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## **Family Planning and Coercion: Abortion as an Inevitable Consequence**

### **Abstract**

The implementation of China's one-child policy created a profound tension between women and families seeking autonomy over their bodies and fertility, and the coercive measures employed by the country's family planning system. This paper explores the complex dynamics involved in family planning, including factors such as son preference, extensive monitoring at both the workplace and family level, and the widespread reliance on abortion as a consequence of coercion. By disregarding the inherent tensions between individuals and family planning policies, enforcing coercion at the local level, and objectifying people, these variables ensured the performance of the one-child policy but inflicted deep pain, trauma, and division within individuals and families. This paper argues that Chinese family planning fostered a relationship between individuals and communities that incentivized the neglect of individuality and emotions while segregating people by objectification, which made abortion the only “choice” for women who had a second child.

### **Introduction**

There were specific factors that contributed to the tension between women and families seeking autonomy over their bodies and fertility, and the coercive measures employed during China's one-child policy. Prevalence of the practice of forced abortion was because of variables

like contraception failures during the one-child policy, and caused social, emotional, and physical consequences experienced by the affected mothers. This research will center on abortion issues in China and regards the one-child policy as its independent variable to illustrate family planning's role in abortion issues' emergence. The paper intends to answer those questions at a micro level through analyzing selected narratives.

According to the most recent data from the National Family Planning Research Institute, China performs the most birth termination in the world, which is estimated 13,000,000 surgical abortions within the nation.<sup>1</sup> This research is initiated by the question of why China has the highest amount of abortions operated on in the world. One vital variable identified by scholars for the prevalence of abortions in China is the one-child policy, the famous national family planning that endured 35 years. In 1980, population growth in China became a national security emergency for the ruling elite. It emerges as a threat to the nation to obtain the goal of modernity and become a competitive global power.<sup>2</sup> On September 25, 1980, China's Communist Party executed this plan, asking members to limit their family size to one child. To cooperate with its extensive family planning, the national policy became friendly to abortion.<sup>3</sup> With the rise of Chinese feminism, scholars have started to review the history of family planning and female health. The concern for national security drives the government to employ the one-child policy, but the policy-making heavily dependent on science has its downside. When the government entirely focuses on preventing threats from emerging to national economic security, different localities incorporate coercive abortion to fulfill the national plan. Individual female rights have been disregarded, and inappropriate abortions also cause many women permanent bodily

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<sup>1</sup> Mei Fong, *One Child: The Story of China's Most Radical Experiment*. Oneworld, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> See note 1 above.

<sup>3</sup> Weiwei Cao, "Exploring 'Glorious Motherhood' in Chinese Abortion Law and Policy," *Feminist Legal Studies* 23, no. 3 (2015): 295–318, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-015-9291-7>.

damage. Therefore, this paper will further question the forgotten memories of debates about China's abortion policy. It is important to remember that, especially for newer generations who have not been through the one-child policy, a stable appearance of people cooperating with the government's policy should not be taken for granted in China, where people do not have many choices.

Meanwhile, although the government first announced the policy as voluntary, it soon became mandatory. Scholars provide two perspectives of explaining this shift. Greenhalgh regards the unpopularity at the early stage of the one-child policy as causing ineffectiveness in controlling the population, so it left the government no choice but to enforce it<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, Mundigo interprets it as an outcome derived from China's different social conceptions between individual good and national good from Western ideology: "The individual good must be subsumed to the collective good and the general objectives of the society."<sup>5</sup>

After the shift, issues of abortion, corruption, and human rights collided. Starting from 1982 to 1983, the policy requires women with a child to have an IUD inserted and families with two or more children to operate sterilization. At the same time, it is also mandatory to abort unplanned and unauthorized pregnancies. "If women get pregnant outside of our plan, they must have an abortion," the brigade leader Fu Shaorong said during an interview in Sichuan province in 1980.<sup>6</sup> Not every province or region in China carries out the national one-child policy with coercive abortion, but it was a common tool for localities to incorporate.

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Axel I. Mundigo, "Population and Abortion Policies in China: Their Impact on Minority Nationalities," *Human Evolution* 14, no. 3 (1999): 207–30, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02440158>.

<sup>6</sup> Fong, *One Child*, 2015.

