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One Child: The Story Of China's Most Radical Experiment



Synopsis

When Communist Party leaders adopted the one-child policy in 1980, they hoped curbing birthrates would help lift China's poorest and increase the country's global stature. But at what cost? Now, as China closes the book on the policy after more than three decades, it faces a population grown too old and too male, with a vastly diminished supply of young workers. Mei Fong has spent years documenting the policy's repercussions on every sector of Chinese society. In *One Child*, she explores its true human impact, traveling across China to meet the people who live with its consequences. Their stories reveal a dystopian reality: unauthorized second children ignored by the state, only children supporting aging parents and grandparents on their own, villages teeming with ineligible bachelors, and an ungoverned adoption market stretching across the globe. Fong tackles questions that have major implications for China's future: whether its "Little Emperor" cohort will make for an entitled or risk-averse generation; how China will manage to support itself when one in every four people is over 65 years old; and, above all, how much the one-child policy may end up hindering China's growth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1980 the Chinese Communist Party issued a letter requesting its members to voluntarily limit their families to one child. Most Chinese understood immediately that there was nothing voluntary about the "request," which resulted in the largest social experiment the world has ever witnessed.

Although the one child rule was unevenly enforced in different regions of China and could be gotten

around entirely if parents were wealthy enough to pay the fines mandated for additional births, it has nevertheless had a massive impact which will intensify in coming decades. Mei Fong's history of the consequences of the one child rule is also partly her own memoir. A journalist who moves freely between the United States and China, she has had ample opportunities to witness the rule's consequences. The Sichuan earthquake of 2008, for example, meant that she spent many days interviewing grieving parents whose only children had been killed. She also had ample opportunity to talk with women who were forced to undergo extremely late term abortions and with other women who were responsible for seeing that their neighbors obeyed the rule. Her interviews with scientists and demographers made her aware of the policy's long term implications for China: a rapidly aging population, enormous numbers of males who will be unable to find wives, and a population decline that will damage the national economy and health for most of the twenty-first century. She herself became part of the story as she and her husband attempted to have a child of their own but were forced to deal with fertility problems.

Mei Fong does such a great job of weaving together bits of her own struggle with having children in this in-depth look at China's one child policy, that this work of non-fiction really struck a nerve with me, and I think most women, especially mothers, will feel the same way. This is a book I can't help but want to reflect over, then talk about with friends and family. The stories in this book have a way of lingering. It's well written, and discusses where the policy came from, how it went into effect, how it worked, what happened because of it, and how it has affected the Chinese family and economy today. It's really comprehensive, without ever being boring. It is very well written, highlighting individuals and incidents in such a way to drive the reality of such an intrusive policy home. I absolutely wanted to cry when I read the story of Feng Jianmei. I wished that the book had a few pictures, and perhaps some simple maps, that's all I'd have changed about it. While it was described in great detail, the picture of Feng with her dead baby girl would certainly have been nice to have in the book. I found that picture on the web. I found myself talking to friends about this book, and some of the stories in it, and many are interested in it - while I feel men and women will learn a lot from this book, I think that women in particular will probably have strong opinions about it. The section on adoptions was rather chilling to me. I had looked into adoption from China once myself. At the time I felt sure the babies were just not wanted.... I'm glad I read this book. I'm glad that the policy has been ended, and I'm glad that so many people helped bring that about, but mostly, after reading this, I'm really glad I live in America.

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