

## China

"The leaders in Beijing have increased investment in agriculture and the manufacture of consumer goods and have stepped up the effort to restore and protect the economy's environmental support systems by increasing expenditures on reforestation, desert reclamation and, most importantly, family planning. In effect, China is defining security in economic and ecological terms" Lester Brown, project director, Worldwatch Institute

As the planet's most populous nation, China's response to economic and environmental problems is a remarkable story. Although some countries are aware of their need for population reduction, China has been one of the few to recognize and effectively implement programs which stress a true negative growth in population--the one child family. China's leaders had a resource assessment done which indicated that there was a need for rapid and comprehensive change in resource management and consumption. Population analysts in China graphed the numbers of infants born every year. Their projections showed that in the future their population would rapidly approach two billion people. They were aware that the consequences of such population growth would likely be famine and riots. Chinese leaders at this point began a radical program to cut back on the population. The two child family was introduced as the desired norm in 1971. As time passed it became evident that even if this program was a raging success it would not be enough to curb the explosive growth of the Chinese population. The current Chinese population program, begun in 1982, promotes the one child family and addresses the need to maintain this reduction in population for several decades to reach a more optimum population in the future.

China's 1.2 billion people have been steeped in an agrarian tradition for thousands of years. Though at present China is becoming more industrialized, this agrarian tradition has promoted large families and the pro-birth traditions that accompany such an orientation. Having children to help work the land and to be of economic support to the parents in their old age has been implicit in the social traditions of the Chinese. Male children were particularly sought to continue the family lineage, and because they would be a greater economic advantage in the male-dominated society. Other cultural inducements to produce a large family had grown up around this economic reality. A large family was a source of pride, indicative of male virility and female worth. Social interaction was based upon family needs, and mores originated from the propensity for large families.

In such a society the idea of population reduction must have been anathema. China, however, embarked on a spectacular social experiment in response to the reality of the crushing pressures of overpopulation, and, more importantly, in response to a vision of the future in which benefits can be realized by reducing population. The Chinese have embraced the idea of population reduction though they have not yet established a strong industrial base, an occurrence which seems to result in lowered birth rates.

Active encouragement by large segments of society toward population reduction is a new development in the history of human effort. It can easily be explained by the need to do something about the sheer numbers of Chinese, whose nation has the largest population on earth, but it still requires a diametrical change in thinking about the world around us. The Chinese have begun a comprehensive campaign to educate the people to the realities of overpopulation, and to encourage the one child family as the social norm of the present and the future. There is no doubt that there is resistance to the new policy, but at the very least the awareness of the problem is being brought to

the attention of the populace. Age-old traditions are resistant to change, but this educational campaign is already producing results. China's birth rate is declining rapidly, and the social acceptance of the new program is better than what one would expect. In 1983 China brought its annual growth rate to 1.06 percent (approximately 10 million births), one of the world's lowest. In some provinces the proportion of first babies among total births is as high as 97 percent. (47) From 1970 to 1980 the total fertility rate fell by 60 percent, the most rapid decline ever recorded in a large low-income population. It fluctuated in following years, but matched the 1980 low again in 1987. (48) Seeking to supplant old traditions with new ones will take time, but China is the first nation to take a very long term view of the necessity of dealing with its population problem. The Chinese, at present, are planning to continue this program for 100 years, a time span demanded by any realistic effort to curb growth.

The educational program to influence new reproductive habits is evident not only in schools but in every segment of the population. Posters and other methods of informing the general public are used to promote this unique view of population planning. The increasing awareness of the public makes having or desiring more than one child an act detrimental to the public good. The one-child family is connected in the public mind with the good of the country and the society. People are asked to forfeit their own will and desires in order that all, including the children being born at present, will benefit in the future. As children are raised in this atmosphere of concern about population pressures, new values which stress reducing the population as a program to better the nation and society will take hold. Due to this socialization it is likely that the program will be even more successful in the future. Preconceived notions of the one-child family as being foreign to the status quo will fall away. Educating the entire society to be aware of the problem will create new traditions and mores.

