that time, he says, a man could change woman as often as he changed clothes. His wife Zhao Ai on the other hand, emphasises how women were more valued in ancient China, and she refers to the time when family names followed the women's blood line. Thus, the Chinese gender roles are dynamic, and may also change in the future.

[335] See Table 1 in this thesis
[336] (Fong 2002)
[337] (Stein 1995, 174)
[338] (Eklund 2011, 71)

During the interviews, few of the participants seemed to have any strong opinions on whether or not the family planning policy had improved the education and job opportunities for girls and women today. When explicitly asked if they believed such claims, the young man Xu Dong from Shanghai said that the family planning policy might have had some positive effects for girls in urban areas. After discussing the topic with her friend, the young woman Yang Bi from Guangzhou, said that women did have more time to concentrate on careers when they had fewer children. None of them seemed especially eager to elaborate on these issues though, and neither did my friend Li Ying during the interviews. On a later occasion however, when we went through some of the findings in this study together, she suddenly told me that there had indeed been a certain positive effect for both girls and women. "Double benefits" she called it, as girls now can not only enjoy the opportunities and family assets earlier reserved for boys, but they are also under less financial pressure than most boys, as the tradition of men buying a couple's house still prevails.

Scholars argue that son preference is not equally strong throughout the entire Chinese population. Research by Robin Burgess and Juzhong Zhuang show a correlation between strong son-preference and low education and income.[339] Hansen and Thøgersen argue that the son preference is stronger amongst the Han majority population than amongst the minorities,[340] while Zhang Li et al. believe son preference in strongest among male respondents.[341] In Milwertz' study, several women expressed a desire for their only child to be a girl rather than a boy, as a daughter would be closer to them than a son. In her survey, about half of the participants were unconcerned with the gender of their unborn child, 27.5 per cent hoped for a boy, while 16.1 per cent hoped for a girl.[342] However like the majority of my interview participants, the respondents in Milwertz' survey were all urban women, and therefore do not necessarily reflect the desire for daughters (or sons) in the total population.

Vanessa L. Fong's study in *Only Hope* also shows a correlation between the gender of the parent and the desired gender of the child. Among the female respondents, 37 per cent would prefer to have a daughter, while only 8 per cent would prefer a son. Similarly, among the male respondents 28 per cent preferred a son, while only 9 per cent preferred a daughter. Yet, most of the participants had no preference at all.[343]In my study, those who had a stronger preference for one gender than the other all preferred the same gender they were themselves.

[339] (Burgess and Zhuang 2002)
[340] (Hansen and Thøgersen 2008, 46)
[341] (Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006, 101)
[342] (Milwertz 1997, 137-139)
[343] (Fong 2004, 137)

The young women Wang Ping, Chen Bao and Wu Cai all wanted at least one girl, while the majority of the participants in my study however, simply preferred one child of each gender, or did not mind the child's gender at all. Nie and Wyman argue that the lack of gender preferences is characteristic of the views among today's urban Chinese citizens.[344] The one-child policy has meant that parents cannot allocate their resources unequally between their sons and daughters. They have only one child, and whether that is a boy or a girl the parents want - and need - that child to succeed in life.

There are however several indications of a prevailing preference for one boy and one girl,[345] and Fong argues that Chinese do not define masculinity as superior femininity, rather the masculine (*yang*阳) is good only in moderation and when balanced by the feminine (*yin* 阴).[346] Zhang Guo agrees that most Chinese would prefer one boy and one girl, thus supports a two-child policy to relieve both age and gender gaps.[347] Many of the interviewees in my study also clearly stated that they would prefer one of each if they were to have two children, and they were also of the clear impression that most Chinese, both rural and urban, would agree with this preference. Yong Cai and William Lavely do however emphasise the regional variations in child gender ratio, and show that the lowest levels of imbalance are reported in the autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang (101.4 and 105.6 respectively), while some of the highest ratios are reported in the far more populous provinces of Guangdong and Henan (at 129.6 and 132.4 in the 2000 census). The highest difference between the number of boys and girls aged 0-4 by province, is however found on the island of Hainan, with a child gender ratio of 136.0. Within each province there also exists large variation, for instance in Hubei province where the average child gender ratio is 129.0, but an alarming level of 197.3 in the city of Wuxue. [348] Cai and Lavely further argue that the variations in family planning policy implementation within a province are not large enough to fully explain the variations in child gender ratios.

