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Family Planning and Human Trafficking in China

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Divisions concerning best policy practices simmer underneath the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) image as a united body with one major exception: China’s Family Planning Policy or the one child per couple policy. Within the CCP, China’s 1.3 billion population is accepted, without challenge as a major problem that must be addressed ever since the party took a hardline stance in 1979 to reduce the Chinese people’s fertility. An unintended consequence of the population policy is the significantly skewed ratio between male and female children, causing a scarcity of women, which in turn contributes to the continuous decline in the status of women. While women’s diminished status is exacerbated by China’s population policy it was not the policy itself that caused the Missing Women Phenomenon. Rather, it is deeply embedded beliefs about women’s inferiority to men socially, culturally, and economically. A result of the decline in women is a high demand for brides for Chinese ever growing population of bachelors, a demand that will cause the trafficking of women and girls to increase in China throughout the twenty-first century.

In this paper, I establish the link between the “one child per couple” policy’s impact on trafficking of women and girls. First, I provide a background of the infamous one child policy. Second, I assess the history of male preference within China. Third, I evaluate the current situation of trafficking in persons, including the Chinese government’s response, and projections for the continued growth of trafficking within China. Fourth, I analyze China’s growing internal migrant population, which serves as the best case study to surmise the ramifications of male gender preference as exacerbated by China’s population policy.
The One Child Per Couple Child Policy: An Overview

For more than a century, the Chinese have used the word “science” to refer not just to the study of the natural world but also to a way of thinking that is supposed to be rational, objective, and modern. In a nation disillusioned by Mao’s utopian fantasies, Deng’s emphasis on science as the party’s new touchstone was a political masterstroke... the leadership’s blind faith in science led it to adopt an extreme solution to a problem that while serious, could have been managed in other ways. At the center of the process was a group of eminent rocket scientists, men who had been sheltered from Mao’s campaigns, who had access to computers and international journals, and who were supremely confident in their own abilities... These men viewed the population as a machine to be fine-tuned by engineers like themselves, not a society of humans with rights, values and preferences.¹

This quote by Philip P. Pan illustrates the greatest flaw in China’s population planning policies during the post-Mao era (1976-present). During the Mao era (1949-1976), enthusiasm on the part of party members earned cadres promotions and power. Advancement could not be achieved through specialization or education but enthusiasm for the CCP and advancing Mao’s ideal socialist society. During the post-Mao era, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the party began to embrace education and specialization. Party members who rose to prominence were educated in fields such as engineering and science. Specializations in fields such as political science and sociology, which would be able to forecast the disastrous human impact of certain policies on the Chinese people, were not valued. Therefore, the one child per couple policy was implemented with very little assessment of how the policy would threaten China’s social stability.

The first census in China, taken in 1953, revealed the Chinese population was 583 million people.² After the census results revealed the massive size of the Chinese population, debate ensued within the party about whether or not China’s immense population was its greatest asset

or its greatest inhibitor. Although Chairman Mao Zedong believed the people were China's greatest asset, he tempered this belief through enacting policies granting women access to contraceptives and encouraging family planning as part of socialist enterprises. The pragmatist faction within the party, led by Deng Xiaoping, advocated strict state enforced birth control but Mao was opposed to this. Therefore, it was not until after Mao's death in 1976, and Deng's subsequent rise to power, that strict family planning policies were devised and imposed. Deng formerly proposed the policy of one child per couple in 1978. It was implemented one year later in 1979, establishing the population control policy as a crucial component of economic development and modernization.

From its inception, the policy was part of the all-encompassing reform and modernization goals of the Deng Xiaoping era. There was little resistance to the policy in urban areas. Rather, it was, and continues to be, the rural areas where the policy faces its greatest challenges in implementation and citizen resistance. Deng's economic liberalization campaigns included the 'family responsibility system' which made it economically advantageous for peasant families to have larger families. Deng-era agricultural policy de-collectivized farmland and let families engage in their own economic enterprises, such as selling excess grain on the market. In 1984, the policy was relaxed in rural areas, to adapt to the needs of peasant farming families. Minority groups, such as the Tibetans and Uyghurs, who would have vehemently opposed to the strict

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4 White, *China’s Longest Campaign*, 2006, 26-32, 70.