The government of China is the prime motivator in implementing the one-child family policy. To counter resistance to this policy, incentives are offered as benefits to those who have only one child. All medical costs of the first child's prenatal period and birth are covered by the government. Preferential schooling is made available for the firstborn. A couple pledging to have only one child is paid monthly up to the time the child is 14 years of age. If a couple decides to have a second child all benefits must be repaid and the preferential treatment given the first child is removed. Another child is allowed in the case of the death of a child, remarriage, or if a child has a serious handicap which is not hereditary. A woman must be 24 years of age before she is allowed to conceive under the current policy. The system is institutionalized and no one is exempt--wealthier families included. The government takes an active part in promoting the one-child policy and dissuading the decision to have a second child. Population planning committees and representatives proselytize for the one-child policy and advise against a second pregnancy vigorously, to the point of browbeating women who are considering having a second child.

Convincing women to have abortions rather than bear a child to term has been criticized as one of the "Draconian" measures that China has adopted. Though this type of treatment may seem harsh, the Chinese have recognized that the ecosystem of their country is incapable of providing for greater numbers of people, and have made a decision to do something about it rather than let their people starve as a consequence of inaction. Punishment is not the aim of the program; positive reinforcement is. Persuasive force is used rather than physical force. The emphasis in the Chinese policy is on birth control rather than abstinence or abortions, and the number of abortions is decreasing. (49) As values change, the social consequences of having more than one child in such a system will be obvious. Having a second child will be viewed by others as a selfish act, disdaining

the concerns or the welfare of the rest of the society. Social awareness of the benefits of population reduction coupled with an awareness of the consequences of uncontrolled population growth will radically change China's future.

Conditions in China are different from those in many other countries in the world. The government is not an elected democracy, and has more authority to impose such a program to effect the changes necessary in reducing population than would an elected government. Their culture is racially more homogeneous than in most countries of the world, thus encouraging a unity that would not be present in most nations. In looking past these differences, however, we can see that the Chinese are trying to change the consciousness of an entire nation, an entire society toward individual patterns of reproductive behavior. They are the first nation to link the destiny of their nation to the reproductive behavior of their citizens. In doing so, China has become one of the few nations to experiment with the positive possibilities of population reduction. It is all the more interesting because reproductive "freedom" has been unquestioned throughout the rest of the world.

The ongoing change which makes the expansionist economy a relic of the past will favor those nations who make a concerted effort to reduce their population. A large labor force is not as functional as it once was. Nations such as China and Singapore have seen benefits of population control in economic terms, showing that at this point in history even reducing the rate of population increase can have a positive effect on an economic system. Feeding a large population is more difficult than reducing the population when arable land is at a premium, and it can ease the burden of overtaxed agricultural systems. While the rest of the world seeks to increase yields in crops and develop genetically superior strains of food crops, China is one of the few countries seriously looking at other means to deal with the problem of too many people, too little food. Another advantage the Chinese have in dealing with their population problem is that they have not been at the forefront of the expansionist economy. They do not have to confront the notion that our only hope lies in constantly expanding the economy to meet our needs.

One consistent obstacle to facing the need for population reduction in the industrialized nations is the perception that its implementation would imply that the engine of the expansionist economy is running down. Boom cycles in the past have brought prosperity, and progress is intertwined in the public mind with continued expansion. Population reduction has always come about through famine, pestilence or war. Suggestions that we need to curb our population growth are considered negative in comparison to the idea that growth itself is of benefit. Rather than face the unpopular idea of cutting back to conserve resources, our leaders have continually proposed that we can have unlimited prosperity without making major sacrifices. We now see the growth of the bureaucracy as a focal point of our economic distress, but the attempts to pare this growth will be futile without reducing the masses that fuel it. "Conservative" political views hold that we can return to a time when the economy was stronger, by expanding the private sector while cutting government expenditures. The same people who hold these views are usually bitterly opposed to conserving by reducing the number of people that share the resources.

China, on the other hand, is rationally examining the extent of its economy to provide for its people. Economic benefits of this population policy will be hard to determine, but at present there is no indication that the change has been detrimental to China's economy. The commitment to population reduction indicates that the Chinese people believe the reverse--that fewer people will enjoy a better standard of living. Several indications validate this belief. The average housing space per person has increased since 1978. (50) Though faced with feeding 22 percent of the world's people, China has increased per capita food production and essentially eliminated malnutrition.