Interestingly, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has been involved in various aspects of reproductive health and family planning programs around the world, including in China during the implementation of the one-child policy. However, it is important to note that the UNFPA's specific role and level of involvement in China's family planning policies have been a subject of controversy and debate. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, China experienced a rapid establishment of population studies as a field of study within the country. This involved the opening of population research offices in various universities across China, beginning around 1976-1977. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) played a significant role in supporting these initiatives by providing financial assistance.<sup>7</sup> However, due the implementation of the one-child policy, massive sterilizations and forced abortion emerged. Until the early 2000s, numerous international entities made the decision to believe that compliance with the one-child policy in China was a voluntary choice, despite mounting evidence suggesting otherwise.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of my research, my hypothesis was that the tension between the public opinion and government policy regarding abortion ethics exist. Nevertheless, during the research I found that many aspects beclouded this issue. For example, during the implementation of the one-child policy, the political climate of the time restricted people's freedom to express dissatisfaction openly. National concerns about the perceived population problem also influenced public attitudes, with many individuals willing to comply with the policy for the sake of national stability.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the discursive tension between public and government did not rise like Western cases.

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Fong, *One Child*, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Yilin Nie and Robert J. Wyman, "The One-Child Policy in Shanghai: Acceptance and Internalization," *Population and Development Review* 31, no. 2 (2005): 313–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2005.00067.x>. Greenhalgh

During my research, I found that the primary tension at stake was between the autonomy of women/families over their bodies and fertility, and the coercion imposed by China's family planning policies. Abortion became the outcome faced by millions of mothers who were unable to resist this coercion. This paper delves into the multidimensional variables involved in family planning, including son preference and systematic monitoring at both the workplace and family level.

I argue that Chinese family planning created a dynamic between individuals and communities that encouraged disregarding individuality while emphasizing the process of individuation, thus abortion became inevitable for women. To strength my main argument, I demonstrate how the approaches of family planning commission sidestepped the ethical discourse of abortion and the tension between individual or family autonomy on family planning and national family planning in individual cases. Also, this paper illustrates why women who had more than one child had no choice but underwent abortion, and why doctors and family planning cadres accepted processing or coercing abortion as their works.

## **Literature Review**

Since abortion became one of the leading birth control methods after the nation announced its family planning, scholars often address abortion issues when discussing China's family planning. This section of the paper reviews the one-child policy and its history with the condition of abortion in China. I identify two different ways of family planning incorporate coercion in abortion: persuaded and forced abortion, and one way of people using it for their own

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identify the science behind the policymaking as problematic (a main way of China nationalized the idea of rapid population growth being a future catastrophe. More explanation in my literature review). Meanwhile, this paper will explore how the national concerns influenced public attitudes in individual cases.

interest of family planning: sex-selective abortion. I also highlight their sociocultural causes and influences.

The literature review explores the relationship between abortion and the one-child policy in China and why peasants' desire of participating in family planning had little space under the government's population policy. Meanwhile, the literature provides a comprehensive view of the connection between the state and localities during the period of the one-child policy. I primarily discuss four core pieces of literature. *Just One Child* by Susan Greenhalgh and *One Child* by Mei Fong are the pieces that mainly focus on the levels of the one-child policy and China's policymaking. For Greenhalgh and Fong's works of literature, I essentially explore the process of the one-child policy influencing China's abortion policy to give a boarder sense about the environment of the narrators that this paper analyzes. *Behind the Silence: Chinese Voices on Abortion* by Nie Jing-Bao provide a ground for discussing the tension between public debate and the government's policy. Mara Hvistendahl discusses one critical interaction under the study of this paper – abortions operated based on sex discrimination in China and its correlation with family planning that leads to abortion decisions of families. Jing-Bao and Hvistendahl's pieces enhance the discussion by revealing the stories of forced abortion and sex-selected abortions in China. In the first section of the literature review, I will explore how the scholars define the one-child approach and what policy characteristics they highlight in their works. In the second part, I will indicate different tension that the literature study and how they contribute to categorizing three ways of incorporating abortion either by family planning commission or individuals during the one-child policy: persuaded, sex-selective, and forced abortion.

