

## **Fertility Control and Its Effect on Chinese Women**

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Current Chinese population policy started in early 1980s and is one of the most controversial population policies in the world. Some labeled the policy as an aggressive anti-natalist policy, due to coercion of the contraceptive practice (for example, Abrams, 1996: 23). Criticism comes mostly from Western societies and they viewed the policy from different angles. September 2010 was the 30th year since the controversial policy was begun. Experiences over the years enable us to reflect on the current population policy from its background of having the policy and the special effects of the policy on the Chinese. This paper will specifically examine the effect of population policy in 1980s on Chinese women and discuss the contribution of women in the sustainable development in China in general.

### **1. Current population policy:**

The current Chinese population policy started in early 1980s. Demographic status and stages of social development in China today is very different from that of 30 more years ago. Any policy is formed with its own reason. The Chinese population policy, especially a fertility control policy, came about as a serious consideration of total population size as well as the speed of its growth in China at the time.

1.1 Demographic background: It was under the pressure of the size of the population (in 1970s

as well as seen in the future) that China initiated its population policy. Changes of population size in China were dramatic over the years. In 1950, China had a population of 545 million, about 3.4 times of that of the U.S. population in the same year (Table 1). The size changed to 816 million in twenty years (1970), 271million more people than the population of 1950, or a level close to that of U.S. in 1995. Ten years later (in 1980), Chinese population had increased to 981million, very close to 1 billion. The size is unique in the world but not necessary good news for the development of China, because every progress made in an economy or society divided by a large size of the population will end up as a small progress.

Table 1: Changes in Population Size, 1950-2010

Country	Year	Population (in 1,000)	Year	Population (in 1,000)
<b>China</b>	1950	544951	1980	980929
	1955	598226	1985	1053219
	1960	645927	1990	1142090
	1965	716270	1995	1210969
	1970	815951	2000	1266954
	1975	911167	2005	1312253
			2010	1354146
<b>United States of America</b>	1950	157813	1980	229469
	1955	171152	1985	240612
	1960	186326	1990	254865
	1965	199453	1995	270648
	1970	209464	2000	287842
	1975	219108	2005	302741
			2010	317641

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>

The change in population size is captured by population growth rate. According to information listed in Figure 1<sup>1</sup>, we find population growth rates in China in 1960s and 1970s were faster than other periods in the figure. The relatively high growth rate in 1980s was an echo of that in 1960s. The effect of growth rate in population size can be understood as following. A growth rate of 1% will push the population to double its size in 70 years. When the rate is 2.2% (the level in China in 1970-1975), the population will double itself in 31.2 years (70/the growth rate). If China continued its population growth rate of 1.48% (the level between 1975-1980), China would double its population size in 47 years, from the 1971 population of 911.1 million (Table 1) to 1.8 billion in the year 2118. The high rate of growth and the implication or effect of the rates was the concern of the government. In Figure 1, we find the growth rate in the U.S. in 1955-1960 was higher than that of China. However, considering the size of the U.S. population, the same growth rate will produce a larger population size in China since China has a larger population base. Even a small rate of growth in China will lead to a large absolute size of additional population.