5 White, *China’s Longest Campaign*, 2006, 1.

6 White, *China’s Longest Campaign*, 2006, 5.

birth control limits were granted exceptions within the Chinese legal system because they were more likely to challenge the regime as opposed to the Han ethnic majority.  

The policy continues to be amended, due to concerns about elder-care burdening only-child couples with the decline in social services offered by the state. In urban areas the policy was altered to allow couples comprised of single children to have two children in urban areas that were previously restricted to only one child. This amendment is both the result of the reduction of fertility in urban areas being under population replacement levels and concerns about elder care for the growing number of elderly people in China.

Consequences of the one child per couple policy, even after being relaxed, remain severe. The fertility rate of China declined during the 1970’s with less intensive and invasive family planning campaigns advocating marrying older, producing fewer children, and longer spans of time between producing children. As evident by developed Asian nations, such as the Republic of Korea and Taiwan, declining fertility appears to be a phenomenon associated with urbanization that requires little, if any, intervention by the state. These nations did not advocate family planning programs as invasive and controlling as China’s in order to achieve low fertility rates. The one child per couple policy, in retrospect, looks like a pet project of Deng’s exemplifying the personalism, without rationality, under which the CCP operated since the Mao era. The unnecessary escalation of the early 1970’s family planning model, to the extremely invasive and controlling program implemented after 1979, resulted in mass corruption as officials struggling to meet population quotas, and rampant human rights violations, especially the rights of women and girls.

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8 White, China’s Longest Campaign, 2006, 167.
10 White, China’s Longest Campaign, 2006, 59, 73-76.
The CCP was unaware of the positive correlation between economic development and fertility reduction; therefore, the CCP invested resources in the one child per couple policy that could have been used for the betterment of the Chinese people. Resources that could have fostered economic development, with less detrimental societal consequences, were wasted implementing aggressive family planning policies throughout China. Resources ensuring the enforcement of the one child policy could have been allocated to ensuring gender preference did not widen the gap between males and females, within the People’s Republic of China (PRC), this could have at best averted or at the very least significantly reduced the negative consequences produced by the gender gap, such as trafficking in women and children.

In 2012, influential bodies with close ties to the party, voiced calls for the party to end the policy.\textsuperscript{11} The transition of power, in November 2012, offered few indicators that the policy will be ended. The conservative faction, and re-emergence of Jiang Zemin, suggests significant reforms, such as ending the one-child per couple policy, will not occur during the next five years.\textsuperscript{12} The next opportunity for a factional power shift, and potential for reforms, is not until 2016.

**Male Preference in China and Overview**

Male preference is a phenomenon not unique to China, nor is it unique to Asia but exists, to some extent, in every society, and as such, often manifests in cultural distinct ways. Chinese male preference is rooted in Confucian cultural beliefs, which strictly define each person’s role and values male roles over female roles. The duties of women are to marry, have children, and care for her husband’s family. Women always perform these roles in subservience to male

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  \item \textsuperscript{11}Xinhua, "1st LD-Write thru: Time To Loosen Family Planning Policy: Think Tank," Beijing, China, October, 26, 2012. Electronic.
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authority figures, whether they be their father, husband, or eldest son. Elder care and continuing the family lineage is the responsibility of the son, not the daughter, who upon birth is expected to leave the family one day and join her husband’s family.

Historically, Chinese families were quite large, comprised of many sons and daughters even though sons were always valued more. The fertility rate in China began to decline during the 1970’s. However, the preference for male children remained unaffected. The strict one child per couple policy was introduced without a comparable policy to combat male preference and ensure the gender ratio within China remained balanced. By not addressing this deeply rooted cultural belief, of male superiority, the CCP strengthened the foundation for societal chaos in subsequent generations as women become increasingly scarce.