*One-child policy*

Many scholars have researched the one-child policy and its effects. The earliest related source I found, Tien uses statistical methods to examine abortion in China concerning its family planning in the 7<sup>th</sup> year after the plan launched using a statistical method.<sup>10</sup> He identifies different patterns of using abortion in distinct provinces and regions. He emphasizes that the difference in development in provincial and rural places strongly impacts the achievement of family planning goals. Tien identifies the issues within abortion usage based on the one-child policy yet does not further explain it. Nie Jing-Bao regards the one-child policy as one aspect of supporting abortion in China.<sup>11</sup> Most survey research respondents strongly supported China's family planning since they believed that overpopulation is a serious social problem in China. Hesketh et al. identify that the main reason for abortion is the lack of official approval for pregnancy due to the one-child policy.<sup>12</sup> In light of this, although scholars concur that the one-child policy is the leading cause of abortion, women underwent abortions voluntarily after being persuaded or against their wills. Hesketh et al. took a quantitative path to emphasize the one-child policy's 25 years lasting effects on women, especially those who have married. However, their sample is relatively small, and they did not take abortion as the center of the study. Greenhalgh studies the connections between family planning policy and politics.<sup>13</sup> She demonstrates that the one-child policy is a turning point for the Chinese government and policy making because "an intensely state-centric system began to open up to actors and ideas 'beyond the state.'" The one-child policy also represents a pivotal moment when policymaking was deeply dependent on science and heavily politicized science. International scientific truth, according to Greenhalgh, is embedded with

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<sup>10</sup> H. Yuan Tien, "Abortion in China: Incidence and Implications," *The Population of Modern China*, 1992, 287–310, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-1231-2\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-1231-2_11).

<sup>11</sup> Jing-Bao Nie, *Behind the Silence: Chinese Voices on Abortion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Therese Hesketh, Li Lu, and Zhu Wei Xing, "The Effect of China's One-Child Family Policy after 25 Years," *New England Journal of Medicine* 353, no. 11 (2005): 1171–76, <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmhpr051833>.

<sup>13</sup> Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 2008.

subsequent political assumptions. Human values, social structures, and politics are valueless compared to the fate of the PRC's ecosystem from the perspectives of cyberneticists. Therefore, Greenhalgh identifies that the one-child policy is also the product of China's problematic science and policymaking. Like Greenhalgh, Hvistendahl also draws a connection between the implementation of the one-child policy and technological advancement in China.<sup>14</sup> However, distinct from the other scholars, she demonstrates family planning in an international context. She also examines how international agreement and funding support China's one-child policy's execution in a way they unexpected. While UNFPA(United Nations Population Fund) intends to use the funding for education regarding the value of daughters and small families, local family planning officials used it in propaganda for national family planning and promoting abortion of all kinds to restrict the size of families.

Cao also examines China's ideologies on abortion and ethics in the context of China's history and legislation.<sup>15</sup> She agrees that persuasion and enforcement of abortion were family planning and demographic goals. On the other hand, she approaches the issue of abortion from the perspective of feministic theory.

Meanwhile, Hvistendahl also marks China's economic condition and ideological transformation as the buttress for the one-child policy's implementation. Sharing this idea, Fong regards financial concerns and needs as a primary cause of the one-child policy.<sup>16</sup> However, Fong has a different insight regarding China's launch of the one-child policy. Instead of focusing on international funding, she emphasizes that the population experiment in Sichuan plays a

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<sup>14</sup> Mara Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Weiwei Cao, "Exploring 'Glorious Motherhood' in Chinese Abortion Law and Policy," *Feminist Legal Studies* 23, no. 3 (2015): 295–318, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-015-9291-7>.

crucial role in the national launch of the policy and finalizing a coercive method when accomplishing the plan. The coercive population control experiment went well and provided a regional result that shows 95 percent of the couples guarantee only one child.

*Tension and Abortion: persuaded abortion, sex-selective abortion, and forced abortion.*

The existing literature agrees that carrying out the one-child policy was coercive instead of voluntary, and it causes abortion of all kinds. Rigdon interestingly gives an example of Chinese students' point of view on the discourse of abortion.<sup>17</sup> The student thinks that unlike "rich Americans," the discourse of abortion is meaningless since Chinese people are facing economic problems and even having trouble raising children properly with sufficient resources (e.g., food and clothes). Assume that individuals and families can decide the family size themselves, and if there were no enforced family planning in China, the economy would collapse. Although Nie Jing-Bao acknowledges the silence of the public debate on the morality of abortion in China, his view on why there is silence is entirely different.<sup>18</sup> He argues that silence in the general discussion does not represent that Chinese people are unconcerned with the morality of abortion. He thinks that words cannot fully express what reality Chinese people used to be and are encountering (e.g., forced abortion). Nie Jing-Bao's insight is unique compared to the other scholar reviewed because it analyzes Chinese culture's ethics in a broader context, not only within the one-child policy era and after.

