

★ **FACTFILE**

- The world's total population passed the 6 billion mark in 2000.
- Over 4.8 billion people (80 per cent) live in LEDCs. The two countries with the largest populations are both LEDCs:
 - China, with 1.25 billion
 - India, with 1 billion.

- The USA is the MEDC with the largest population but at 270 million it has less than a quarter of China's population.
- On average the population of LEDCs is growing by 1.8 per cent per year (doubling every 38 years).
- Many people feel that this growth rate is not sustainable and that if it continues it will lead to disaster, as Malthus predicted.

Case study: Population control in China

In the England and Wales case study (see pages 160–61) you will learn that population growth started to fall because of a mixture of economic changes in society. Then, on pages 162–63, you will see how, in Thailand, government policy has affected birth rates. However, in China the government became even more deeply involved in developing population policy. The government had two reasons: they wanted to avoid the Malthus type of disaster, but they also realised that China could only enjoy a rising standard of living if its population growth was controlled. This section looks at how China cut its rate of population increase, and considers whether its methods should or could be tried elsewhere.

The 1950s

In the 1950s the philosophy of the Chinese government was 'a large population gives a strong nation'. The government encouraged people to have children for the good of the country.

Then, in 1959–61, there was a serious famine. Up to 20 million people died, including many children. The birth rate fell. More boys died than girls.

The 1960s

After the famine there was a population boom. Population increased by 55 million per year (equal to the total population of the UK). The government did nothing to try to reduce the birth rate.

The 1970s

From the mid-1970s onwards, however, policy changed. At first the government just urged people to reduce their families. They publicised the catch-phrase *Wan-xi-shao*, which means 'Later, longer, fewer', standing for:

- Later marriages.
- Longer gaps between children.
- Fewer children.

The 1980s

This did not work well. The population went on increasing, so in 1979 the government introduced the 'one child policy' which set very strict limits on who was allowed to have children, and when. Strong pressure was

156 put on women to make sure that they used contraception.

There were even people known as 'granny police' whose job it was to watch their neighbours to make sure that they were taking the pill. If they suspected that women were pregnant without permission they reported them to the authorities. Enforced abortions and sterilisation became common. The policy was successful in urban areas but not in rural areas where many couples disobeyed the ruling and had large families.

'Boys are better!'

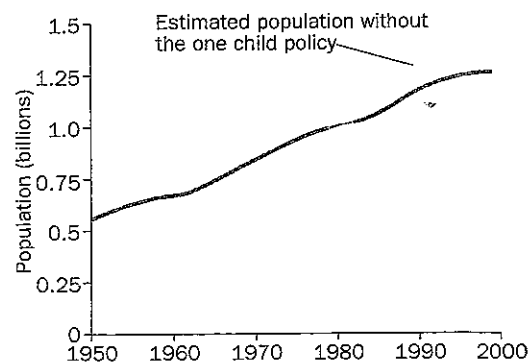
One side-effect was the practice of 'female infanticide'. Couples wanted sons, so many baby girls were killed or aborted, so that people could try again for a son.

'Little emperors'

Some people say that there has been another undesirable side-effect of the policy. Children with no brothers or sisters get all the attention of their parents and grandparents. They can become very spoilt by all the attention, and they grow up not knowing how to share with other people. They are called 'little emperors'. Of course this view may well be an exaggeration. Many families have an 'only child' who grows up to be very sensible and well-balanced.

The 1990s

From 1989 the one child policy was relaxed slightly and this has speeded up the increase in the birth rate slightly (Figure 15). But in any event an increase in births in this period was unavoidable because the peak number of women born in the population boom time of the 1960s and 1970s are now of child-bearing age (Figure 16).



China's total population, 1950–99