Burgess and Zhuang have performed a study of how gender bias is reflected in household spendings in China. Their hypotheses seem to be that modernisation, through higher income levels and a diversification of household investments/spending could affect the tradition of son-preference in China. They find there are biased health spendings against

[344] (Nie and Wyman 2005, 329)
[345] (Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006, 99)
[346] (Fong 2004, 108)
[347] (Zhang 张国 2012, 121-123)
[348] (Cai and Lavely 2007, 113-119)

young girls in poorer rural areas, and biased education spendings against older girls in both relatively poor and relatively rich provinces (Sichuan and Jiangsu respectively). Supporting census data on gender bias, their research show that higher income areas in both provinces are less biased than the poorer areas, and that the rural areas are more biased than the urban areas. Thereby supporting the general view that poor rural societies exhibit the most biased views on gender, and that rich urban societies exhibit the least biased views, as suggested by Croll and others.[349]. Their results suggest that the prevailing son-preference (mainly in rural areas) is not solely driven by cultural factors, but economic factors as well. The correlation between low income and strong son-preference thereby suggests that an economic policy which raises the income levels of the entire population would also lead to a decreased son-preference. Daniel Goodkind argues that gender ratios at birth are actually more imbalanced in urban areas than in rural ones. The rural ratios just appear more imbalanced as a lager portion of these births are for a couples' second or third child, which typically is more often influenced by gender selection. This does however *not* imply that rural couples are more eager to practise gender selection than their urban counterparts.[350]

Although none of the participants in my own study expressed a son preference themselves, all were very aware of its existence, and many had stories of friends and family members who were devastated because they did not have a male heir in the family. Previous to the interviews for my study, a male Chinese student called Zhu Ming told me of a lingering idea of failure for couples who did not have a son. After the interviews, as none of them had revealed any prevailing son preference, I asked the participant Li Ying if she thought son preference was a dwindling tradition, mostly kept up by the elder generations. She then told me of a young woman she knew, who had cried for two weeks after giving birth to her second daughter. This woman was deeply disappointed and saddened by the fact that she did not have a son, even though all other family members were more than pleased with the birth of a healthy baby girl.

Zhu Ming also told me about a rising tendency for strong women (*nü qiangren* 女强人) to not want any children at all. He told me that a mutual female acquaintance was a typical example. She was too concerned with studies and books to ever want a child, or even a boyfriend. I thought this description to be a bit simple, and not in accordance with my impression of Chinese as extremely fond of children. Zhu Ming's opinions were however to

[349] (Burgess and Zhuang 2002)
[350] (Goodkind 2011, 312)

some degree reflected in the interview responses. In general, the male participants seemed more eager to have children than the female, and among those who suggested that they might not want any children, all were female.

Future consequences

The gender ratio we now see at birth will of course have serious implications for the future population composition. While women are overrepresented in the growing numbers of elderly, they are seriously underrepresented among the younger generations. According to UN projections of China's population development, the gender ratio for the age group 25-29 is estimated at 106.56 in 2011, and will rise every year until it peaks somewhere around 2030, when there will be more than 8 million more men than women in this age group.[351] That is the equivalent of the population of a small country, all being men unable to find women to marry and have children with. Other estimates show that by the year 2025, there will be 30 million more men than women in the between the ages 25 and 40.[352]

These men are often referred to as *bare branches* (*guang gun*光棍), and are expected to stay bachelors for life unless they find a partner from outside China. Thus, the imbalanced gender ratio is thought to not only increase legal immigration, but also human trafficking of potential brides. Immigration from neighbouring countries is already relieving some of the pressure on the demand for women in marriage age, and this trend will probably continue as the demand rises. Poston Jr. and Bouvier however fear that large-scale immigration is unlikely, as China is still mainly a poor country.[353] Regardless, the sheer magnitude of China's male surplus means that immigration alone cannot make up for the missing women in its population, and if attempted it would merely result it widespread shortages of females in the countries from which these women would emigrate.

These *bare branches* are perhaps not the most eligible bachelors either. According to Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer, they are characterised by being from lower socioeconomic classes, likely to be unemployed, without land or other resources, and they mainly socialise with each other - creating bachelor subcultures.[354] Throughout the history of China, bachelorhood have been an unusual, if not even unacceptable social role,[355] and

[351] (UN 2011a)
[352] (Peng 2011b, 173)
[353] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 255)
[354] (Hudson and den Boer 2004, 188-191)
[355] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 254-255)

marriage rates have traditionally been high across the East Asian region. A change in cultural and social attitudes towards marriage may however be on its way, perhaps regardless of the male population surplus. Lee and Wang however states that although females married universally and early throughout Chinese history, there has been a strong tendency for males to marry later or not at all.[356] They argue that bachelorhood seems to have been a "universal phenomenon in China regardless of time and place".[357]

Among the possible consequences of the gender imbalanced population in China, Poston Jr. and Bouvier mentions several more or less likely outcomes. With the large excess male population, the Chinese authorities may opt for tighter control of the population's freedoms, in order to limit rise of crime often assumed to occur when the population has a male surplus.[358] If the Chinese State becomes even more authoritarian due to this excess male population and the threat it represents, the progress of democracy in China may very well be the one suffering. A strategy by the government could be to occupy the idle times of these men by organising them into workgroups on huge construction projects, which China at any given time have plenty of, say the building of massive dams or vast train lines. The government might also have use for the large portion of young unmarried men in military forces, either in domestic projects or in international operations. Poston Jr. and Bouvier, as well as Hudson and den Boer, speculate that China could use such a populous military force to invade other countries, and mentions the conveniently located Taiwan as a natural choice.[359] [360] Hopefully, these are unnecessary grim projection of the future deployment of these excess males. Poston Jr. and Bouvier are also somewhat pessimistic about the future of gender imbalance in China, as they se little indications of gender ratios at birth levelling out any time soon. They fear that as much as 100 million men, or more, will be without a female equivalent. For these men, both the direct and indirect effects of the family planning policy will be present. As they are potentially without both siblings and wife, they are alone in supporting their parents. Also, if unmarried, they will probably remain childless, thereby without any old-age support from family themselves.[361]