Greenhalgh analyzes the one-child policy from scientific and policymaking points of view and focuses on the dynamics of population control.<sup>19</sup> She contributes to studying the

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<sup>17</sup> 1. Susan M. Rigdon, "Abortion Law and Practice in China: An Overview with Comparisons to the United States," *Social Science & Medicine* 42, no. 4 (1996): 543–60, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(95\)00173-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(95)00173-5).

<sup>18</sup> Nie, *Behind The Silence*, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 2008.

tension of public thoughts on birth control issues in China. “In taking a stand on this sensitive issue, the party claimed population as its own, marginalizing the voices of a variety of social forces – public health specialists and women cadres as well as social scientists – who had expressed views on issues such as contraception, abortion, and population control,” her statement initiates the suspicion towards the denied existence of public opposition towards abortion policy in China.

Abortion has been used as a primary tool to support China’s birth planning. Comparing to Greenhalgh, Hvistendahl and Fong explore more about the relationship between abortion and the one-child policy. According to Hvistendahl, individuals sacrifice to achieve their national needs in China, “if women get pregnant outside of our plan, they must have an abortion,” as the family planning worker states when being interviewed.<sup>20</sup> She also highlights an interview with Chen Fenglian, the local women’s federation chair. In the interview, Chen indicates that to achieve family planning objectives, cadres went to the homes of pregnant women and persuaded them by explaining how poor China is. As a result, most women who initially objected to abortions can be influenced to operate abortions, including those seven months pregnant. In light of this, it is not that the tension from public opinions never exists, but rather the tension is partially resolved by persuaded abortion.

In addition to persuaded abortion, Hvistendahl raises the issues and emergence of sex-selective abortion.<sup>21</sup> Like many Asian countries, Chinese parents prefer boys over girls. Hvistendahl defines sex-selective abortion as the process of people who resist the one-child policy and take advantage of sex-determination technology like ultrasound to decide to operate on abortion based on the sex of the fetus. Hvistendahl illustrates that the one-child policy did not

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<sup>20</sup> Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection*, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection*, 2011.

boost abortion usage merely through persuaded and forced abortions but also through sex-selective abortions. Sex-selective abortions operated with the heart of the parents wanting to have sons and found a way around the restriction of the one-child policy. The complicated interaction between social practice of sex-selection and the one-child policy caused many unintended consequences, including imbalance sex-ratio, massive abandonment of female infants, etc.<sup>22</sup> This paper primarily analyzes how forced abortion became one of the unintended consequences of such interaction.

Fong focuses on forced abortion and thoroughly explains why forced abortion emerged.<sup>23</sup> At the early stage of the one-child policy, national family planning had trouble gaining popularity because of its one size fits all measures. By 1984, the central government had no choice but to decentralize its power to localities. According to Fong, the central government gave neither restrictions nor further instruction on obtaining population rate control; it only cares about the final result. It also provides no funds for family planning, so the provinces must figure it out independently, eventually leading to corruption. The central government's role in the execution of the one-child policy is freeriding, which made the process of this policy a chance for some people to gain their interest. Most importantly, for some provinces and family workers, forcing pregnant women to abort is not a wrong method to utilize under the pressure of the central government's order.

*Chinese Scholars: Entering The Era Of The Two-child Policy.*

Many academic articles written by Chinese scholars initiate their discourse on the two-child and three-child policies by discussing the 2010 China census. Yong Cai provides an

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<sup>22</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China* (St. Paul, Minn: Yeong & Yeong, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Fong, *One Child*, 2015.

overview and comprehensive analysis of the 2010 China census. Compared to China's population growth in 1990-2000 (11.0) and 1980-90 (14.4), the 2010 population growth from the 2000 census in China dropped to 5.7 per 1000. This means 1.5 births per woman. Meanwhile, within this low population growth rate, there is also an elevated sex ratio at birth. The National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPFPC) and the agency responsible for implementing the one-child policy emphasizes that the low fertility report excluded the issue of a large portion of underreporting births.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, while admitting the existence of underreporting, domestic and international demographers who work outside the Chinese government argue that China indeed stepped into a transition of below-replacement fertility (2.1 births per female). With socio-economic changes like "urbanization, industrialization, economic liberalization and expansion of education," the one-child policy is the casual element of China's low fertility levels. In this case, it appears that China's government and governmental agencies in 2010 were still not optimistic about China's population control, nor did they admit the success of the one-child policy in controlling the population growth rate.

