

# **How does overpopulation affect Chinese society and policy**

## **Introduction**

### **Definition of overpopulation**

Overpopulation is an undesirable situation whereby the number of the existing human population exceeds the carrying capacity of the specific ecological setting. Essential materials for survival will not be enough for people in this environment since the demand for food, water, transportation, shelter, and social amenities is not matched with the available supply. Thus, the quality of life will worsen and the environment will be deteriorated as a result. Overpopulation is a global problem. Currently, many states are facing the overpopulated society issue and China seems to be one of the most problematic nations when it comes to this topic.

### **Demographic in china**

The current population of China is 1,450,674,999 as of July 2022, equivalent to 18.47 percent of world's population, China has been ranked first in the list of countries by population for decades. Although China is a considered large country by population, The density is ranked 81st on the list of 195 countries in the world due to its large area. Singapore is the world's most populous state instead but the negative effects of overpopulation in China are much more impactful because many areas of the land in China are still underdeveloped.

### **Cause of the overpopulation**

The overpopulation in China occurs due to many reasons. The most obvious one is the advantage of China's geography. The nation has enormous areas of productive landmass and

many rivers, which grants Chinese people a better quality of life from good farmland, and convenient access to fresh water, Therefore, China can produce enough food and water to nourish large numbers of the population. Many other areas in the world have similar advantages, for instance, some countries in the middle of Asia like Bangladesh or Pakistan also have good fertile land and easy clean water access. Still, these countries cannot handle as many people as China because their smaller sizes of geography are their limitations. China's large amount of resources fit for having big families, so the birth rate of the country was quite high in the past.

Another cause that stimulates the population in China is the takeover of the Communist government. Rapid improvements in sanitation, more equal distribution of food, improvements in maternal care, and the control of communicable diseases began to drive death rates down. Before this movement, The estimated population growth was 0.3 percent and the Chinese population was in a precarious balance. The birth rate in China was 3-4 percent and the death rate fluctuate from 2-4 percent.. The birth rate was high due to the abundance of resources but at the same time people were living in vulnerable and not sustainable conditions. When diseases are spread or have poor harvesting season, the population was shrink. After the reform and modernization, Death rates decreased and China began its population explosion as population growth increased to more than 2 percent per year. Apart from the reasons mentioned before, the war also plays a big role in this circumstance. In the post-war era, people had a mindset to have lots of babies because China lose many people back then.

## **Government's response**

### **The initial policies**

The population in China kept increasing after the central government of China took control over the country but they were neither concerned nor willing to launch the solution

policy at first. The leader of the state at that time, Mao Zedong, believed that being populous will be beneficial for the country rather than be problematic. Mao Zedong argued that a large population means more labor in agriculture and more products makes country become stronger. According to Mao's ideology, China should keep population growth at this rate and it would allow people to have a better society despite the limited resource. However, after the GLF (global famine) between 1958-1960, China was hit severely due to its large population. Mao eventually took back his words and allow the policy to control the birth rate. In 1971, the First family planning initiative, known as wan-xi-shao, or later-longer-fewer, was launched. The policy is based on three main regulations: later marriages, longer spacing between children, and fewer children in total. The policy lasted until 1978 and the result was highly satisfactory since total fertility rates were decreased in an apparent fashion, from 5.8 before to 2.7 after the policy launched. Although the success of this initiative, The government is still worried that the capacity of the nation will not be enough to handle the continued population growth. To prevent another wave of births, they decided to adopt the tightened version of the previous one, which is called the "One-child policy", in September 1980. Its purpose is to limit the great majority of family units in the country to one child each. The penalties would be given to the women who have two or more two children. The implementation of the policy was extraordinarily strict through the first five years. Women with one child needed to insert intrauterine devices (IUDs), women with two or more children needed to sterilize, and abortion for unauthorized conceptions. Indeed, extreme methods like this created various domestic and international controversies and many actors asked the Chinese government to relax the policy. Continuous domestic resistance and international pressure led the Chinese government to adapt the policy. The new one is described as a "One-and-a-half-child policy". The government finally renowned forced abortion and sterilization and women were allowed to have a second child if their firstborn is a girl. However, the financial penalties of having more than two children are still there and even though the forced abortion is canceled, the

parents will be pressured by local family planning workers to abort the fetus anyway if they became pregnant after having two children.