Assessments of international organizations, cooperating with regional organizations are often overly optimistic about their ability to change cultural norms and attitudes regarding gender. Male preference has been a part of Chinese culture since the dynastic period and economic development and modernization do not possess mechanisms to curb male preference held by the majority of Chinese people for centuries. The most telling evidence of male preference is the decision by a significant number of Chinese couples to continue trying to have a male child after giving birth to a girl, despite coercive measures and punishments from the state, including lost career opportunities, loss of housing and loss of benefits.

The basic understanding of communal or collective values makes the existence of the gender gap within China seem illogical as individuals within collective values societies are supposed to value the greater good over individual gain. However, this interpretation does not

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13 UNFPA Country Technical Services Team for East and South-East Asia, Bangkok, Thailand. Cultural: Reproductive Health Challenges and Strategies in East and South-East Asia August 2005, 1. PDF.
14 Hudson and den Boer, Bare Branches, 2004, 165-166.
take into account the understanding of collective values by Chinese people where the unit of analysis is the family and not the individual. As previously mentioned, the greatest duty of a couple is to continue the family line, this can only be done through a son. While female scarcity is an issue that is apparent at all levels of society, the duty to family, as understood by Chinese collective values, remains to fulfill the obligation to family first. Therefore, the idea that female scarcity will eventually result in couples recognizing the value of the girl-child is false. The ramifications of this are evident in the demand for ‘baby-brides’ (infants and girl-children purchased and raised for future marriages) and forced marriages which are discussed later.

As previously stated, sons, not daughters continue the family (although women clearly are necessary in the biological sense). It is the duty of the son and his wife to care for his parents in their old age. In order to ensure one’s own survival, and prosperity, the family must produce sons. This attitude has not changed, even in circumstances when women are able to earn greater income. The Chinese government does not provide an adequate social welfare net for elderly citizens that enables them to depend less on their children for care in their old age. This strengthens the validity of the claim that modernization does not increase the value of women and women’s rights within societies.

The gap between males and females at birth is quite substantial, however, so is the rate of infant mortality amongst girls in China. Male infants are more vulnerable, for biological reasons, to die as infants than females; globally, infant mortality rates amongst male babies is naturally slightly higher, yet in Asia this trend is reversed. Female infants are not dying from malnutrition, but from denial of adequate medical care by their families during their early years.

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of life. This shows how little females are valued in China, as well as the inadequacies with the Chinese healthcare system and other social welfare programs. When parents must choose between caring for a male or female child they will spend much more money to care for the boy than the girl.

Since its inception, the CCP recognized Chinese culture devalued women and made efforts to elevate the status of women through legislation, such as the Marriage Law of 1950. Women’s status within the CCP, during its formative years, compared to the status of women throughout the rest of China’s history, greatly improved within the party, due to the need for people in order to overthrow the Nationalists and defeat foreign invaders. Women were an untapped resource and valuable to the cause. However, CCP membership, since the CCP rose to power, has been esoteric for women at best and central leadership, throughout China’s history, is best surmised with the quote, ‘the sky is high and the emperor is far away.’

In its White Paper on Population Policy released in December 2000, the PRC acknowledged women are greatly disadvantaged within Chinese society. This document states that the government will combat prostitution, trafficking in persons, and uphold the rights of the girl-child. This suggests the CCP is cognizant of the decline of women’s status. However, the document provides no indications of how the party plans to address declining women’s status and threats facing female children. The White Paper still links China’s one child per couple policy to economic growth. The linkage between reducing the population, and economic growth and development, has been the justification for the strict one child per couple policy since

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19 Hudson and den Boer, *Bare Branches,* 2004, 149.
its inception.\textsuperscript{23} The White Paper offered no suggestion as to how the CCP plans to combat gender preference which is causing the status of women to be diminished.

Corruption also undermines any significant efforts to implement policies endorsed by the central government throughout China. Any attempt to rectify the major societal issues facing China in the twenty-first century is dependent upon strict and enforceable anti-corruption measures. However, the White Paper neglects to mention the problem of corruption in implementing the one child per couple policy which involves violence against women. The CCP prioritizes economic development above civil and political liberties, and environmental protection. As long as the one child per couple policy is linked with economic development, the CCP will never completely abolish it.