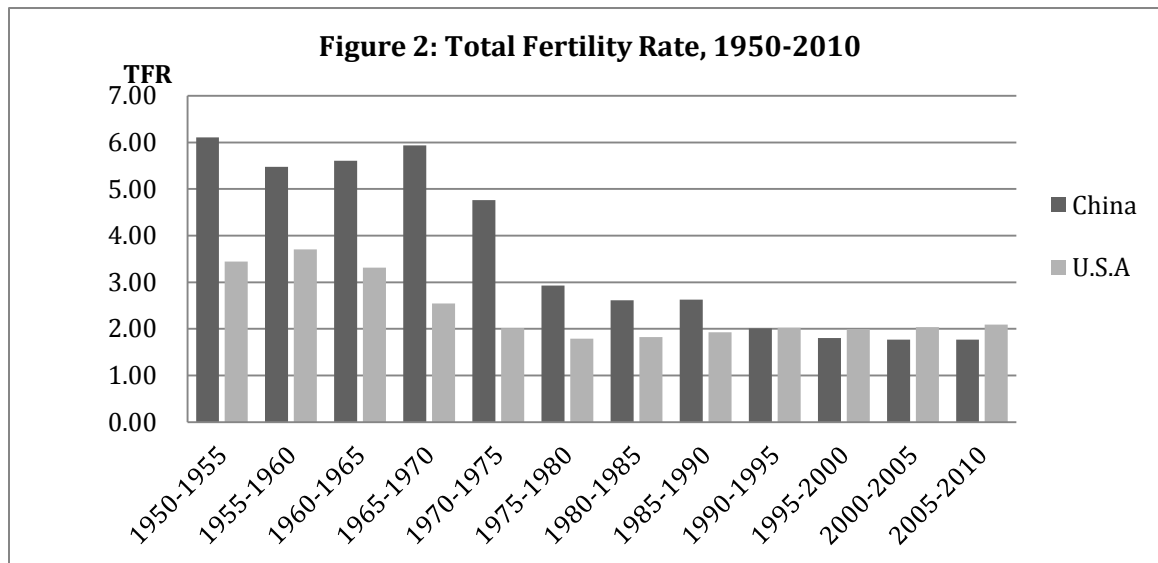
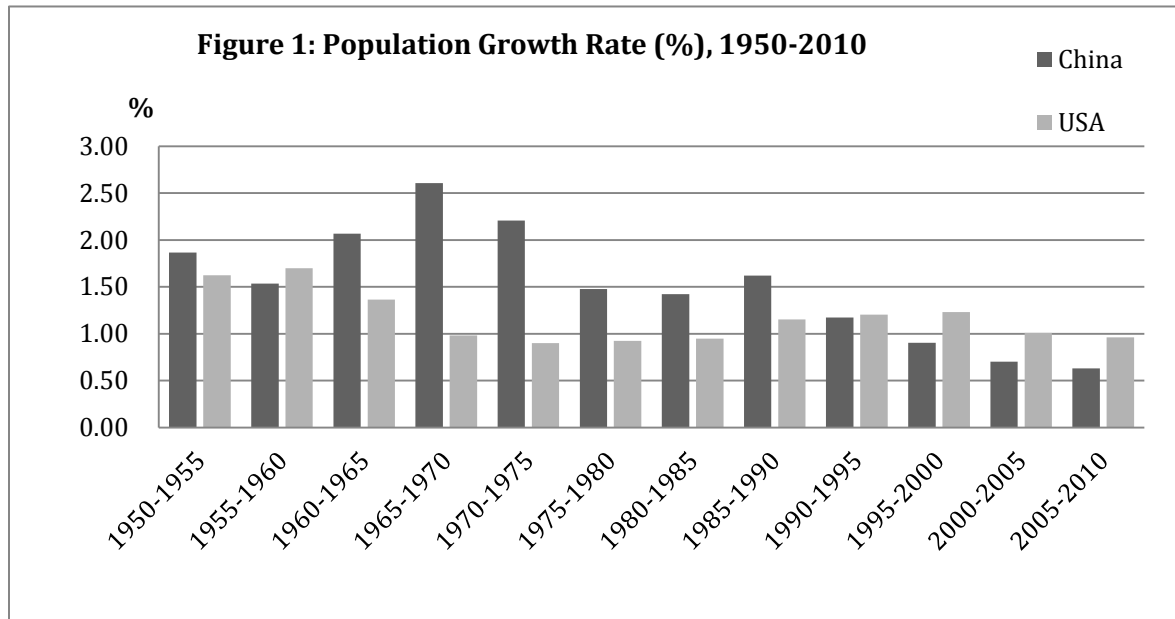
Population growth rate may be a result of a sharp decline in mortality as well as a constant increase in fertility. In China, both mortality and fertility play roles, but fertility is our main concern for population regulation. According to Figure 2<sup>2</sup>, the total fertility rate (TFR, the number of children a woman may have in her life according to current age specific fertility rate)

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision, New York, 2009 (advanced Excel tables).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision, New York, 2009 (advanced Excel tables).

in China remained very high before 1975. On average, a woman had 4.77 children before 1975 and still had 2.93 children before China started a fertility control population policy. History cannot go back and we are not sure if Chinese fertility will go down to the current low level (about 1.77 between 2005 and 2010). Before 1980, the Chinese government worried about the size of the population and its effect on social development. Fertility rates in U.S. were high in 1950s, but were not as high as those in China and the rates came down to a healthy range for population growth since the 1970s (Figure 2). If China had experience of that in the United States of 1970s (TFR was 2.02 between 1970 and 1975), China would not need to adopt the population policy in early 1980s. By viewing the population size, the population growth rate and the fertility level in China before 1980s, we have reasons to believe that such a demographic status is a source of concern for a country hoping to develop economically and socially.



