



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on January 14, 2010

China's Under-population Crisis

China is facing a population crisis — a tremendous gender imbalance in its population of young people. A report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) predicts that by 2020 one in five young men will not be able to find a bride. That amounts to 24 million bachelors.



CASS's "2010 Social Blue Paper" says boys under four years old outnumber girls in the same age range by 1.23 to 1, [People's Daily Online](#) reports. CASS researcher Zhang Yi explained gender proportion has historically remained in the normal range of 1.05 to 1 based on a higher mortality rate in males, but population censuses since 1980 show "the gender imbalance has been growing wider year after year."

The *People's Daily Online* made a passing remark regarding China's one-child population control policy but said experts note its effect has been merely to cause "parents to avoid reporting the births of many female babies, leading to a statistical imbalance." The [London Times](#) goes into more detail. It reports that the CASS paper blames China's one-child policy for creating the imbalance as well as a host of social problems accompanying it, including crime, prostitution, and social instability. CASS clearly admits the one-child policy has led to a bias for boys. The *Times* quotes the report saying, "Sex-specific abortions remain extremely commonplace, especially in rural areas."

Why the penchant for boys? In her 2004 book [Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son](#), Kay Ann Johnson explains that in the patriarchal Chinese society parents want a son to carry on the family name and care for them in their old age. Johnson said the Chinese think of daughters as "lost" at marriage, forced to "transfer their primary obligations" to the husband's family. Therefore, when Chairman Deng Xiaoping instituted the one-child policy in 1979, orphanages across China started to see a dramatic upswing in the number of healthy girls entering their doors. The problem grew so quickly that within a decade China modified its one-child policy to allow those in rural areas who have a daughter to have a second child, and international adoptions from China to the United States alone rose from 12 in 1988 to more than 5,000 in 2000.

Also in the 1980s, ultrasound was introduced in China, leading to a staggering rise in abortions of girls. It should come as no surprise that China's census records show that this rise in abortions was accompanied by increasingly disproportionate numbers of boys born to Chinese couples. The *Times* reports that China now restricts tests to determine whether a fetus is a girl, but abortion, infanticide, and abandonment remain common. Chinese demographers estimate the one-child policy has "prevented 400 million births."

Changes are already on the horizon. The [Washington Post](#) recently reported that the city of Shanghai has launched an unprecedented publicity campaign to combat its population crisis, urging residents to



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apply for permits to have a second child. Otherwise, the percentage of people 60 and older will continue growing from last year's high of 22 percent. At present, Shanghai's birthrate is less than one child per couple. The first few months of the campaign have delivered disappointing results, however, as even large townships have received only a handful of applications.

The *Post* says decades of propaganda posters such as "Mother Earth is too tired to sustain more children" and "One more baby means one more tomb" have left their mark. The article quotes one couple blaming the poor economy and nationalized insurance for their decision to have only one child. Another resident explained his reason as, "Ours is the first generation with higher living standards. We do not want to make too many sacrifices."



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