Technology has exacerbated the expression of male preference within China. Sex selective abortions would not be possible without ultrasound technology that is available even in the lesser developed regions of China.\textsuperscript{24} The state, cognizant of this problem, did outlaw revealing the sex of the child to expectant parents; however this is largely ineffective as parents will bribe doctors to learn the sex of the child.\textsuperscript{25} While revealing the sex of the child to parents is illegal, sex selective abortion is not a crime.\textsuperscript{26}

The role of the All-China Women’s Federation in addressing male preference is active but conflicting. The organization is actively engaging international organizations, such as the United Nations and International Labor Organization, to reduce male preference and attempting

\textsuperscript{23} White, \textit{China’s Longest Campaign}, 2006, 5.
\textsuperscript{24} UNFPA Shuzhou Li. \textit{Imbalanced Sex Ratio at Birth and Comprehensive Intervention in China}. 2007, 8.
\textsuperscript{25} UNFPA Shuzhou Li. \textit{Imbalanced Sex Ratio at Birth and Comprehensive Intervention in China}. 2007, 8
\textsuperscript{26} UNFPA Shuzhou Li. \textit{Imbalanced Sex Ratio at Birth and Comprehensive Intervention in China}. 2007, 10.
to secure funding the state may not be able to supply.\textsuperscript{27} There have been some levels of success in lowering the sex ratio at birth rate in cities such as Chaohu, yet the ratio remains incredibly and unnaturally high, having been lowered from 125 to 114 in three years.\textsuperscript{28} There is also no indication as to whether this was a fluctuation and if concentrated intervention is needed to continue to keep the rate lower.

Methods employed by the All-China Women’s Federation are questionable. They have been observed as reinforcing stereotypes about women’s roles and male preference in areas throughout China, especially the countryside.\textsuperscript{29} This is an example of the lack of capacity from the central government and other Chinese institutions, resulting in varying policies and implementation at regional and local levels. Chinese organizations and government lack the capacity to be consistent, without consistency there can be no successful systematic effort to address male preference throughout the entire country. While small areas of success exist, they require large amounts of resources focused on one small area. Aberrations of small regions with reduced male preference occur; however, this is not applicable to the rest of mainland China unless the capacity of the central government is strengthened.

**Human Trafficking in China the Current State**

The United Nations defines human trafficking as:

> The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of

\textsuperscript{27} UNFPA Shuzhou Li. *Imbalanced Sex Ratio at Birth and Comprehensive Intervention in China*. 2007, 12
\textsuperscript{28} UNFPA Shuzhou Li. *Imbalanced Sex Ratio at Birth and Comprehensive Intervention in China*. 2007, 9
the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person, having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.\textsuperscript{30}

Since 2001, the United States State Department has released an annual report assessing the policies and practices of every nation-state in remedying trafficking in persons. The report does not rank countries on the prevalence of trafficking within their borders, but on efforts made by the government and law enforcement to combat trafficking in persons. Countries are classified as: Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 watch list and Tier 3. Tier 1 is the highest ranking based on a country’s successful drafting and implementation of measures to combat trafficking in persons. Tier 2 is when a country is partially successful and showing progress in designing and implementing anti-human trafficking measures. The Tier 2 watch list ranking is designated for a country that is regressing in the design and implementation of anti-human trafficking measures. The Tier 3 ranking is the lowest; a country with a Tier 3 ranking does not adhere to any criteria to design and implement anti-human trafficking policies. The report assesses state response to trafficking of all persons for purposes of labor or sexual exploitation. Throughout the international community, the best response to human trafficking is a holistic approach that includes: prevention of trafficking, prosecution of traffickers and protection of victims. The United States State Department evaluates every nation on the basis of policy formation and implementation in addressing these three issues.

China is a source, destination and transit country, however, the majority of trafficking in persons is not cross-border but intra-state and predominantly amongst China’s migrant population.\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{hukou} system makes these migrants more vulnerable than migrants seeking economic opportunities in other countries. The majority of the State Department’s report


\textsuperscript{31} United States Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report. United States Department of State, 2012, PDF. 118.
concerning China in 2012 focused on trafficking for labor purposes, however, the portion devoted to women and sexual trafficking specifically linked China’s population policies and cultural preferences for sons as skewing the gender ratio and increasing trafficking of brides to and within China.