## 1.2 The population policy:

Population policy, according to Demeny (2003), “may be defined as deliberately constructed or modified institutional arrangements and/or specific programs through which governments

influence, directly or indirectly, demographic change.” Changes of population size of a country can be achieved by raising or reducing fertility, mortality, and international migration. Looking at the population policy around the world, fertility is the most popular variable that countries use to influence (either limiting or increasing) population size, followed by welcome or discouraging international migration. Fertility and migration are seen “as the key objects of governmental interest in population policy” (Demeny, 2003). China is an example of relying on limiting fertility to adjust the speed of population growth; while other countries, e.g. in today’s Japan, are examples of having a pronatalist population policy to combat the low fertility levels.

Since 1976, with effort by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, information regarding to population policy were collected and published. In the latest publication in 2010, we are able to follow the trend of the policy over 30 years in different countries and Table 2 is a summary from the United Nations about views of the Chinese government on population over the years. Based on the information in the table, it is clear that the Chinese government viewed that the population size and growth were too large and high until the year of 1996. China had policies to lower the population growth rate until 1996 to fulfill the national population goal. Therefore, about 5 years ago, the Chinese government considered that the population growth was satisfactory and did not necessitate any further measures to lower the growth rate; and its population policy was only to maintain the current population growth rate.

While the Chinese government had measures to lower the growth rate, the working target of the policy was fertility. As an important variable in the population growth, the Chinese government considered the fertility level in China was too high and also had a policy to lower the fertility level over the years (Table 2). Fertility control is a cornerstone of the population policy in China. Even so, since 1996, we see less overt fertility control policy identified by the government. Like the government policy toward population size and growth, Chinese government started to have policies only maintaining, but not further lowering the fertility since 2009. To achieve the fertility and population goal in China, the Chinese government provided direct support in contraceptive usage. People were not having problems obtaining contraceptives and basic contraceptives were free to people of reproductive ages.<sup>3</sup>

Table 2 Views and Policies of Chinese Government on Population

<b>Population policy variable</b>	<b>1976</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2009</b>
Population size and growth				
<i>View on growth</i>	Too high	Too high	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
<i>Policy on growth</i>	Lower	Lower	Lower	Maintain
Fertility and family planning				
<i>View on fertility level</i>	Too high	Too high	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
<i>Policy</i>	Lower	Lower	Lower	Maintain
<i>Access to contraceptive methods</i>	Direct support	Direct support	Direct support	Direct support

Source: United Nations, 2010 “World Population Policy, 2009”,  
[http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2009/Publication\\_index.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2009/Publication_index.htm)

<sup>3</sup> According to “Regulations on Administration of Technical Services for Family Planning” (effective as of October 1, 2001), Chinese government provides free-of-charge contraceptive and birth-control technical to rural residents (Article 3)  
[http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-08/24/content\\_25697.htm](http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-08/24/content_25697.htm)

Information from the United Nations is valuable for grasping a government's view on population; however, it does not give us any information regarding a detailed national population policy. For example, under which circumstance a country started to consider about its population growth or fertility shown in the UN's report, the time the government started the policy, and the major content of the policy. We are often not able to grasp information on the government population policy, especially for countries that did not claim to have an overt population policy (e.g. many European countries). China is an exception since China has a population policy and a fertility control population policy.

Current population policy in China is a result of many efforts to implement a right policy for the country and the individuals' interests over years. The current policy is a continuing one of that in 1980, so called "one-child policy" by many international communities. Before then China had a rather loose family planning or fertility control program. There was "late, spacing and few" promotion in 1973, with an emphasis on the "few". "Late" means to get married after 23 years old for females and 25 years old for males; "spacing", 3 or more years of birth intervals; and "few", no more than two children per couple. The policy gradually changed to "one is not few, two are the best and three are too many" and started to "promote one couple to have one child, at most 2 children" in 1978, (the year "China advocates and promotes family planning" were written in Chinese constitution) (Li, 2009). Even with these efforts in 1970s, population still grew at a speed that worried the Chinese government and society. Towards the end of



1970s, China was facing a serious slow economic growth and the surplus of labor was considered a result of fast population growth. A population policy checking the population growth is not without shortcoming. However, when the government made the decision to formulate a population policy in 1980, it had already considered the possible consequences of the policy, for example, age composition (aging issue in the future), labor shortage, or family structure (4-2-1) due to the intended policy (Zhang, 2010). With careful studies and research by social scientists as well as scientists in China, the government made a decision that those problems, if they were to happen, were less serious than the fast growing population in rate and size in China. A population policy with a clear demographic target and goal started in 1980 and is still in force today with some modifications.