Agricultural production has increased to the point that China has changed to a net exporter, rather than importer, of agricultural products. China is a leading exporter of cotton today, shipping a million bales of cotton abroad annually, when as recently as 1980 the Chinese were importing cotton. In 1985 the Chinese produced 100 million more tons of grain than they did a decade earlier. (51) Though per capita income is far less than that of the industrialized nations and even less than the rest of the Third World, China's birth rate is not much higher than that of the industrialized nations, 19 as opposed to 15 per thousand population. China's infant mortality rate is 38 per thousand live births as opposed to 101 for the rest of the Third World. Life expectancy in China is not far from that in the Industrial World, 65 years as opposed to 73, and better than that of the rest of the Third World, in which life expectancy is 56. (52)

Changes in social interaction form another area which will certainly bear examination as to the effect of this radically different outlook on population growth. Critics of China's population reduction policy already are speculating that the children of the one-child family will be the recipients of too much attention and become "spoiled" as a result of that attention. It seems too early to tell what the effects of such a policy will be, but in any case, the arguments against a population reduction policy have to be stronger than a simple behavioral problem like willfulness in children. Still, such a policy is volatile and produces controversy. There have been reports of infanticide, due to the emphasis on having a male child. Infanticide is a serious problem, similar to the problem of rampant child abuse in western nations, but just as we are working to eliminate child abuse it seems only fair to assume that the Chinese are not allowing infanticide to go unchecked.

It is also possible that the effect of China's policy could be to create more unity among people who are seeing a society changing to a future without siblings, aunts, uncles or cousins. The Chinese report that the single children are precious to all of their adult contacts, which would indicate that such a sacrifice might produce a reverence for the value of children in the whole society. Whole villages consider the children born as "their" children, bringing a return of the extended family, the loss of which has been so mourned in modern society.

Other social benefits are apparent. Because there are fewer children, the opportunities available to them are better. Ninety-five percent of Chinese children are enrolled in primary school. China's literacy rate is 80 percent, excellent among Third World countries. Nine girls out of 10 are enrolled in school (53). China has become a functional model for countries struggling with similar problems of overpopulation, high infant mortality and ecological damage. The Chinese experience indicates that money alone will not solve problems, but identifying the source of each problem and addressing it effectively will. China's policies mirror a plan for Third World countries put forth by the European Parliamentarian's forum on child survival, women and population which will be discussed later in this chapter.

It would be nice if we had the time to quantify and qualify the results of the present program in China and come to a leisurely conclusion as to whether its social and economic ramifications are precisely what we would like to have happen in the rest of the world. But in the last 70 years we have nearly tripled our global population, and time is already past when we should have been making concrete decisions to reduce population. China is, at present, a laboratory in which a radical social experiment is taking place. It is easy to criticize the possible results of that experiment; it is more difficult to suggest other solutions to the problem that required such a measure.

It is interesting to note that the Chinese adopted their present population policy before it was dictated by extreme conditions such as starvation. The Chinese have been feeding over a billion people through their land reform policies, though only 11 percent of their land is cultivable. Per

capita farmland in Sichuan is less than 0.164 acres. In the United States it is more than ten times this amount. (54) China's agricultural policy stresses utilizing the knowledge of the workers who are actually doing the farming. Innovations and conservation techniques by these workers have improved land use. Making use of their huge population for labor-intensive farming, using the tools they have had at hand, and creating specialized devices suited to their form of agriculture rather than relying on imported mechanization have all been part of a successful agricultural program for the Chinese. Less than 40 years ago China was being written off by the experts as a "basket case" which was likely to have a continual problem trying to feed its people. In contrast to those predictions, China has become one of the few Third World nations to reverse the declines in production, and they have done it in such a spectacular fashion that even the Chinese government leaders have been surprised by the turnaround.