The 2010 census also confirms a sex imbalance within China's population. The record from the 2010 census demonstrates that more than 20 million of the total number of "missing girls." However, the policies regarding sex-selective abortions are not very effective. Although sex-selective abortion is illegal, it is still accessible to people. Cai identifies that the problem is rooted within the social institutions of China's patrilineal family system.

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<sup>24</sup> Yong Cai, "China's New Demographic Reality: Learning from the 2010 Census," *Population and Development Review* 39, no. 3 (2013): 371-96, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2013.00608.x>.

China's one-child policy ended on January 1, 2016, and China changed its population policy with a required family size. All Chinese families can have two children. Feng et al. indicate three steps in terminating the one-child policy and initiating the two-child policy. First, in March 2013, NPFPC (the National Population and Family Planning Commission) and MOH (the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China) created a new National Health and Family Planning Commission. Second, starting in November 2013, the government announced that all couples could have two children if one of the parents were an only child 2015. This new relaxation of the family planning policy is named the selective two-child policy. Third, in October 2015, China planned to allow all couples to have two children in 2016, named the universal two-child policy.

After the termination of the one-child policy, some scholars define China's one-child policy as "one of the costliest lessons of misguided public policymaking."<sup>25</sup> The policy exerts a significant impact on various aspects, including the fertility rate, sex ratio, population size, age structure, human capital investment, labor supply, and more.<sup>26</sup> While the implementation of the one-child policy may have slightly expedited the fertility transition in China, it also incurred significant drawbacks such as political implications, human rights issues, a rapidly aging population, and a skewed sex ratio due to a preference for male children.<sup>27</sup> Importantly, the decline in China's fertility rate appeared before the official launch of the one-child policy. This phenomenon appeared under a policy in the 1970s that promoted later marriage, longer birth

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<sup>25</sup> Wang Feng, Baochang Gu, and Yong Cai, "The End of China's One-Child Policy," *Studies in Family Planning* 47, no. 1 (2016): 83–86, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4465.2016.00052.x>.

<sup>26</sup> Fei Wang, Liqiu Zhao, and Zhong Zhao, "China's Family Planning Policies and Their Labor Market Consequences," *Journal of Population Economics* 30, no. 1 (2016): 31–68, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-016-0613-0>.

<sup>27</sup> Junsen Zhang, "The Evolution of China's One-Child Policy and Its Effects on Family Outcomes," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no. 1 (2017): 141–60, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.1.141>.

intervals, and fewer births, which was much less coercive.<sup>28</sup> In sharp contrast, because of the large gap between the state interest and the Chinese families' desires, the one-child policy required top-down approaches, mobilization of states' resources, and total commitment of all-level leaders for its all-one-child goal.<sup>29</sup>

Other Chinese scholars show support for the universal two-child policy and highlight its advantages in solving or alleviating social, economic, and demographic problems compared to the selective two-child policy. Most importantly, most of the issues they identify and claim that the two-child policy aims to approach are the lasting effects of the one-child policy.

The Chinese scholarly community regards the universal two-child policy as more advantageous than the selective two-child policy in seven aspects: 1) when stratifying many families' desire for a second child, the policy will also have the demographic population under control; 2) the policy can reduce population aging and the labor force decline; 3) the universal two-child policy is beneficial for China's socioeconomic development; 4) the policy can alleviate the high sex-ratio births; 5) reduce the risks of losing the only child for the one-child families. 6) suppressing corruption under family planning; 7) avoiding social injustice by balancing the burden of caring for older people in all families.<sup>30</sup> Wang et al. utilize the queue group element method to study the trends of demographic population and population structure changes after the universal two-child policy implementation. Their results show that the universal two-child policy can effectively reduce the declining trend of China's total population, population aging, and

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<sup>28</sup> See note 24.