The core of the policy can be read in an “Open Letter to all Communist Party and Communist Youth League Members on Controlling Population Growth”, issued on September 25 of 1980 by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party<sup>4</sup>. The government recommended all members of the Chinese Communist Party and the Communist Youth League should lead by setting an example to have only one child per couple. Young couples should have only one child and older couples should encourage their children to have just one child per couple. The goal of the policy was to keep the population size within 1.2 billion by the year of 2000. Population size was a major concern of the policy since the size was considered as hindering the social and economic development of China.

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<sup>4</sup> The open letter in full can be read in the following official website <http://www.chinapop.gov.cn/gkx30n/gkx/>

The policy stays today but with frequent adjustments over the years. For example, in 1984 the “one-child policy” started to be relaxed only in rural China followed by the Central Document 7 by the Party Central Committee. Rural residents with “practical difficulties” were allowed to have second children, especially when the first child was a girl since 1984 (Greenhalgh, 1986; Wang, 1996). This change in the content of the policy was described as to “open a small hole to close up a large one”. With this minor change, the majority of young couples would follow the one-child per couple policy and demographic target would be met. Minority Chinese have a different and much less restrictive (if there was a restriction for some groups) population policy. For example in an interview, former Minister of Population and Family Planning Commission Weiqing Zhang mentioned that in Tibet of China, the number of children per couple was not limited by the national population policy<sup>5</sup>.

In general, population policy in China today follows the mainstream of the policy promulgated in 1980 that in Han Chinese areas, most couples, especially urban couples should have only one child and rural residents may have second child under certain circumstances. People usually call the Han Chinese population policy as 1.5 child policy reflecting that different rules applied rural and urban Chinese. Back to 2007, about 35.9% of Chinese couple were having only one child, 11% were having two or more children, and 52.9% were having 1.5 children (Xuejun Yu<sup>6</sup>). However, we should not ignore a fact that since China started its

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<sup>5</sup> <http://bbs.news.163.com/bbs/shishi/3296938.html> An interview with former Minister Weiqing Zhang.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.chinapop.gov.cn/zcjd/200707/t20070710\\_50004.html](http://www.chinapop.gov.cn/zcjd/200707/t20070710_50004.html) An interview with official of the population and family planning commission Xuejun Yu

population policy in 1980, the single child under the policy are now entering into their reproductive age and forming their own families. When they, the single child, are married, they will be able to have two children if they want under the policy that their parents followed. Today, about 30%-40% of Chinese couples are able to have two children according to the population policy even back to 1980<sup>7</sup>. Since not many couples qualified for the two children in 1980s and 1990s, this part of the policy was ignored and neglected by the public. The policy back in 1980s stated that if both husband and wife are from single child families (i.e. they do not have siblings) the couple may have two children if they wish. This new phenomenon, under the old but currently effective policy, indicates that the Chinese population policy is not simply a one as “one-child” policy. It is a policy with many facets with different guidance toward different groups of people (Xuejun Yu<sup>8</sup>)

## **2. Influence of population policy on women:**

Population policy should have influence on everyone covered by the policy. Regarding the fertility control policy, we believe that Chinese women benefit from the policy at least in the following two aspects: one is about the knowledge of contraceptives that women gained through the dissemination of contraceptive knowledge by the government. With that knowledge, women were able to control fertility themselves. The other aspect is about gender and types of relatives one may have due to the policy. The policy leads to more female relatives in an extended family

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.chinapop.gov.cn/zcjd/200707/t20070718\\_49998.html](http://www.chinapop.gov.cn/zcjd/200707/t20070718_49998.html)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.chinapop.gov.cn/zcjd/200707/t20070718\\_49998.html](http://www.chinapop.gov.cn/zcjd/200707/t20070718_49998.html)

which may give more power to women.