In September 2015, After a long period of policy enforcement, Chinese officials finally announced that the program was ending, but its effects and legacies remain.

### **Consequences of the one-child policy**

Traditionally, Chinese parents prefer male children over female because sons are more valuable to the parents. The sons will be the ones who inherit the family name and property. Moreover, boys are more likely to contribute to the household's income. All things considered, Being able to have only one child makes the daughter become highly undesirable. Statistically, the rate of abortion of female infants was risen significantly (partly because ultrasound sex determination merely became available back then). There is an increase in the number of girls who were abandoned in the orphanages. Furthermore, many female babies were infanticide during that period. This led China's sex proportion into an awkward position because the ratio became skewed too much toward males. At its peak, reports said that the gap between males and females was roughly 4 percent. The circumstance also has an impact on future generations since the gap widened between both sexes over time leading to the lack of females available for marriage.

Elderly people are also negatively affected by this policy. In Chinese culture, a big part of senior citizens will rely on their children to take care of them after their retirements. The effect of the policy makes the proportion of elder people grows much more than the newborn so there were fewer people to support the elders.

The fact that many parents chose to not register the girl with the authorities plays a big role in the imbalance as well and these undocumented girls faced very poor quality of life. Since they were hidden from the authorities, they cannot obtain education and employment. Meanwhile, the situation of a male child was exactly the opposite. Since most parents had only

one child, the child's education became highly valued. The target levels of education for the children increased and so to the cost of supporting children. Families prefer to invest expensive resources in the son. In other words, they decided to trade the quantity for the quality of their child. If those children cannot be a success in life, they will be pressured by the thought of being a failure and a waste of money, therefore these children are also suffered from the strict lifestyle and stress.

The legacy of this notorious policy remains and creates impacts until the current time. Despite the fact the operation ended several years ago, Chinese people still have a mindset that having small families is more preferable. High expectations for education levels and the concern that having another child would affect their careers make it costly to have a second child. Many couples hesitate to plan for bigger families as a result.

### **The urgent need for a new method**

In terms of results, family planning by the Chinese government could be considered as a successful initiative because the rapid population growth was slowed down. However, if we analyze it in depth, the disadvantages caused by this policy outweighed the advantages. Apart from the imbalance in gender ratio, male child preference, undocumented children, worse quality of life for elderly people, and fewer marriages, the policy also caused a new and crucial problem, human trafficking. Young women are being trafficked from nearby countries, for example, North Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar for forced marriage. Another error in the policy is that it is only be forced to apply with Han Chinese people, the number of children of other ethnic groups, such as Manchu, Uyghur, Tibetan, or Mongol in China is still overloaded. Therefore, the need for a more efficient policy is urgent. China decided to renounced the one-child policy in 2015 and replace it with renewed policies.

However, The government of China continue to have the policy to control the population, but not as strict and extreme as the family planning policies, for example, reducing

immigration to lower the population of a country. Controlling the number of people who come and leave the country will make a big difference for such a populous nation as China.

Furthermore, The government has a policy to give tax benefits to parents that have only one child. Those parents could give the tax benefits to the poorer parts of the country so the birth rate of people in the underdeveloped areas will slow down. These policies received better feedback from people because Instead of setting up the punishments and penalties, the government rewards those who coordinate with the policy and that leads to more positive results.

## **Issues caused by overpopulation**

### **Society**

Due to the high population, China has a gigantic labor force. In 2020, there are approximately 789 million people who are able and have the willingness to work. In a heavily populated society like this, the demand for labor could not keep up with the supply in the market. To simplify, the jobs available are much less than the number of people seeking for it. This eventually leads to high levels of unemployment and crime rate. There is a positive relationship between unemployment and crime. The unemployed people who have no income need to steal essential materials for their survival and many of them committed to doing crimes as a result. The government indeed tried to compromise the situation by providing basic social instruction, shelter, education, and medical assistance for people in this group but they find that it costs a lot of money to do it perfectly. In the current state, The Chinese government cannot provide all these basic needs for every unemployed people since there are too many of them.

