

WINDOW TO CHINA

CHINA'S ONE CHILD POLICY

By Joshua Zhong

When the People's Republic of China was established on October 1, 1949, the population in China was about 530 million. Three decades later, the population had reached more than 800 million. To prevent an economic and natural resources disaster and ensure long-term development, the Chinese government adopted the Malthusian Laws of Population Limitation and issued the "Two Children Per Couple" rule in 1978. However, the new rule failed to slow the rapid growth of the population. By late 1980, for the first time, the China's population reached one billion.

To curb the seemingly uncontrollable population growth, President Hua Guo Feng ordered the National People's Congress in September, 1980, to write the "One Child Policy (OCP)" into the revised Marriage Law. At the same time, the legal age for marriage was changed from 20 to 22 for men and from 18 to 20 for women as a way to slow down the birth rate. To ensure the implementation of the OCP, the State Family Planning Commission was created.

As national policy, the OCP requires a married couple to be responsible citizens by having no more than one child. At the same time, it encourages young people to delay their marriage or not to have children immediately after marriage. If a man marries at 25 and woman at 23, it considered a "late marriage". If a legally married couple gives birth three years after their marriage, it considered a "late birth". The government offers certain financial rewards and job promotions to these couples.

The OCP only applies to Han Chinese residing in urban areas. Urban Han Chinese comprise about 25% of the total population. The agricultural Han Chinese, about 70% of the total population, are allowed to have a second child only if their first child is a girl. However, the second birth must be four years after the first birth. Urban Han Chinese couples are allowed to have another child if they have one of the following situations: the first child has genetic disease, both parents are the only child in their families, remarried couples, couples whose first child is an adopted child, couples with one spouse working in dangerous environments, or couples with overseas relatives.

To avoid ethnic resentment and to protect national unity, the Chinese government did not apply the strict practice of the OCP to the fifty minority ethnic groups until 1995. In February 1992, when the population in Mainland China reached 1.15 billion, the State Family Planning Commission required all the minority groups, except Tibet, to adhere to the OCP.

To discourage unplanned births, the government stipulates severe financial and occupational punishments against couples who break the rule. If a couple gives birth to a second child, they will be fined 30% to 50% of their combined annual salary. They will

not receive any raises or promotions for five years, and they will receive no medical subsidies for seven years. To prevent couples from abandoning their female children, the government made child-abandonment a punishable crime. Doctors who use ultra sound to reveal a child's gender before birth will face up to a 10000 RMB fine, which is about one year's salary.

Couples who purposely delay marrying or giving birth to a child will be awarded with longer paid maternity leave for both the mother and father. They also will be awarded five additional vacation days each year and receive priority consideration for housing, childcare, child education, medicaid, and employment. Furthermore, they will receive an additional 5% retirement allowance.

China's OCP has been sanctioned and supported by the United Nations from the beginning, while at the same time condemned by many religious and human rights organizations in the West. According to the year 2000 census, the Chinese population has reached 1.3 billion. In comparison, the population in America is about 281 million.