2.1 *Women benefit directly from the fertility control policy by being able to gain knowledge about contraceptives, learn different methods of contraceptives, and have fewer children.*

When a country has a population policy, it has to have ways to implement the policy.

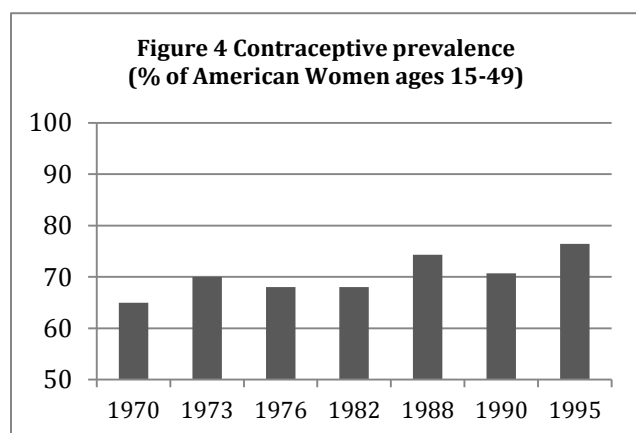
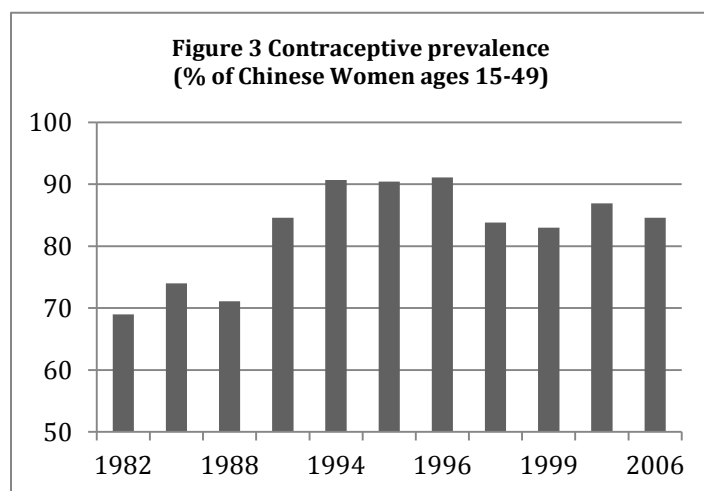
Without individuals having a way to control their fertility, the national goal of fertility control will not be achieved. In China, with the eagerness to achieve the national demographic target, the Chinese government promoted and encouraged individuals to use contraceptives. The promotion was successful. According to Figure 3<sup>9</sup>, at the beginning of the implementation of the population policy, contraceptive prevalence rate among Chinese women was below 70%. As policy implantation continued, the rate went up to over 90% in the first part of the 1990s. That is among women in age group of 15-49, 90% of them or their partners were using some type of contraceptive. This is the highest level in the world during that period<sup>10</sup>. Although the level went down a little after 1997, it was still high enough to prevent unwanted births. For a comparison, Figure 4<sup>11</sup> represented the contraceptive prevalence rate in the U.S. It is clear that the level in the U.S. was lower than that of China, indicating fewer women and their partners were using contraceptives. We cannot make a strict conclusion that the higher the prevalence rate, the lower the fertility in a population. However, higher rate will contribute to a lower fertility rate.

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<sup>9</sup> Source: World Development Indicators 2009 | The World Bank, [http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=contraceptive+&d=WDI&f=Indicator\\_Code%3aSP.DYN.CONU.ZS#WDI](http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=contraceptive+&d=WDI&f=Indicator_Code%3aSP.DYN.CONU.ZS#WDI)

<sup>10</sup> [http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=contraceptive+&d=WDI&f=Indicator\\_Code%3aSP.DYN.CONU.ZS#WDI](http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=contraceptive+&d=WDI&f=Indicator_Code%3aSP.DYN.CONU.ZS#WDI)

<sup>11</sup> Source as footnote #9



In order to look at the effects of contraceptive use on fertility, we collected information on contraceptive use among Chinese and Americans by types of contraceptives used. In Table 3, we found the most popular contraceptive (top three) methods in China were IUD, female sterilization and male sterilization, all long-term effective methods. Between 1982 and 2001, around 40-50% of married Chinese relied on IUD for fertility control. Female sterilization has stayed around 40% among all users since 1988. The oral contraceptive pill was not a popular method in China while condom use gradually gained popularity among the population, however at rather low level. In year 2006-2008, the most popular (top three) contraceptive methods

among married Americans were female sterilization, the pill and male sterilization (Table 4); two of the methods were long-term effective methods. Condom use remained a popular method among that population.