[356] (Lee and Wang 1999, 7)
[357] (Lee and Wang 1999, 70)
[358] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 10-11)
[359] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 255)
[360] (Hudson and den Boer 2004, 263-264)
[361] (Poston Jr and Bouvier 2010, 263)

Unlike Erwin Bulte, Nico Heerink and Xiaobo Zhang,[362] Hudson and den Boer do not believe that the strong male surplus will increase the value of women. On the contrary, they argue that women will be increasingly controlled by the male majority, and only increase in value as "commodities to be bought and sold". Furthermore, they argue that the lack of women will not lower population growth, but rather result in more children per woman.[363] Xiao and Feng argue that parents' perception of gender equality will affect their fertility level, concluding that those who believe the two genders to be of equal value generally have fewer children than those who emphasise gender inequality. If this conclusion is right, China can expect to see further low fertility levels as the notion of gender equality becomes more accepted in the population.[364] Most scholars believe fertility levels will remain rather low for some time, and many propose different adjustments to the current family planning policy to avoid further gender gaps. Goodkind objects to the 1.5 child policy, as it causes discrimination when parents who have a son are not *allowed* to have a daughter as well,[365] and Bulte et al. support policy relaxation as gender ratio is lower among minority populations with less strict birth limitations.[366]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that traditional son preference, combined with strict family planning policy and technological advances in gender selection on infants, have resulted in a major gender gap in China's younger generations. Yet, the perceived value of sons and daughters are somewhat changing, as limited fertility has had positive effects on the social, economic and cultural status of girls. Furthermore, the gender preferences among the participants in this study seem to correspond with previous studies which argue that most prefer one daughter and one son, thus higher future fertility could narrow the gender gap in coming generations.

[362] (Bulte, Heerink, and Zhang 2011, 37)
[363] (Hudson and den Boer 2004, 202-205)
[364] (Xiao 肖富群 and Feng 风笑天 2010a)
[365] (Goodkind 2011, 312)
[366] (Bulte, Heerink, and Zhang 2011, 36)

7 Socioeconomic gap

While the family planning policy's effect on increasing age and gender gaps is widely accepted, some scholars suggest that the policy increases China's socioeconomic gap (*shejing chaju* 社经差距) as well.[367] The family planning policy is not only implemented differently in various population groups, but its implications on these population groups also differ greatly. Do these differences in implementation increase socioeconomic stratification in China, and strengthen the divide between urban and rural, rich and poor? And is the common urban-rural divide too simplistic to sufficiently explain local variations in fertility levels?

Different policy implementation

When the family planning policy was introduced, near 80 per cent of China's population lived in rural areas.[368] Today however, for the first time ever, a majority of China's population resides in urban areas. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, the proportion of China's urban population reached 51.27 per cent in 2011, thus surpassing the rural population by 34.23 million residents.[369] As Gu Baochang emphasises, this signifies a new era in Chinese history where rural citizens are a minority. The traditional Chinese society, as described in Fei Xiaotong's classic *From the Soil* (*Xiangtu Zhongguo*), is gradually becoming a lesser part of present-day China, and increasingly a part of China's history.[370]

Professor of Sociology Martin K. Whyte is among the scholars who emphasise the long-lasting gap between rural and urban China. He argues that the Chinese society should be regarded as a dual society within one country, rather than one uniform society.[371] This dual society is largely upheld by China's household registration system (*huji zhidu* 户籍制度), which categorises all citizens as either rural (agricultural) or urban (non-agricultural). Peng Xizhe argues that the continuation of this registration system, often simply called *hukou* (户口), reinforces China's social segregation.[372] Today, the rural-urban divide is getting more arbitrary, as rural residents do not necessarily have agricultural occupations, nor is migration

[367] (Banister 1987)
[368] (Population and Family Planning 1990)
[369] (NBS 2012a)
[370](Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 110; Fei, Hamilton, and Wang 1992)
[371] (Whyte 2010)
[372] (Peng 2011a, 583)

as limited as it used to be. Thus, both the socioeconomic and geographical component of the *hukou* system is changing, and making a simple dual divide difficult.[373]

Nonetheless, throughout the period of family planning policy in China, the divide between rural and urban implementation and acceptance has been considerable.[374] As Gu et al. explain, China's heterogeneous demographic and socioeconomic conditions are reflected in the local variations in family planning policy and policy implementation.[375] A study by Cai Yong argues that the *hukou* system is among the most important elements of family planning policy,[376] as it largely determines whether or not a person is obligated to follow the one-child rule. As Banister early pointed out, the family planning policy emphasises and strengthens the already vast differences between rural and urban population in China, as well as the differences between the advantaged and disadvantaged families across these geographical divides.[377]