## **Politics**

Even though China relaxed the strictness of communist views, China's leadership is still intensely influenced by communist values. Overpopulation makes the central government's work becomes tougher since they were pressured for poor services. Health care, schools, transportation service, and environmental services in many areas of the country are still not developed to match the global standard. The higher population creates damage to these services harshly. The already-underdeveloped services have to reduce the quality and quantity due to overpopulation but the public cannot openly discuss or ask for more because they fear to do so since the power is highly centralized toward the central government. As a result, all of these lead to the situation that China is being viewed more negatively by other nations.

## **Education**

Oversized classes became a common phenomenon in China. The problem is more serious in rural areas since education resources tend to go to the urban areas. Away from the city, the number of students is overloaded meanwhile teachers and classrooms are insufficient. The most overcrowded classroom from the sample of the study is in Henan province which has 113 pupils per classroom in average. Many schools in China combine lessons because of the size of the classes. Furthermore, The classroom is sometimes not enough to capacitate all the students, In that case, students might have to study outdoor. In conclusion, Rapid population growth impedes educational development by reducing educational quality to maintain enrollment or by reducing the quantity to maintain educational quality.

## **Economy**

The large population seems to be beneficial for economic development at the first glance but in the case of China, the overpopulation not only grants advantages but also disadvantages to the economy. Overpopulation puts pressure on natural resources. With

insufficient resources, the population growth will cause the decrease income per capita decrease in the long run. The higher unemployment rate, environmental change, poor standard of reduction, and food shortages are holding back economic development as well. The rapid population growth leads to higher demand for fundamental needs, like food, accommodation, and clothes. In the long term, the cost of these basic needs will increase because the supply could not match with fast demand growth. As a result, The people at or near the poverty line's standard of life will be deteriorated by more expensive goods.

## **Environment**

Even though the world is moving towards green energy, China remains as reliant as ever on fossil fuels. The faster the population grows, the more fossil fuels will be used as it is the main energy for the Chinese economy. The use of fossil fuels has both direct and indirect negative effects to harm the environment. In 2021, the share of coal and gas in power generation was stuck at 71 percent in China and the burning of coal and oil is the compound that produces carbon dioxide. China has to exploit this kind of resource a lot more than the neighboring countries because they are overpopulated and it causes China to become one of the biggest polluters in the world. The consequence of a rise in carbon emissions in the atmosphere has a devastating impact on the greenhouse effect. Due to excess carbon dioxide in the air, the heat will be stuck in the atmosphere, makes the world's temperature increases. This type of gas was emitted by most human activities, for instance, driving or burning things. China, which is the most populous nation in the world, contributes a lot when it comes to the cause of this crisis.

The demand for resources in an overpopulated state like China is also very excessive. Therefore, excavation and deforestation happen very often. Deforestation contributes to the formation of other environmental issues, such as global warming, erosion, and desertification because trees can absorb the carbon dioxide emitted by people. Furthermore, the topsoil will

not be protected without trees. When the rainy season comes, there is no topsoil to absorb the rainfall and store the water in the layers of it. Rainfall will easily run off into springs and streams, causing erosion and floods, and suffering the crop.

Extinction of species is another result of deforestation since there are humans trespasses into their natural habitats and threatens the survival of the organism. According to biologist, Edward O. Wilson of Harvard University, 10,000 to 17,500 species in the rainforest face their extinction each year.

Overpopulation makes noise pollution became a serious problem in China as well. Noise hazards can be the cause of many health issues, like anxiety and hypertension. However, the most obvious one is hearing loss. The problem is especially critical in the urban areas, a recent study showed that the average day-to-night noise level was 79.2 decibels in rooms facing main traffic in Beijing. The noise usually lasts from around 8 p.m. until 2 a.m. in the next day, making it difficult for people in the big cities to have an efficient sleep. Noise and poor sleep can also aggravate tinnitus and heart problems. Hearing-related disabilities have been reported to be one of the most common disabilities in China, affecting 16.8 percent of its population could be a piece of legit evidence.

Apart from these consequences, Overpopulation also harms the environment of the city in overall as well. The quality and sanitary of the town tend to be in a worse state. Many problems occurred in the overcrowded city, for instance, the increasing trend of the amount of disposed of garbage. In the last decades, the amount of garbage being disposed of in China has significantly soared, reaching approximately 242 million tons as of 2019. Fortunately, the annual amount declined in 2020, for which the first time in many decades.