It would be absurd to suggest that China has made these positive changes simply by implementing a population reduction policy. China adopted a market-oriented agricultural system rather than trying to maintain its state-controlled collective farming. China decentralized agricultural decision-making, allowing individual farmers to make day-to-day decisions which will affect production. Destructive environmental practices are being reversed and projects to halt soil erosion have been introduced. Reforestation is a priority that is assisting agricultural improvement. The eventual benefit of the population reduction policy, however, will be that the gains that have been made will not be absorbed by an inevitably larger population. India, struggling with the same difficulties with which China has come to terms, has the burden of an additional 16 million people every year. Economic and social improvements are more than absorbed by such growth.

Despite their successful, labor-intensive farming policy that is providing food for the largest population on the earth, the Chinese decided to relieve the future stress on their arable land and ensure that they can support their population in a reasonable manner by reducing their population. By doing so they may also avoid some of the other consequences of population imbalance. China, like all nations of the world, has environmental problems that must be confronted as they move toward more development. But, as with environmental stress everywhere, reducing population cannot do anything but help. The most compelling point of the Chinese experience, however, is that one country has decided not to allow its future to be determined by factors that are within its control. Something can be done about the ravages of overpopulation, and it is being done in China.

It is essential that we learn from the Chinese experience, because it is the key to changes which will be necessary to aid the non-industrialized nations, as well as the developed countries. In confronting the necessity of reducing the world population, we must realize that the non-industrialized nations needs are different from those of the industrialized nations. The fastest growing part of the world's population is in those nations which have been characterized as the Third World. The majority of their citizens are below the age of 20, which means that they will be having children in the near future.

It is not as though the idea of population reduction would have to be forced on an unwilling populace. Surveys confirm that 463 million married women in developing countries outside of China want no more children (55). To reduce the population of these countries and increase their standard of living is not impossible, but will require a commitment that we have been unwilling to make. Perhaps we will remain unwilling to make this commitment until we recognize that we do not live in a vacuum, and that ecological debilitation in other countries will have effects upon all of us. Isolationist policies are no more functional in the ecological sphere than they have been in the economic sphere. We seem to have many voices prompting us to join the global economic

community, and many analyses of the ill effects of ignoring the global economic picture. The effects of ignoring the global ecological picture are vastly more debilitating. Hopefully, we will have the necessary time and forewarning to act on balancing our needs with the needs of the planet, although we seem to quite easily ignore those who seek to guide us to a more rational future course.

There are solutions. According to the World Resources Institute book 'World Enough and Time', "Countries in every hemisphere and at every income level have reduced birth and death rates relatively quickly: Cuba, China, Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand are all very different countries, but all have been successful in speeding up the demographic transition." (56) A report on the proceedings of the European Parliamentarians' forum on child survival, women and population held in February 1986 at The Hague, Netherlands resulted in this informal agenda. "The ideas put forward ranged from urgent and far-reaching priorities--such as universal immunization, oral rehydration therapy and family planning availability--to less ambitious and more practical necessities. Some of them:

\*\* Develop and implement integrated strategies in primary health care services and health systems in the poorer nations, emphasizing greater participation by women and youth.

\*\* Marshall all available resources for immunization drives around the world to reach the goal of universal immunization against major childhood diseases by 1990.

\*\* Distribute inexpensive oral rehydration packets to the vast majority of developing world families who still don't have them to fight the dehydration of diarrhoea.

\*\* Make available family planning methods, including voluntary means of contraception, to millions of couples around the world who do not wish to increase the size of their families.

\*\* Intensify educational and informational campaigns to make people aware that population programmes can improve the health of entire communities.

\*\* Utilize existing institutions such as churches, political parties, trade unions and women's organizations to give women a greater participatory role in their communities.

\*\* Establish training centres for village women to learn the basics of hygiene, nutrition, literacy and family health.

\*\* Support research efforts and surveys to discover how decisions affecting health and nutrition are made at the household level in a given society. Find out what positive and negative beliefs and practices determine the quality of nurturing to assist development workers.

\*\* Give rural women more free time to educate themselves by reducing their domestic burdens: drill wells and provide appropriate and inexpensive appliances such as millet grinders, motorized pumps and stoves.