In rural areas, state authorities have generally given less preferential treatment in social services to those who abide by the family planning policy than in urban areas, thus making policy compliance less socioeconomically beneficial for the rural population.[378] Yet, Milwertz argues that fertility is not only a question of urban or rural residence, but a question of *hukou* category. She argues that many women who hold rural *hukou*, but reside in larger cities, still seem to prefer having more children than their urban *hukou* neighbours.[379] Cai Yong's study on the other hand concludes that *hukou* status has limited impact on actual fertility; rather socioeconomic conditions mostly determine a person's reproductive decisions.[380] Harrell et al. remind us that the simple urban-rural divide is not sufficient to explain regional fertility variations in China, as there are vast differences also between different rural areas.[381] They conclude that a combination of socioeconomic, cultural and political factors have led to the rapid fertility decline in rural China. Different timing in education levels, economic development, modernisation and family planning policy implementation together explain fertility differences between the studied regions of Guangdong, Zhejiang and Hebei.[382]

[373] (Wang and Mason 2007, 180)
[374] (Croll, Kane, and Davin 1985)
[375] (Gu et al. 2007, 143-144)
[376] (Cai 2010, 426)
[377] (Banister 1987, 185)
[378] (Lee and Wang 1999, 95)
[379] (Milwertz 1997, 30)
[380] (Cai 2010, 433)
[381] (Harrell et al. 2011, 33)
[382] (Harrell et al. 2011)

Socioeconomic conditions affect family policy implementation and actual fertility differently within urban areas as well. Generally, urban China has showed broader acceptance of family planning policy than rural China, as limited fertility holds more advantages in urban environments. Among less economically advantaged urban citizens, policy compliance was thus strongly related to a state dependence on social services. Among wealthier urban citizens however, having more than one child remained an obtainable goal, as the one-child rule was easily evaded by accepting the so-called social maintenance fee. The interview participant Zhang Xue told me that his friends who had only one daughter, but belonged to an urban area where the 1.5-child policy did not apply, had decided to pay the state fee in order to have another child. The main divide between the possible fertility of rich and poor thus lies in their ability to pay the penalties and provide for a child born outside regulations. This widens the social gap between these two population groups, and might also further widen the economic gap between them, as those with two children are better prepared for old age and retirement.

Lee and Wang argue that the effectiveness and success of China's family planning policy is largely related to the people's opinion of it being equally beneficial for everyone. They state that the policy by and large is universal, equally enforced and with few exceptions.[383] This is a huge simplification of the policy's implementation, and the people's reactions to it. The policy is in no way universal, as it has a vast array of exceptions and variations, and it does not affect and benefit everyone equally. The current differences in implementation between geographical areas and socioeconomic groups seem to clearly strengthen the already severe divide between rural and urban China, and wealthy and poor Chinese. Today, adjustments to the family planning policy in certain urban areas allow, or even encourage some couples to have two children regardless of the first child's gender. At the same time the rural population see no such encouragement despite low fertility and imbalanced gender ratios.

Greenhalgh argues that the social polarisation does not occur simply between the urban and rural population, but between coastal and interior China, the Han majority and the ethnic minorities.[384] The Chinese government has had several reasons for allowing more births in China's peripheral provinces and minority populated rural areas. First of all, these areas were not especially densely populated to begin with, and further population growth would not necessarily have a negative effect on food supply. Furthermore, a strict

[383] (Lee and Wang 1999, 133)
[384] (Greenhalgh 2010, 67)

implementation of an unpopular policy in these areas could strengthen already existing ideas of independence and uproar against the Chinese central government.[385]

Some of the participants in my study commented on the unequal implementation of family planning policy, and proclaimed that a future policy would be more likely to be accepted, and thereby more easily succeed, if it was more universal and fair. As the participant Yang Bi argued: "It's not my fault that I am Han Chinese, or that my family is urban residents, so why should these things affect how many children I am allowed to have? And now single-children are allowed to have two children themselves, but it's not my choice whether or not I am a single child."

When discussing the different policy implementations with Li Ying, she said that the main problem with the policy in rural areas is that it is implemented "forcibly and inhumanely". Thus, the impression of unfair policy implementation runs both ways, on the one hand some envy the less strict birth limits among ethnic minorities, single children and rural residents, but on the other hand some also worry about how the policy is implemented in areas where fertility preferences to a lesser extent correspond with policy limits.

Different policy implications

A population's fertility level is often assumed to be negatively correlated to their level of economic development.[386] When the family planning policy was introduced in 1980, urban China had already reached fertility rates close to replacement level. The decline in fertility in rural China on the other hand, was lagging at least ten years behind this development. In the large eastern cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing, rapid fertility decline started already in the mid-1960s, whereas in the Western provinces fertility decline did not begin until the 1980s.[387] The variations in total fertility rate (TFR) across China according to the 2000 national population census are clearly presented by Dudley L. Poston Jr, Heather Terrell Kincannon and Jungwon Yoon.[388] They show how local TFRs range from 0.41 in a county in Heilongjiang, to 5.47 in a county in Tibet, thus revealing a vast difference in average number of births across China. Poston Jr. et al. conclude that these variations in TFR are not only