Table 3: Trends of contraceptive uses among married Chinese women (%), 1982-2001

	1982	1988	1992	1997	2001
Male sterilization	10	13	12	9	8
Female sterilization	25	37	42	40	37
Intrauterine device	50	40	40	43	46
Condom	2	2	2	4	6
Oral contraceptive pill	8	5	4	2	3
Other method	5	3	<1	1	1

Cite from Hesketh, 2005, p.1171

Table 4 Percentage of married couples and percentage of all women using each method in U.S. (2006-2008)

	Married couples	All marital statuses
Any method	79	76
Male Sterilization	13	8
Female Sterilization	24	21
IUD	5	4
Condom	12	12
Pill	16	21
All other methods	9	10

Source: Mosher and Jones, 2010, p.15

By examining the type of methods used by men or women, Chinese women seem to take an active role in the use of contraceptives. All female methods used added up to over 80% and reached to 86% in 2001 (Table 3), which is higher than that in the U.S. (57%, Table 4). Male methods however were not that popular in China. Only about 14% of couples were using male

methods (vasectomy and condoms) in China, while male methods were practiced among 30% of women using contraceptives in the United States. This special pattern of contraceptive use in China was a result of government promotion and encouragement as well as individuals' choices. At the beginning of the fertility control policy, to achieve the demographic goal set by the government, China put more emphasis on the female methods since they were the most effective way to control fertility. In general, couples in Han Chinese areas with one child were promoted to use IUD (free of charge) and those who had completed their reproduction according to the fertility quota (one child or two children) were encouraged to accept female sterilization<sup>12</sup>. Although this practice may discourage the use of other short-term contraceptive methods, after 30 years of the practice, we may look at the practice from a different angle, or a positive explanation of the practice on women. Females gain from female contraceptive methods because they can control fertility on their own and have fewer children which gives them more opportunities to work outside the family<sup>13</sup> and to devote more time to themselves.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in "Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China" (a law went into effect on September 1, 2002), Article 34 stated that "Persons providing family planning technical services shall give guidance to citizens who practice family planning in choosing the safe, effective and appropriate contraceptive methods. Couples who already have children are encouraged to choose long-acting contraceptive method ([http://www.china.org.cn/china/2010-09/25/content\\_21001026.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2010-09/25/content_21001026.htm)).

<sup>13</sup> Using gender difference in migration as an example to show the autonomy women have in their life. According to 1% of sample survey of 2005 in China, sex ratio (a ratio of males to females) was 100.5 and that of age group 15-39 was 91.6 (Duan and Yang, 2008), meaning more female migrants in the age group. Internal migration, especially rural to urban migration, usually means free choice of individuals to the move, chances to see and to be influenced by urban or outside village life, and economic gains from working in cities. Since there are more females in young and working age group among migrants in China, we may conclude that young women in China has more power to make their own decision and are more successful economically in urban. To be more economic independent, status of women at home and in society changes and is improved.