<sup>29</sup> Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Yi Zeng, "Implementing the Universal Two-Child Policy as Soon as Possible Is a Win-Win Policy for Both the Nation and Common People," *Chinese Population Yearbook* 36, no. 5 (August 2015).

the decrease in labor force problems.<sup>31</sup> Further study has also shown that China's universal two-child policy will significantly reduce abortions of unauthorized pregnancies and a more balanced sex ratio. However, the positive effects of the policy on alleviating the problems of a shrinking labor force and population aging will not become apparent until two decades after.<sup>32</sup>

### *A Gap of Knowledge and Discussion*

Although providing a general insight into the relationship between China's family planning and abortion, the literature I examined does not explain the issues that complicate abortion generated by the daily operation of different localities. The explanation is primarily based on a nation-state perspective of China's family planning. The lasting effects of the one-child policy on families and individuals who were heavily impacted by the policy and their attitudes (e.g., resistance) toward abortion are lack of study. Although some discuss abortion through individuals' perspectives, like families who operate abortion, the tension that has been studied is toward gender equality or the one-child policy. This research fills the gap in comprehending the relationship between individuals and the community demonstrated by the conflict between people's desire of deciding their family size or fertility and the national abortion condition.

Many Chinese scholars further expand their research on the effects of the one-child policy and its relationship with abortion after the termination of the policy. However, among those scholars attempting to predict the impact of the two-child policy and advocate for it, few comprehensively draw connections between the one-child policy and the two-child policy. Most

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<sup>31</sup> 王开泳, 丁俊, 王甫园. 2016. 全面二孩政策对中国人口结构及区域人口空间格局的影响[J]. 地理科学进展, 35(11): 1305-1316. [Wang K Y, Ding J, Wang F Y. 2016. Influence of the implementation of the universal two-child policy on demographic structure and population spatial distribution in China[J]. Progress in Geography, 35(11): 1305-1316.]. DOI: 10.18306/dlkxjz.2016.11.001

<sup>32</sup> Yi Zeng and Therese Hesketh, "The Effects of China's Universal Two-Child Policy," *The Lancet* 388, no. 10054 (2016): 1930–38, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(16\)31405-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(16)31405-2).

of them directly avoided discussing the after-effect of the one-child policy. At the same time, the arguments established by the advocates of the two-child policy who tried to connect those two policies within Chinese family planning remains questionable. For example, when Zeng and Hesketh give background information and evaluation about the one-child policy, they claim “there have been social benefits for women (in implementation of the one-child policy), with an acceleration of movement towards gender equality.” Although they think having only one child made many families treat daughters equally to sons, and they recognize that the one-child policy has contributed to the highly skewed sex ratio at birth to some degree, they ignored the impact of sex-selective abortion and how the one-child policy complicates abortion choices. As much of the literature illustrates, because a Chinese family could only have one child, they had to abort girls to archive the family goal of having a boy.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Zeng and Hesketh’s argument of the one-child policy being beneficial to gender equality is contradictory.

In comparison, the Chinese scholars who decided to re-examine the one-child policy and its effect after China’s new implementation of the two-child policy provide a more persuasive assessment of China’s family planning history.

Whether by valuing the lesson taught by history or looking forward to China’s future in family planning, Chinese scholars agree that the two-child policy helps address the low fertility and demographic population growth rate problem caused by the earlier execution of the one-child policy.<sup>34</sup> The new era of two-child policy or three-child policy does not necessarily mean significance of family planning has diminished. In fact, it has been elevated to a new level due to the recent emphasis on "top-level design" to politically guide population development in a more

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<sup>33</sup> Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 2008.; Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection*, 2011.; Fong, *One Child*, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Wang Feng, Baochang Gu, and Yong Cai, *The End of China’s One Child Policy*, 2016; Fei Wang, Liqiu Zhao, and Zhong Zhao, *China’s Family Planning Policies and Their Labor Market Consequences*, 2016; Junsen Zhang, *The Evolution of China’s One-Child Policy and Its Effects on Family Outcomes*, 2017.

holistic manner. This approach involves removing previous administrative barriers between hierarchically structured bureaucracies and prioritizing population "health" over "birth planning." According to Alpermann and Zhan, although the "one-child policy" has been permanently abolished, population planning in a broader sense, which encompasses policies related to birth, aging, migration, and urbanization, remains active and will continue to be relevant in the foreseeable future.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Narrative Analysis**