[385] (Crook and Timæus 1997, 145) See Crook and Timæus for a brief debate on the implementation of family planning policy in Tibet.
[386] (Peng 2011b, 167-168)
[387] (Peng 2011b, 162)
[388] (Poston Jr, Kincannon, and Yoon 2009)

related to differences in family planning policy regulations, but are partly due to the vast differences in socioeconomic development within China.[389]

One of the socioeconomic factors which both affect, and is affected by, family planning policy is universal education. Improving the population's educational level is among the best options for securing balanced fertility levels, argues Zeng. He urges government authorities to relax the family planning policy, and rather invest in the education sector, in order to promote sustainable reproductive behaviour and fertility levels.[390] Higher education, especially for women, is both a cause and effect of lower fertility in China, as fertility is inversely related to the population's educational level,[391] and the opportunity cost of having children rise for both men and women with higher educations and careers. The access to education and higher education in particular, is far better in urban areas than rural, thus giving urban citizens a better opportunity to increase their own socioeconomic situation. This unequal access to education is far from unique to China, the reasons for its intensification however is. Rural couples have been urged, or even forced, to reduce their number of children for several decades, recently under the argument that fewer children equal higher quality children. As the lower fertility levels are achieved however, local authorities do not necessarily provide better education possibilities for those who still remain, but rather close down educational institutions and thus reducing the access to education in rural areas. The interview participant Liu Wei told me that the town where he grew up in Hubei province did not have any schools left, and the school he used to go to was abandoned. The town was therefore no longer a desirable place to live for most young couples, and many had moved to larger cities. Thus the combination of reduced fertility patterns and urbanisation reinforces both the ageing and the development gap between rural and urban areas.

Tyrene White points to another implication of different rural-urban implementation of family planning policy, which she calls "the sibling gap". This gap describes how most people growing up in rural areas have one or more siblings, while most urban people have none. White argues that having siblings largely affects a person's socioeconomic situation, as well as future fertility preferences. A person who has grown up with siblings is more likely to desire siblings for their own child, and those who have grown up alone tend to prefer only one

[389] (Poston Jr, Kincannon, and Yoon 2009, 106)
[390] (Zeng 2007, 237)
[391] (Jones, Straughan, and Chan 2009, 2-12)

child. Thus, fertility behaviour and cultural traditions are affected in generations to come by this rural-urban sibling gap.[392]

The scarcity of young people in urban areas has led to large-scale rural-urban migration, which according to Zhao and Guo will "increasingly become a precondition for, rather than a by-product of, future urban development".[393] Su Jian however fears that the rural-urban migration has already peaked, and that the transfer of labour surplus from rural areas is largely completed. Thus relaxing the family planning policy and stimulating further population growth is the only way to avoid serious labour shortage (*mingong huang* 民工荒).[394] The extensive migration of working-age Chinese from rural to urban areas has also worsened the already weak old-age support system in rural communities,[395] thus reinforcing the resource imbalance between the relatively rich urban areas and relatively poor rural areas. Gu argues that the rapid urbanisation of China is more than just a question of population distribution, but also an indication of further changes in both Chinese culture and social structure.[396] Also, urbanisation may increase the impression of arbitrary policy implementation, as rural migrants who live in urban areas are under less strict birth limitations than their urban registered neighbours.

Both the article by Jiajian Chen, Hongyan Liu and Zhenming Xie, and the article by Cao Rui emphasise the role of temporary migrants, the so-called floating population (*liudong renkou* 流动人口), in the diffusion of pro-family planning attitudes throughout China.[397] In recent years the size of the floating population has increased continuously, exceeding 230 million people by the end of 2011, which in an 8.28 million increase in just one year.[398] As Gu states, the size of China's floating population is the largest ever recorded in peacetime, and like every other large demographic change it will undoubtedly bring forth significant social change.[399] Chen et al. focus on how female migrants who return to their rural hometown are very much influenced by the urban attitudes towards family planning, both regarding number and gender of children. Cao on the other hand focuses on the development of fertility preferences within the migration population. Traditionally this population group

[392] (White 2006, 264-265)
[393] (Zhao and Guo 2007, 7)
[394] (Su 苏剑 2010, 15-16)
[395] (Peng 2011b, 172)
[396] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 110)
[397] (Chen, Liu, and Xie 2010; Cao 曹锐 2012)
[398] (NBS 2012a)
[399] (Gu 顾宝昌 2010, 110)

held on to a rather strong son preference, but Cao argues that this preference is changing as the new generations of migrants are more influenced by notions of gender equality. Also, Cao argues that this floating population is increasingly influenced by modern patterns of low fertility preferences.[400]

Through the eyes of both Chinese authorities and public, the gap between urban and rural China is largely a gap between modern (*xiandai* 现代) and backward (*luohou* 落后). The urban residents of Shanghai interviewed by Nie and Wyman present the policy's effect on their life as minor, because they are advanced and educated people "who know that having many kids is a bad decision".[401] According to these interviewees, rural citizens on the other hand "cannot understand this", and face more pressure to have bigger families. Xiuhong You, Dudley L. Poston Jr. and Tyrene White show how there exists a fear within the urban population of excessive fertility desires amongst the floating population.[402] Their preference for many children allegedly result in couples frequently moving from one place to another in order to have multiple birth without being caught by family planning authorities. These rumours of a "child-bearing guerrilla" or "guerrilla birth corps" are refuted by You and Poston Jr., who argue that most migrants have lower fertility than the population in their rural hometowns. Peng's study also shows that the level of fertility among migrants in urban areas is generally lower than in the rural areas they originate from, but not as low as in the urban areas they have moved to.[403]