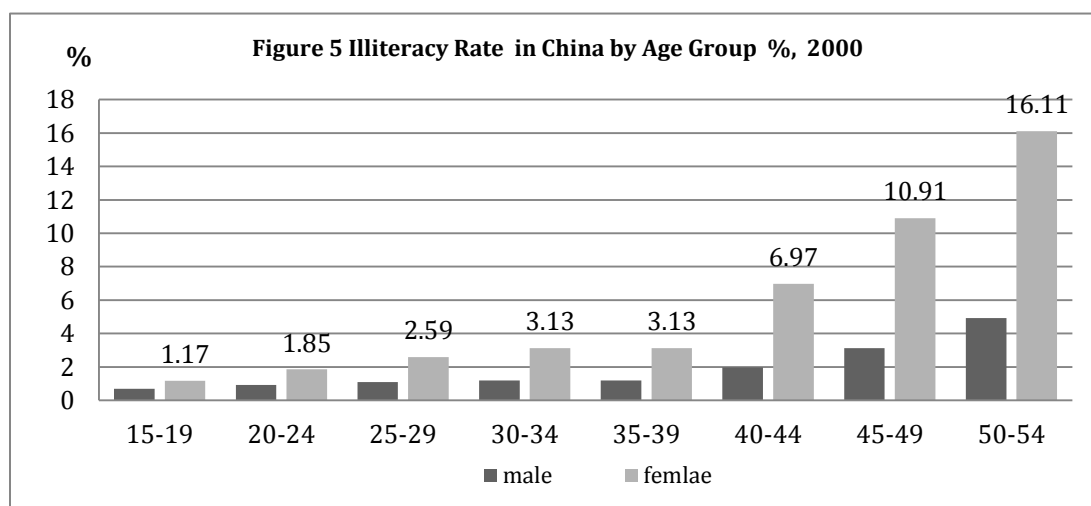
Women gained from having fewer children not only for their own life, but also by passing the gains on to their child or children. With fewer children, a woman does not only free herself from heavy family duties, but it also gives her only child or children (no matter a girl or boy) a better chance of personal development. Educational attainment is used as an example of the gains of fertility control on women. Male preference has been criticized as a sign of backwards of Chinese tradition. When a family has limited resources (e.g. financial resource), as in many parts of China, male children were usually given priority for use of resources (e.g. for education opportunity). From statistics of education, we find more rural females were illiterates and have less years of education than males do. This situation has been improved over the past few decades and the trend is shown in Figure 5<sup>14</sup>. In the figure we find illiterate rates among Chinese over 15 years old were lower among young Chinese than that of older Chinese. Individuals younger than 20 years old are generations born after China started the population policy in 1980. The lower rate of illiteracy among females and smaller difference in illiterate rate between males and females of younger age groups may not only be a result of Chinese government's efforts to improve educational attainments among Chinese, but also may be one result of family planning in China—the less children a family has, the more family resources will be used for girls' education<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/renkoupucha/2000pucha/html/t0402.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Another benefit of fertility control by women, which we will not discuss in detail, is that once women have knowledge on contraceptives and birth control, they are able to pass the knowledge on to their children which is also an effective way to disseminate the knowledge in a population.





In general, because of the population policy in China, women are able to practice birth control, which under traditional patriarchy society women might never be able to do. However, we should realize that at the beginning of the birth control campaign in 1980s, some women suffered from discrimination of having girls only at home which were considered to have no contribution in continuing their husbands' family lines, an issue will not be discussed in detail in this paper.

## 2.2 Women benefit indirectly from the fertility control policy by having more female relatives within the nuclear and extended family and gaining more power in and outside of the family after the policy implemented.

The family has always been the basic economic and political, as well as consumption and child rearing unit, in Chinese society. Ideally, the family follows a patrilocal or patrilineal extended joint family (Freedman, 1970). This tradition requires that society maintain high fertility, especially having son(s) in an individual family. In the system, parents take care of

children and pay the cost of marriage of their son(s). In return, the son's family will contribute to the parents' family economically and take care of the aged parents when they get old. Daughters will play a similar role but at their husbands' family when they marry. This tradition reflects the elaborations of kin and terminological types in the Chinese kinship system. According to Feng's detailed description of Chinese kinship, the different kin/terminological types number 286, 206 are patrilineal relatives, 80 are relatives through the mother (1948:67-125).

The current population policy will reduce the number of relatives one has dramatically in his or her life. According to the policy implemented in urban China, one will only have 8 relatives within 5 generations excluding one's own generation (Table 5). In rural areas, the picture is little complicated but at most, one may have 8-12 family members within 5 generations (2 ascending and 2 descending, not including him or herself). Even in urban areas, when the only child marries and can have two children, the maximum number of family members will not exceed that in rural area.

Table 5: Maximum Number of Family Members One May Have Lifetime under the Population Policy

Types of family member in different generations	In urban (one child per couple)	In rural (under 1 or 1.5 child per couple)
Grandparents	2+2	2+2
Parents	2	2
Own Child	1	1 or 2
Grand Child	1	1, 2, 3 or 4
Total	8	8, 10, 11 or 12

Reduction in number of family members is not a simple matter in China since it will also

reduce the possibility of having important relatives that traditional Chinese kinship builds on.

We will use the one-child policy and the 1.5 children policy as an example to show the effect of the fertility control policy on types of Chinese kin one may have under the policies.