In addition to economic migrants, China’s ethnic minorities have the highest risk of being trafficked for labor and sexual exploitation. The city of Jinghong in Yunnan province exemplifies the problem of trafficking within China which resulted from modernization campaigns enacted in the 1970’s. Jinghong is the sex tourism capital of the PRC as more and more brothels emerge. Jinghong serves as an excellent case study for the effects of modernization and the one child per couple policy on the status of women. Yunnan Province had one of the highest skewed gender ratios in China. The province was the location of many economic reforms resulting in the entire province becoming a breeding ground for trafficking in persons. The scarcity of women, combined with the demands for women in the sex entertainment industry as well as brides resulted in an increase of women being trafficked to Jinghong. Many of the victims trafficked to Yunnan for sexual exploitation come from ethnic minority and economic migrant populations.

The PRC has been on the Tier 2 watch list from 2005 until it was categorized as Tier 3 in the 2013 report. Before this downgrade in 2005 China was ranked at Tier 2 showing a lack of

action despite the *White Paper on Population Policy* promising to combat trafficking in persons, prostitution and to protect and promote the rights of women and girls.\textsuperscript{36} The most recent report assessing the effort of the Chinese government to combat human trafficking was not optimistic as the Chinese government appears to be getting progressively worse in combating human trafficking.

The Government of the People’s Republic of China does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government did not demonstrate evidence of increasing efforts to address human trafficking over the previous year; therefore, China is placed on the Tier 2 Watch List for an eighth consecutive year. China was granted a waiver of an otherwise required downgrade to Tier 3 because its government has a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute a significant effort to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is devoting sufficient resources to implement that plan.\textsuperscript{37}

The PRC’s written propositions show, at least, recognition of a growing problem of trafficking in women on the part of the CCP. Trafficking within China is rising and this serves as a threat to stability within China, threatening the CCP’s legitimacy.\textsuperscript{38} Chinese police have rescued victims in raids on brothels; however, there is no successful mechanism for reincorporating victims of trafficking into society.\textsuperscript{39} Cultural abhorrence of prostitution, and the lowly status of women, makes returning to village life impossible for some victims and dangerous for those that were sold to traffickers by their parents. Raids on brothels and establishments utilized by trafficking organizations, reflects the increasing demand for women and not improvements on the part of the state in designing and implementing anti-human

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\textsuperscript{36} United States Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report. United States Department of State, 2013. PDF. 128.

\textsuperscript{37} United States Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report. United States Department of State, 2012, 118.

\textsuperscript{38} Yik Yi Chu “Human Trafficking and Smuggling and China,” 2011, 39.

trafficking measures. Corruption and a lack of organization plagues enforcement agencies within the CCP as a result these raids serve only to reveal the growing nature of the problem and not progress in resolving it. Unless the CCP is able to successfully enact programs to alter male preference, gender imbalance will remain. This gender balance will continue to drive demand for women and women will continue to be sold as brides.

The Chinese have had minimal although not significant instances of success, in combating trafficking organizations; however, the diversity of trafficking organizations themselves makes the future success of China’s trafficking campaigns grim. There are three levels of criminal organizations within China engaging in trafficking of persons. The first level is highly sophisticated, including a vast network of operatives used to recruit, transport and sell victims, these large organizations are known as legions. The second level is smaller and less sophisticated organizations called guerilla traders. The third and most simplistic level of criminal trafficking organizations are individual traders.