## **Hypothesis: The situation of overpopulation crisis will be better overtime but it will create new problems**

### **China is entering the aging society**

Past demographic trends, like fewer marriages, and an imbalance in gender ratio, have resulted in a remarkably low dependency rate for young people. Those same trends dictate that in the future China will face particularly rapid population aging. Many reasons contributed to the aging society in China, for example, the mindset instilled by the long period of enforcement of the child limitation policy and the high cost of living (especially in education since the parents have high expectations of educational levels) causes the birth rate to decline. Not only the decrease in population growth, but many predictions even suggest that China's population is about to shrink for the first time since the great famine 60 years ago. In many of professional reseachers opinion, the turning point will come in a decade or sooner. China Academy of Social Sciences expected the population to peak in 2029, at 1.44 billion, and The UN population prospects report expected the peak later, in 2031 to 2032, at 1.46 billion. After the peak, the population of China will rapidly decrease. My take is that the proportion of elderly people population will continue to climb most of the time from now on due to continuously higher living costs and higher education of people in the new generations. Seeking financial stability before having kids becomes the trend for those younger people. In the current situation, having babies is luxurious for people in many countries in Asia, which means that it is a thing just for the ready parents. If the mother was pregnant by mistake, the child will be considered as a burden since taking care of one more life is, and will be even more expensive in the future. By this projection, the China's population will be much lower than a billion in 2100.

By this fashion, Aging society slowly become a major threat to the Chinese economy. There is a decreasing trend in the working-age population in China's labor force. Unless

productivity advances rapidly, The annual average decline of 1.73 percent in China's working-age population sets the scene for much lower economic growth. Moreover, China will be required to direct more of its productive resources to the provision of health, medical and aged-care services to meet the demands of an increasingly elderly population. To deal with this crisis China has formally revised its law to allow couples to have up to three children, to boost the birth rate.

### **Three-child policy**

In 2021's may, China enacted the three-child policy. People could have up to three children nowadays. This policy canceled a financial penalty that couples needed to pay for having children beyond the regulated limit. The government also encourages people to have more children by improving childcare infrastructure. Moreover, the party indicated that it would improve maternity leave and protections in the workplace as well.

### **Feedbacks**

Despite the effort of the government, Chinese people are not satisfied, let alone the critics. The policy was criticized that it is inadequate and useless. For Chinese people, no matter how many babies they open it up to, they are not going to have more than one (or any) child because they believe that children are too troublesome and expensive. Moreover, reports said that many women feel impatient and worried that they will not be able to educate their children well enough. The policy was attacked quickly on the social media platform. Many posts on Weibo (Chinese's most popular social platform) suggest that people are already tired enough to just feed themselves. To conclude, the policy is not effective because it does not solve the problem at the correct point. Today, People decided not to have children because of the high cost of living, not because of the limitation. However, those who illegally have three children are still gaining benefits since their third child would not have to be hidden anymore.

## **Conclusion**

Overpopulation in China creates many types of threats to its own country. The fact that the economy and social structure were damaged by the issue has always been troublesome for the government. However, overpopulation is not only affecting China. Overpopulation is one of the biggest problems facing humanity because it also harms the planet's well-being and scarcity of food. The high crime rate, the mass amount of acid rain, mass extinction of species, and scarcity of natural resources are all consequences of overpopulation. China contributes a lot to why the world's temperature has increased, in other words, Other countries take damages from one overpopulated area as well.

Currently, the situation of overpopulation in China is so much better due to the policy to limit the number of children and the population growth of China is expected to keep decreasing. However, We cannot conclude that the policy is successful. The overpopulation issue is solved but it costs a good quality of life for people to do that. Furthermore, The policy and poorly organized plan by the government create more new problems, such as, an aging society and fearness of having many children. China may have failed to deal with the problem efficiently but we can use this incident as a lesson to remind ourselves that solving overpopulation can be lengthy and tricky so the policy needs to be precise and well-thought. I believe that, when there is a will, there is a way. Although China has many challenging issues ,all of them are fixable with efficient and appropriate policies.

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