Table 6: Relatives More Likely to Have Under Current Population Policy

	<b>Genealogical type</b>	<b>Kinterm in Chinese</b>
Parent generation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fathers' older sister</li> <li>2. Mother's younger brother</li> <li>3. Mother's younger sister</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Gu</i></li> <li>2. <i>Jiu</i></li> <li>3. <i>Yi</i></li> </ol>
ego's generation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Older sister</li> <li>2. Younger brother</li> <li>3. Younger sister</li> <li>4. Father's sister's children</li> <li>5. Mother's brother's children</li> <li>6. Mother's sister's children</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Jie-jie</i></li> <li>2. <i>Di-di</i></li> <li>3. <i>Mei-mei</i></li> <li>4. <i>Gu-biao Xiong, Di, Jie, Mei</i></li> <li>5. <i>Jiu-biao Xiong, Di, Jie, Mei</i></li> <li>6. <i>Yi-biao Xiong, Di, Jie, Mei</i></li> </ol>

Under the current policy, for a male ego, he will never have patrilateral uncles (*Bo fu* and *Shu*) since under any condition a family may not have two male children, but a 50% chance of having matrilateral uncles *Jiu* (mother's brother), *Yi* (mother's sister) or *Gu* (father sister) under a policy that a family may have second child when the first one is a girl. Under the 1.5 fertility policy, a family may have 1 girl, 2 girls, or one girl (first) and one boy (second child). Thus, a male ego will not have brothers (younger or older) or younger sisters and no “*Tang*” cousins (father's brother's son or daughter).

In a family, we find more female relatives and more less-important matrilateral relatives by

the standard of the traditional Chinese kinship system. This change is an unexpected change under current population policy, but it will rebuild the family structure in terms of the number and type of family members and reshape relationship among family members. This change will favor women in China. With less choice among family members, people will have to rely on their female or female related relatives for their daily life. The role of female relatives will be magnified among the new generations under the Chinese population policy. The change will be gradual and deserves a further detailed study and verification.

### **3. Conclusion:**

Our analyses demonstrate that by going back to the 1970s, fertility control in China was an urgent need to help society catch up with the world and to fulfill China's longing to develop into a world power. Population size was viewed as hindering the development and fertility control was seen as the most effective way to check the population increase. To achieve the goal of fertility control, Chinese women made a great contribution, judged by level of the contraceptive prevalence rate and by types of method used. They have not only made a contribution to fertility control, but also gained and benefited from that control. Without the policy or promotion of fertility control, many rural women (a large percentage in Chinese society) would not be able to know about or ways to use contraceptives to control births that they did not want. With fertility control, women also were able to distribute their wealth or resources for all their children, including their daughters. Improvement in educational attainment among females in China

explains this to some extent. With fertility control, although it was rather harsh on many individuals, Chinese women found that their status within families changes. A traditional patrilineal kinship system was shaking and one finds more matrilineal relatives due the regulation of fertility policy, especially in rural China. Women will have more power in many aspects due to changes in structure of relatives within the nuclear as well as in the extended family. Their voices will be heard more loudly in Chinese society. This silent and unexpected change generated by the policy will have profound impact on Chinese society in the future.

By controlling their fertility, or reducing number of children a woman has, Chinese women also made great contribution to the sustainability of the Chinese society as well as to the world. On 28 of January 2011, Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the UN, called for revolutionary action to achieve sustainable development in the world. In his speech, Ban seriously reminded all of us that “we mined our way to growth, we burned our way to prosperity, and we believed in consumption without consequences”, a kind of development leading to “global suicide”.<sup>16</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the balance between population and natural resources will again be a serious issue for many countries. Human beings should use the limited natural resources wisely, including reducing the burden from the size of the population on the resources. Less people, less pressure on natural resources<sup>17</sup> and greater social development. From this point of view, we conclude that

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=37405&Cr=sustainable+development&Cr1=> (02-08-2011)

<sup>17</sup> For example, per-capita water availability in China is less than that of the United States. Between 2003 and 2007, China only had 2,138 m<sup>3</sup> renewable water resources per person per year while the United States had 10,231 m<sup>3</sup>. ([www.worldwater.org/data20082009/ch05.pdf](http://www.worldwater.org/data20082009/ch05.pdf)) The volume in China was even smaller if we divide it by the size of population.

while Chinese women benefit from fertility control, directly and indirectly, they also made a great contribution to the sustainable development of China as well as the world by fertility control. The contribution of women to the development of China will be remembered.

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