The reason for the diversity of organizations is trafficking in persons is a low risk criminal enterprise that yields high profits. The legal system punishes trafficking in drugs and weapons more severely than trafficking in persons, which makes it appealing to criminal organizations, in addition to yielding high profits. As economic development increases, the demand for women as brides by individuals and attractions in the sex entertainment increases. The Chinese legal system fails to adequately respond to trafficking in persons; therefore, the number of traffickers at all three levels of criminal organizations grows and they become bolder

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42 Jiang, Quanbao and Sanchez-Barricarte Jesus, J. “Trafficking in Women in China,” Research Institute for Asian Women Sookmyung Women’s University, Seoul, Korea, 2011, PDF. 91.
43 Jiang, Quanbao and Sanchez-Barricarte, Jesus J. “Trafficking in Women in China,” 2011, 91.
in their practices of abducting and selling women and children. It is in cities such as Jinghong that organized crime units have successfully trafficked women with few legal repercussions.

China’s 2012 National Plan of Action for anti-trafficking efforts is scheduled to be released in December 2012. According to the United States’ State Department report, the PRC shows signs of recognizing the severity of the trafficking of persons for sexual and labor exploitation. However, the report does not take into account the history of policy implementation and the lack of capacity for central government apparatus to adequately penetrate rural China. The most difficult problems facing the enforcement of China’s population policy were in the countryside and corruption remains a problem at every level of governance within China. The growing dangers of China’s domestic internal trafficking is not as prioritized by other nations because combating cross-border trafficking currently has greater national security implications than China’s intra-border trafficking. Unless progress is made to improve the capacity of the state to implement policy in the countryside coupled with serious anti-corruption measures, the PRC will fail to implement its National Plan of Action for anti-trafficking and trafficking will persist.

Consequences

The negative consequences of the combination of male preference with weak policies to combat human trafficking are already apparent in the twenty-first century. Trafficking of women and girls is rising as desperation for brides, and the cultural acceptability of exploiting women due to scarcity, reaches the generation where the one child policy began. This is evident in the

44 Jiang, Quanbao and Sanchez-Barricate, Jesus J. "Trafficking in Women in China," 2011, 93.
practice of purchasing brides, and the sale of women to brothels. As women become increasingly scarce, they will increasingly be devalued making their commoditization easier.

Another consequence of the one child per couple policy is the underreporting of females. While the underreporting of females may reduce the gender ratio within China it is highly unlikely the reduction would be significant enough to lower the gender ratio to a natural level of 105.46 Not reporting girls, and hiding girls from local officials, presents problems for the future welfare of these hidden daughters. The hukou system is necessary to gain access to education and medical care in China. If daughters are not being reported, and are being hidden from provincial authorities, it is unlikely they are receiving quality education, which has been linked to reducing the risks of being trafficked.47 These unreported daughters are at a greater risk of exploitation and sale to traffickers because their existence is illegal.

Currently, children trafficked domestically for illegal adoptions are predominantly male and while domestic adoption, legal or illegal remains rare within China the trend of adoption overall is likely to rise due to female scarcity. This is a direct result of male preference.48 Male preference is also reflected in the price of boys being much higher than the price of girls.49 However, this statistic could be subject to change as the practice of baby-brides is likely to become more common. Baby-brides are the result of the Chinese people becoming aware of the scarcity of females within China. Families are anxious about their sons’ chances to marry in the

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47 Yunnan Province Women’s Federation, “Yunnan Province, China Situation,” 2002, 2.
future, especially in rural areas, and will adopt a girl child, at an affordable price, and raise her with the sole purpose of being the bride for their son in the future.\textsuperscript{50}

The kidnap and sale of women will become more common in the future. The government is unlikely to consider any significant change to the one child per couple policy until at least 2016. As economic growth continues, the demand for women for sexual exploitation will rise in cities such as Jinghong and elsewhere. The commoditization of women, due to their scarcity, will devalue them to the point where sexual exploitation will be more acceptable, especially amongst the bare-branches. As marriage prospects for men of lower socio-economic status grows increasingly bleak the kidnapping and sale of women to the country side will increase, as will the sale of baby-brides.

As evident by gender gaps in Taiwan and South Korea, son preference is not a phenomenon of the developing world.\textsuperscript{51} Constraints emplaced by urbanization and development cause male preference to be dramatically expressed, as overall desire for multiple children decreases, the desire for a son does not. Therefore, the PRC’s narrow focus on economic development being the solution to all of China’s issues, from party validity to social stability, will not solve the growing gap between male and female children in China.