Isabelle Attané argues that there is an increasing homogenisation in reproductive behaviour across China and its ethnic groups, as the behaviour of the minority population is approaching the behaviour of the ethnic Han majority. This is seen in declining fertility and increasing gender ratios among the nine ethnic groups she studied.[404] According to Xu Jing, differences in family planning policy initially increased regional diversity (*quyu duoyuan* 区域多元), but lately reproductive behaviour have started to converge across regional borders and policy areas.[405] Ma Xiaohong, vice director of Beijing Population Research Institute, supports this assumption, and shows how reproductive attitudes and behaviour is converging across urban and rural divides (*chengxiang qutongxing* 城乡趋同性),[406] causing Gu to argue

[400] (Cao 曹锐 2012, 105)
[401] (Nie and Wyman 2005, 326)
[402] (You and Poston Jr 2006, 128-142; White 2006, 265)
[403] (Peng 2011b, 170)
[404] (Attané 2007, 269)
[405] (Xu 许静 2010, 28)
[406] (Ma 马小红 2011, 48-49)

that the duality of Chinese society, with one urban and one rural system (*chengxiang eryuan* 城乡二元) perhaps is weakening.[407]

In addition to increased migration between rural and urban areas within national borders, China is experiencing a rapid increase in the number of citizens travelling overseas for education or work. Mu Yang and Soon Heng Tan emphasise the role of *haigui* (海归), returned overseas Chinese, in shaping social development and creating a *harmonious society* (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会). They define *haigui* as "students or professionals who have lived, studied, or worked overseas for a period of time before resettling in Mainland China".[408] Most of the interview participants in my study are likely to fall into this category, and some already have, as several have now moved back to China. These *haigui* citizens are typically well represented in high-status professions and political positions,[409] thus thought to have substantial impact on the diffusion of modernisation throughout China, perhaps even more so than the returned migrants described in study by Chen et al. However, as Fong states, there exists certain ambivalence on topic of returning to China among many of the young Chinese who plan to study abroad.[410] Likewise, many of the participants in my study seemed somewhat undecided about their future plans, and whether or not they would return to China. At the present, most fell into the category of foreign student (*liuxuesheng* 留学生), but according to Chinese statistics, only about 25 per cent of foreign students are expected to return and become *haigui*.[411]

In many ways, most of the participants in my study are among those who only experience a fraction of the negative implications of family planning policy. They belong to the first one-child generation (*du yidai* 独一代), and thus have an extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins - some even have a sibling. They all come from families wealthy enough to support overseas education and travel, and both the boys and the girls have been given opportunities which would be almost unimaginable for their parents' generation. Most will also have the opportunity to have more than one child themselves, as family planning policy is less strict for the *haigui* population. The coming generation of the previously mentioned *bare branches* on the other hand, will potentially become the ultimate losers of family planning policy. They will be deprived of both close and extended family, belong to

[407] (Gu 顾宝昌 2011, 56-57)
[408] (Yang and Tan 2010, 211)
[409] (Yang and Tan 2010, 217-222)
[410] (Fong 2004, 80)
[411] (Yang and Tan 2010, 217-218)

socioeconomically disadvantaged group, and with neither siblings, wife nor children they risk a life of increasing socioeconomic poverty.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the family planning policy is not only implemented differently in urban and rural areas, but also differentiates between various ethnic and socioeconomic groups within a geographical area. Although introduced to acknowledge the differences between various population groups, the many variations of family planning policy have to some extent also intensified the socioeconomic gaps. Furthermore, as the richer urban population are increasingly free to evade the one-child limit, the poorer rural couples are still supposed to limit their fertility, despite not having the same social service systems as urban China. This chapter concludes that the traditional rural-urban divide still holds many valid explanations, but its future relevance is starting to be questioned, especially on the topic of family planning policy, as fertility preferences and reproductive behaviour seem to be decreasingly related to the standard urban-rural dichotomy.

8 Conclusions

Although China will shortly lose its title as the world's largest population, the demography of China will continue to be of global importance for many years to come. The great diversity of fertility preferences in this study, as well as from previous larger studies, indicates the complexity of planning and predicting China's future fertility, with or without a family planning policy. China's population should not be viewed as a homogeneous mass, and neither national government nor outside viewers should forget to consider its vast plurality when predicting its future development.