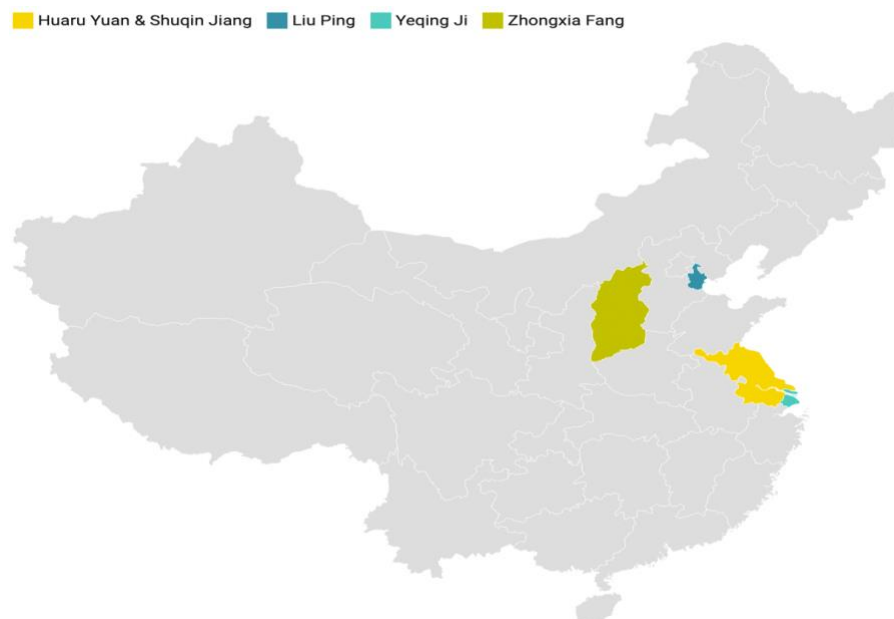
I examine abortion issues mainly through the perspectives of women and families who experienced forced abortion and related punishments. I will interrogate primary sources to incorporate individual voices from the Hearings before The Committee on International Relations House of Representatives in 2004 and before The Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights of The Committee on Foreign Affairs in 2011 and 2012. I also include a case from *The Chen Guangcheng Report: Coercive Family Planning in Linyi, 2005*, Written by Teng Biao. I will examine Dongfang Ma, Yeqing Ji, Ping Liu, Zhongxia Fang, and Yanling Guo cases. They are the victims of the one-child policy and forced abortion and the form of context in legal statements and interviews. Among those narratives, Yeqing Ji, Zhongxia Fang, and Yanling Guo's stories were presented with the help of interpreters.<sup>36</sup> Those victims that will be examined all experienced multi-dimensional and multi-variable monetary and

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<sup>35</sup> Björn Alpermann and Shaohua Zhan, "Population Planning after the One-Child Policy: Shifting Modes of Political Steering in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 117 (2018): 348–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1542218>.

<sup>36</sup> The original congressional document noted the speaker's name as "Yequig." It could be a typo.

suppression from localities of family planning.



*Figure 1 a map showing the regions of the narratives (exclude Dongfang Ma).*

To begin with, I first present the view of Dongfang Ma regarding forced abortion and related punishments. Then, I extract some key themes from her narrative to navigate the following discussions. As one of the critical themes, IUDs and contraceptive methods are mentioned in every story in different ways. I explain why IUDs and other contraceptive methods cannot sufficiently help abortions maintain the one-child policy's performance. In addition to contraception, sex preference, as a cultural aspect, complicates the tension between the policy and individual families' desire to participate in family planning. Local Family Planning Commission and officials employed persuasion or forced abortion to avoid confronting this tension and effectively control local birth populations synchronously. Additionally, I demonstrate the multiple dimensions within the web of managing and monitoring from the Family Planning Commission. I explore how this systematic use of coercion established a deformed relationship among individuals, indicating an objectification of the population by local family planning and the long-lasting effects of such practice.

*Dongfang: “To Punish a Woman and Her Family for Unplanned Pregnancies Is an Unspeakable Cruelty.”*

Dongfang Ma is a female born in China and married in 1986. She was forced to abort for having an unplanned pregnancy after her first child in 1991. A local clinic implanted an IUD inside her without her consent or permission:

After the abortion, the doctor inserted an IUD device into my uterus without either my knowledge or permission. I soon became very sick as a result of the IUD and endured months of horrible pain and discomfort. I suffered from excessive bleeding, weight loss, and fatigue, so I begged the doctors to remove the device, but they refused to do so. If they had it removed, they would be breaking the law. My body just could not tolerate the device. Instead, they inserted a Norplant into my left arm. The Norplant proved to be no less distressing. It gave me night sweats, anxiety, and depression. I did not have my menstrual cycle for over 10 months.<sup>37</sup>

Doctors refused her twice when she requested to remove the IUD implanted in her body. The refusals from the doctors came out of fears of being punished for removing her IUD device. Meanwhile, Dongfang was also bound by Chinese law that she would be punished by losing her job and undergoing forced sterilization if she figured out how to remove the device herself. She implied that before her abortion, she constantly criticized herself.