\textbf{China’s Migrant Population}

China’s migrant population presents many challenges facing the PRC in the twenty-first century. The economic migrant population is only expected to grow as economic opportunities are more lucrative in urban areas, than rural areas, and mass migration to cities increases. Recent statistics from 2006 suggest that, economic migrants are responsible for 16% of China’s GPD

\textsuperscript{50} Shen et al “China’s Stolen Children,” 2012, 10.
\textsuperscript{51} Hudson and den Boer, \textit{Bare Branches}, 2004, 61-62.
The government has embraced migration as a necessary component of economic development, which is the current regime’s claim for legitimacy. Therefore, migration is likely to continue growing, without state intervention, any time in the foreseeable future.

The ‘bare branch’ phenomenon (men unable to marry and fulfill cultural family obligations) is the demographic most likely to constitute the floating population as young, spouseless men from lower socio-economic status are the most likely group to migrate in search of work. However, there is an increasing demand for female labor in manufacturing positions within China because women are more docile and easier to manage. This coupled with the increasing cultural acceptance for women traveling alone, means that while bare branches will comprise the majority of floating population, single women will become a significant minority.

Currently, economic migration is nearly a 50-50 split between males and females. The feminization of the migrant population is not so much a reflection of diminishing male preference, as the expendable nature of women. Couples that are allowed to have multiple children are more likely to send the girl child to the city to work, in a manufacturing position, in order to support the family, at home, while the majority of the family’s resources will be used for the betterment of the male child. Girls leaving their home villages, seeking economic opportunities, typically are under-educated drop-outs possessing little information about the dangers of economic migration. While the All-China Women’s Federation and other

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54 Yunnan Province Women’s Federation, “Yunnan Province, China Situation,” 2002, 8.
international organizations are trying to educate migrant populations about the dangers of migration, the scope of these programs is still too weak to affect significant change.

The migrant population in cities, whether male or female, is heavily discriminated against. The increased discrimination against migrant populations, the differences in language (regional dialects in China are very diverse) and the lack of education of female migrants, places female migrant workers at very high risk to be trafficked for sexual exploitation. Young females are often lured by traffickers with offers of employment opportunities, and are pressured by their families to take these economic opportunities, only to be sexually exploited upon arriving at their destination. 58

The economic migrant population is typically very young. 59 While some economic migrants take their children with them, as they seek employment, millions leave their children behind. These children are often left in the care of a relative. The lack of their legal parents places them at a higher risk for being trafficked than other children. The care of children being passed from relative to relative, especially girl children, can be viewed as a burden on other family members. These children are more likely to be kidnapped, or in the case of girl-children, sold to traffickers that promise employment opportunities.

Conclusions

The CCP will not make any significant changes to the one child per couple policy as a product of the 2012 regime change. The one child policy, while controversial within China and internationally, has been a policy that the various factions within the party have reached a consensus is absolutely necessary. The emergence of think tanks, with ties to the CCP, will not

alter this stance. It will not be until perhaps the next change of power that the gap between men and women, bare branches, and the diminishing status of women will merit consideration as a threat to social stability within the CCP. Even then, few changes in policy are likely to result as Beijing lacks capacity to affect significant change in the provinces.

The one child per couple policy is not alone to blame for the diminishing status of women in China and the rise of human trafficking in women and girls resulting from the skewed gender ratio. As indicated by developed Asian countries, such as South Korea, male preference is not eliminated through economic development. The skewed gender ratio would have resulted from economic modernization, in the cities, without the invasive population policies of the CCP. However, the sizable gap between male and females would not have developed in the lesser developed regions of China where birth quotas, while less strict, were also implemented. The combination of state pressure to reduce fertility and societal pressure to produce a son is what caused the dramatic skew in China’s gender ratio. Trafficking in women, and the diminished status of women, would still be an issue if the state had never introduced such an invasive population policy. However, it would have been on a much smaller, and potentially more manageable, scale. The one child per couple policy served to exacerbate male preference within China and will cause the trafficking in women and girls to rise as women become increasingly scarce in mainland China.
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