Generally, the desired fertility level among the participants in my study is higher than the fertility level encouraged by the current family planning policy, as most would prefer two children – one boy and one girl. At the same time, as most participants say they will limit their number of children to only one, due to socioeconomic conditions beyond their control, their intended fertility is generally lower than replacement level fertility, which scholars advocate to reduce age and gender gaps. Based on these responses, there is reason to believe that fertility levels will stay low for this population group even if family planning policies were to be abolished. Nevertheless, if national or local authorities wanted to encourage higher fertility, there seem to be numerous applicable socioeconomic incentives to consider, which would influence the intended and actual fertility throughout all parts of the population. As desired fertility generally is higher than intended fertility, also in the socioeconomically advantageous group of participants, fertility levels have the potential to rise again, given the right conditions. Thus, introducing a universal two-child policy may very well be a step towards a more balanced population, but as fertility is not simply a question of demand and supply, fertility restrictions may need even further relaxation, and higher fertility may need to be not only allowed, but even encouraged. In the same way as the Chinese government has successfully applied market economy influenced incentives and disincentives to gain the public's compliance with the current family planning policy, it could also apply incentives to reverse this low fertility trend.

A swift rise in fertility levels will potentially increase the economic burden on future generations of parents, as they will then be responsible for several children in addition to their parents and grandparents. The new family structure, brought on by family planning policy and fertility decline, demands changes to both tradition and politics with regards to old-age care. Furthermore, it changes both family roles and the use of different family member titles. While

many of the participants in my study view population ageing as a necessary result of the altogether positive fertility decline, scholars are worried about the impact of rapid fertility decline on both young and old. The government early foresaw the consequences of fertility control on population ageing, but has not successfully prepared for the magnitude and speed of ageing. The increasing age gap is inevitable, yet how long it will last and to what extent it will become a new *population crisis*, largely depend on government decisions on further population policy. In some ways China has the advantage of experiencing the demographic challenges of rapid population ageing after the effects of similar fertility rate patterns have already been by felt neighbouring countries, such as Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, for years. China should therefore already be a couple of steps ahead in coming up with countermeasures to this imbalanced development. Alas, none of these neighbouring countries seem yet to have fully solved the puzzle of how to increase not only desired fertility, but actual fertility amongst their population.

If the policy was to be relaxed however, and fertility skyrocketed within a generation, several new challenges would appear, both on family and national level. A first or second generation single child could potentially be the sole provider of financial and emotional support not only for increasingly long-lived parents and grandparents, but also for several children. On a national level, state authorities may encounter large financial problems if they are to first greatly improve their old age support system, and then face a vast increase in education costs due to a post-policy relaxation baby boom.

Although much of the literature on family planning policy is focused on what socioeconomic and cultural elements affect women's fertility desires, in China's case it would probably be wise to consider men's fertility desires as well, as having children according to the policy requires a woman to be married to a man. Therefore, the decision is not an individual decision to have a certain number of children, but collaboration or compromise between man and wife, as well as their immediate family. If China were to introduce a policy which encouraged more children per couple, then considering what kind of incentives and disincentives would affect men's reproduction intensions might be worthwhile. Thus mapping out the impact of improved paternity leave and childcare solutions on a couple's intended and actual fertility would be an interesting contribution to the low fertility debate in China, as well for many other countries in similar demographic situations.

Today, the first generations with an exceptionally high gender ratio are coming of age, and as they begin to form families of their own, their perceptions of gender differences and

opinions on son preference will impact the future gender balance in China. On the one hand, most participants in my study say the ideal number of children for both themselves and most other couples is two, one boy and one girl. On the other hand, far from everyone say they actually plan to have two children. Most of the participants do not have any gender preferences when it comes to their potential children, but those who do seem to lean towards preferring the gender they are themselves. This observation is supported by several recent studies,[412] and seems to be more influential than the traditional son preference on desired fertility.

This balance in gender preference is however still not observed in actual fertility. In rural areas, the traditional son preference has been acknowledged by the Chinese government, who introduced the one-and-a-half-child policy to accommodate the desire for sons. This policy has however somewhat strengthened the gender gap in rural areas, both with regards to gender ratios and gender roles. Daughters are effectively deemed less valuable by the one-and-a-half-child policy, as well as less obtainable, since the policy prohibits rural couples from having a daughter if they already have a son.

In urban areas on the other hand, the family planning policy has somewhat narrowed the gender gap, albeit not completely balanced the gender ratio. Urban daughters are nonetheless increasingly valued, and given opportunities that would have been unimaginable only a generation ago. Limited fertility has not only affected how parents value sons and daughters, it has also affected the parent-child relationship regardless of gender. Both sons and daughters, in both urban and rural areas, still bear the responsibility of caring for their elders, and are expected to do so regardless of gender. Research in this field shows a broad tendency among Chinese, across time and location, to prefer one child of each gender, thus making several scholars rather optimistic about the future gender ratios in China, especially if the family planning policy is further relaxed.[413]

The differences in policy implementation across various geographical, ethnic and socioeconomic divides have strengthened the already significant socioeconomic gaps within the Chinese population. These inequalities socioeconomic development have lead to massive internal migration, especially from rural to urban areas. This large-scale urbanisation may lead to even lower national fertility rates as urban residents by and large have fewer children than rural residents. However, the rural-urban migration is also largely a by-product of family

[412] (Fong 2004, 137; Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006, 99)
[413] (Zhang 张国 2012; Zhang, Feng, and Zhang 2006)

planning policy and extremely low urban fertility rates, which have lead to an imbalance in labour supply. Thus, the family planning policy has to a certain extent reinforced both the gender gap and the socioeconomic gap, as the equality preached by the government on both issues is not always mirrored in actual policy implementation and its consequences.

