

China Struggles with an Ongoing Gender Gap

Asia has been struggling with gender number gaps for at least three decades. The earliest mention found was from 1991, when there were smaller discrepancies between male and female births, but even then, the fear was a future, larger imbalance between male and female populations, leading to the inability to find a wife! On the other hand, any woman who wanted a husband could have one!

On the face of it, it doesn't sound like a very large discrepancy: In China, for every 100 girls born, there are 130 boys born. But when you ratchet up that number to 1000 girls, for example, that means 1300 boys total, or 300 men who may be lifelong bachelors. The fear is that single men left at loose ends with no families may lead to more violence, sex crimes and psychological disturbances.

In a 1991 report by [Population and Development Review](#), the reasons for imbalance were threefold: more boys than girls are being born, migration which is causing "gains and losses," and sadly, mortality, which is impacted by poorer medical care for women. Women statistically outlive men, meaning the ratio would be fixed on the other end of life. But when the consequences of women receiving poorer care catches up to the female population, women were dying earlier than men, firmly cementing the imbalance between the genders. Once this health care issue was addressed in the latter part of the 20th century, women went back to outliving men, but the fear of more men than women in the population left many feeling troubled.

More recently, many women, still hooked on the idea of having a son to continue the family line, or feeling pressure from family members to do so, will have a sex-selective abortion. While India, China and South Korea—all countries mentioned in the study—have laws against sex-selective abortion, they are not well-enforced.

Analysts are very concerned about population growth in the future, as well as crime levels, but this trend is going to continue, in China in particular, as long as it has two things working against it: a ban on the number of children allowed per family, coupled with the cultural pressure to bear sons. Families want sons to carry on the name and sometimes, family businesses or other legacies. It is well known that girls are often left at orphanages, which are rumored to be overflowing with female babies and small girls.

If the Chinese are so pressed to contain the population, maybe this will help: after all, with fewer couples, there are bound to be fewer babies. Will China rescind its baby ban? Will cultural pressures ease? Only time will tell.

PART II

A reader left a link for [All Girls Allowed](#), an extremely interesting site that is chock-full of (sometimes shocking) information. As an American, it can be difficult to comprehend the way other countries and cultures function. China is no exception.

When the Communist government of China didn't want to approach their food and labor problems with anything but the One Child Policy, former Tiananmen Square student Chai Ling decided to do something about it. She founded [allgirlsallowed.org](#) or AGA. The AGA fight to help women in China, who are undervalued, have few rights and are rapidly losing footing in the population at large due to the response to the One Child Policy. Brian Lee, the Executive Director of All Girls Allowed, was kind enough to thoroughly answer a number of questions about China's population and gender gap issues.

China put a One Child Policy into effect in 1980 because the Communist Government insisted it would help with impending labor and food shortages. However, according to Brian Lee, the Chinese government is the greatest contributing factor to these problems. "[That] was one reason that the government started the policy," Mr. Lee says, "but the main reason for the lack of employment and food was not overpopulation... The Party jumped to the conclusion that growing population was to blame, when in reality it was poor policy."

The One Child Policy has started a ripple effect: the strict regulations coupled with strong cultural pressures to have a son have placed many Chinese women in a "rock and a hard place" scenario. Suicide rates are up among women 18-35 years old, young girls are being abandoned and young sons are sometimes abducted to serve as another family's heir. And still, the government blames overpopulation.

In order to try to coerce women into complying with the One Child Policy, Mr. Lee says, "While it's not spelt out, it's fairly clear that out-of-quota births should be dealt with severely...it also refers to the pressure that a mother feels by other disincentives, which in turn 'forces' her to abort because she has no other options. Exorbitant fines are levied, relatives are taken into custody, houses and property are confiscated—all for the crime of having an out-of-quota pregnancy." Mr. Lee further talks about how the government (via local police) has threatened, arrested, harassed and beaten people who try to speak out about this issue, including attorneys who attempt to help those caught up in a legal tangle over the One Child Policy.

A spotlight needs to be placed on China regarding, at the very least, their treatment of women and children. The Communist government, in their efforts to control and maintain control, are strangling their people. Mr. Lee actually said that "the government has tried to launch propaganda campaigns to convince people that girls are

valuable, but those have proved ineffective and gender ratios have not shown any sign of dropping.” Women are human beings, not property to place a value upon. Rather than rescind the One Child Policy, China is hacking at the root of the consequence with a pen-knife. China has certainly created a huge problem for itself, but ignoring it and continuing to enforce poorly researched policy will not help.

AGA, on the other hand, has some concrete things it is doing now to assist as best they can. AGA has only been in existence since last summer, but already, they are helping so many. One way is to provide women with supplies, clothes and toys when they are pregnant, called the Baby Shower Gift program. The point is to get pregnant women excited at the prospect of having a baby girl. On the legal side of things, AGA is intent on making changes in gendercide, infanticide, forced abortions, child abandonment and abductions, through donations of money and supplies, legal aid and education of the Chinese people.

For more information on how you can help, go to www.allgirlsallowed.org.

“Hi Lara, Thank you for your article—very well written, and we’re grateful for helping us get the word out about what’s going on in China! Take care. Best, Brian.”

Brian Lee

Executive Director, All Girls Allowed

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