\*\* Work with policymakers to repeal legal structures that deny women access to contraception, that curtail the status of women, and, in particular, limit women's and children's chances for education.

\*\* Provide the young in developing countries with the scientific facts of reproduction and information on the dangers of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; and set up centres for pregnant teen-age girls.

\*\* Postpone the age of marriage--by law if necessary--and support programmes to delay the birth of first children until mothers reach 20."

Estimates of the costs involved in carrying out these types of programs range from \$4 billion in 1985 dollars to \$7.6 billion by the year 2000. If these sums seem large, consider that in 1985 the nations of the earth spent \$940 billion on weapons. The key to reshaping our world in regard to nuclear weapons is that we are being forced to think in global terms. The devastation of a nuclear war will not affect one small area and leave the rest of the planet to say we are sorry. Similarly, the key to recognizing the solution to the dilemma we face in our ecological concerns is that we can no longer think provincially. Chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) pollution of the atmosphere by the United States is depleting the protective ozone layer and impacts the entire world. The U.S. is also the greatest producer of greenhouse gases, which may very well effect the most severe environmental calamity ever induced by man. Deforestation and soil erosion in Africa, South America and Asia affects all of us. Though the immediate impact is not readily visible, the future impact is likely to be. We have no way of establishing whether the decline of rainfall in areas of desertification is a normal geological cycle, or a more ominous portent of our interference with the hydrological cycle. We cannot write off areas where we are causing ecological degradation, assuming that other parts of the world will not be affected.

Above all, we must recognize that overpopulation is a world problem, not limited to Third World countries. Those of us in the industrialized nations have nothing to boast about when you consider our pollution, garbage crises, traffic snarls, urban blight and other indications of overpopulation which we manage to ignore. A large population eating hamburgers in North America affects the ecology of South American cattle ranching areas. A world population demanding larger and larger quantities of fish assures that the fishing industry will deplete, and eventually exhaust, those areas providing fish. The idea that an increasing population will live self-sufficiently within its own borders is ludicrous. We utilize the resources of the entire planet for our needs. As we begin to recognize that we are dependent on all our neighbors in the interwoven economic fabric of the nations of the earth, we must also realize that we are similarly dependent ecologically.

The exploitation of Third World countries by the industrialized nations, specifically, the United States, has helped to prevent their reaching economic levels at which their populations would decrease. The United States government has refused to fund United Nations efforts recently, though it has been willing to take credit or share in the credit for United Nations successes. When we remove funding for the United Nations, we may send the message that we are displeased with the politics of the organization, but we also turn our backs on the developing nations. We cannot maintain with impunity a position which repudiates the goals of the report of the European Parliamentarians to which we referred earlier in this chapter. To make our world safer and more ecologically balanced, we must strive together to solve these problems, not only because it is morally justified, but also because it makes sense economically. If we viewed the planet solely as one huge business enterprise determined to increase management efficiency, we would have to

acknowledge that we are bankrupt, or on our way to bankruptcy in many areas. Extensive parts of Africa, India, South America, North America, Asia and Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, would have to be written off as losses. The exploitation of resources in the Third World would be examined with a much more critical eye. The board of directors and the stockholders of our corporation would be demanding an accounting for the poor business practices that led to this situation. Aid programs would be held accountable for backing large, centralized development projects which benefitted few, and were economically and ecologically damaging to many.

Unfortunately, our corporation is blind to the damage that is caused by world population growth. We are cutting back on funds for research and development of contraceptives, for family planning, for all aspects of population control that are in our best interests. That is bad business and poor common sense, because population reduction is one of the best possible investments that we could make for the future. Our continual population growth is not good for anyone. It won't help business, the rich, the poor, Democrat, Republican, capitalist, communist, believer or non-believer. It is the ultimate example of self-defeating behavior. And it is totally unnecessary. We do have the people with the ability and the knowledge to change this behavior. All they need are the resources and the support to promote change. At present, our only example is the Chinese. In their own way, despite lack of international support, the Chinese are the first to confront the issue of too many people and limited resources. If they fail, at least they cannot be accused of a lack of courage or malignant neglect.