Based on the arguments made by Jiajian Chen et al. on return migrants impact on social change in general, and reproductive attitudes in particular,[414] there is reason to believe that the large number of overseas Chinese may potentially also affect Chinese social and reproductive patterns when, or if, they return to China. However, what the effect of this impact will be is less obvious than in the rural-urban migration pattern. Although low fertility is viewed as a trademark of developed societies, most of the participants in this study have slightly higher desired fertility than national fertility levels reflect, but intend to limit their fertility regardless of desire and international influence. Thus fertility desires may further decline in China in the coming generation of increasingly global citizens.

The future of family planning policy

The national family planning policy seems to have successfully influenced the population's desires and hopes for the future, both regarding the quantity and quality of potential children. Despite being based on a small sample of participants, the findings in my study, and the conclusions drawn from them, largely support recent research in the field. The Chinese government seems to have successfully influenced the intended fertility patterns of these global citizens. Yet, this manipulation of fertility norms, as Elisabeth Croll calls it,[415] is no longer mainly based on limiting fertility in order to avoid a *population explosion*, rather it is based on an assumption that one can not have both high quantity reproduction and high quality population. This assumption seems to be imbedded in the arguments of many of participants in my study, thus in order to achieve *suzhi* for their children, they intend to have few, despite desires to have several.

Furthermore, this study emphasises the complexity of changes in fertility preferences, age and gender distribution, as well as socioeconomic inequality. The participants in this study held many different views on family planning policy, and its effect on fertility decline, age and gender gaps, as well as socioeconomic gaps. Some similarities among the responses did however stand out. First of all, a majority of the participants found the birth limitations

[414] (Chen, Liu, and Xie 2010)
[415] (Croll, Kane, and Davin 1985, 2)

imposed by the family planning policy to have been, or still be, necessary. They largely agreed that the size of the population had grown too fast, and limiting reproduction was a valid state response. Thus, most did not object the existence of family planning policy, but rather its implementation.

Secondly, for most of the participants, their intended fertility fell within policy limits, thus they viewed the family planning policy as largely compatible with their own individual plans. All who intended to limit their number of children to one did so because of individual or national socioeconomic conditions, not because the family planning policy prohibited them from acting otherwise. Thirdly, although the family planning policy was mainly viewed as both necessary and compatible with own intentions, its implementation was by many perceived as unfair. As it differentiates between ethnic groups, single and non-single children, urban and rural citizens, and so forth, many felt that the policy affected people unequally based on differences beyond the control of individuals. Finally, a majority of the participants believed that the family planning policy was unlikely to be abolished any time soon. However, similar to many scholarly predictions, several did expect a gradual relaxation towards a universal two-child policy.

One of the reasons for why China is continuing the family planning policy is that the government would not like to suggest a total abandonment of the policy after thirty years of insisting on its necessity and correctness. Furthermore, it is still considered crucial for avoiding overpopulation, which could still potentially threat the nation's economic growth and harm the global position China has worked so hard for over the last decades. Arguably, a policy which allows two children per couple could solve some of the socioeconomic difficulties produced by the one-child limit, as a two-child policy would not only ease the socioeconomic pressure within families and on a national scale, but also help narrow the age and gender gaps in the population today. However, even if such a policy was introduced at this point, and all couples in China chose to have two children, the gap between the old and the young, and between the male and the female groups of the population would not be eliminated over night, not even in our near future. In many ways, establishing a family planning policy for the future is more about serious damage control than small adjustments. The demographic challenges which have already risen in China will continue to escalate in the coming years, thus the government should not delay its decision to alter its policy. The approaching leadership change may perhaps bring forth further policy adjustments, as it

presents an opportunity to change its policy without having to admit to any wrongdoings by the government in office.

This study has focused on a small group of participants' views on China's family planning policy, and compared it to a selection of previous research on the subject. Although not exhaustively examining all views on, or implications of, family planning policy in China by young Chinese today, the study has provided some indications of how complex the debate on family planning policy is, even within the limited and rather homogenous group of participants in this study. The variety of conclusions in both previous studies of Chinese attitudes towards family planning policy and its implications, as well as the complexity of views presented in this study, should not be taken as a sign of lacking validity in any of these studies, but rather a reminder of the dynamic factors which affects a population's reproduction behaviour. Not only is it fair to assume that they have greatly changed over during the family planning policy period, but it is also fair to assume that the impact of different factors will continue to change. Furthermore, not only do large fertility trends change over time, but within a certain time period they are also greatly varied among individuals. Simple assumptions such as "all Chinese prefer sons" or "all Chinese want one or two children" are merely useful up to a certain point. In-depth analysis quickly reveals that these simplifications hold limited validity. Certainly, a large number of Chinese prefer daughters, and a large number desire more than two children, or no children at all.

Further studies on the development pattern of very low fertility in general, and for China under the family planning policy in particular, would be valuable supplements to the existing research on population changes in China. Researching fertility decisions in a socioeconomic, cultural and political context could offer more insight into the effects of population control on all these aspects, as well as their impact on population development.

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