She condemned the cruelty within the policy that punishes women and their families for unplanned pregnancies. In 1998 she and her husband moved to the United States with their only child. An American doctor helped her remove the six little tubes on her left arm, drawing a full stop to the harm and pain the forced implanted IUD device gave. At the end of her statement, she indicates that women’s voices should be included in family planning. Also, not every Chinese

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<sup>37</sup> *China: Human rights violations and coercion in one-child policy enforcement: Hearing before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session, December 14, 2004 § (2005).*

woman can be like her who had successfully escaped China and found a way to live peacefully outside the one-child policy.

*The Elements of Punishment.*

Although it is unclear from this primary source about the location where Dongfang's experience took place, her narratives illustrate six essential elements within the implementation of the policy that repeatedly appear among the statements: (1) abortion as a punishment for unplanned and unapproved pregnancies, (2) forced implantation of IUD, (3) punitive driven family planning: fines, suspension from works, no childbirth registration, etc., (4) self-critic, emotional and physical pain. Worth to notice that "abortion" was only one of the elements that family planning agencies and organizations utilized to manipulate people's fear to maximize the performance of the one-child policy.

*Contraception Methods in General and Their Relations to Abortion.*

As Dongfang's case shows, abortion is only an early intervention to ensure the performance of the one-child policy. Compared to abortion, implanting IUD devices into women's bodies can control unauthorized births in the longer term. However, the coercion regarding who will be implanted with the IUD device varied in different locations and specific cases. I will present how such variation in coercion and individual adaptability of IUD devices contribute to abortion usage and repetition.

Liu Ping, who was born and lived in Tianjin, was also a victim of the one-child policy and forced abortion. Her severe physical condition caused difficulty to adapt to the IUD:

At that time[after giving birth to a son], I had swelling in my right kidney for undiagnosed reasons, so doctors refused to implement the IUD in me and recommended

instead I use other contraception methods. Without the IUD, I became a prime target for surveillance by the factory's Family Planning Commission.<sup>38</sup>

In her statement, there is no mention of an alternative contraceptive method to prevent pregnancy. Although there is no explicit explanation, two possible reasons could be her lack of knowledge about complementary contraception or limited selection of contraception from the local clinics. In addition to contraception, male sterilization was also a choice for her and her husband to prevent pregnancy. Yet, his husband refused to do it. In combination with all the options, Liu Ping had no choice but underwent five abortions.

Yeqing Ji had a similar experience in 1997 after she got married in Shanghai. She experienced abortions twice through local family planning work. After giving birth to her first daughter in 1997, the local family planning agencies ordered her to implant an IUD from the hospital. However, she and her husband wanted another child, and her in-laws strongly preferred boys over girls. Due to the family's wish to have another son, she did not have an IUD inserted. Before her first unauthorized pregnancy, she was taking monthly contraception pills. In June 2003, The Family planning agent, Li, brought Ms. Ji to the same clinic to force an abortion. After the forced abortion, Ms. Ji was also forced to promise that she would have the IUD implantation or that the Family Planning Commission would not release her. However, she never implanted the IUD device according to the requirement because of the fear of pain and physical damage this device could bring. She continued to take contraception pills. At the same time, her in-laws continue putting pressure on her about a second child and a grandson. Then, after her husband's persuasion to stop taking the contraception pills, she got pregnant again in September of the same

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<sup>38</sup> *China's one-child policy: The government's massive crime against women and Unborn babies: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and human rights of the Committee on foreign affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, First Session, September 22, 2011.*

year. The Family Commission was informed about her second unauthorized pregnancy soon after her check-up at the same hospital:

They dragged me down from the fourth floor into a waiting car and then drove me into Jiading Women and Children's Clinic and pulled me directly into the operating room. Li held me down in the bed and sedated me. The abortion was performed while I was unconscious. When I came to, I was already in the recovery room outside the operating room. Doctors told me that they had inserted the IUD immediately after the abortion and that I was responsible for the cost of the IUD procedure. So the IUD was installed inside me against my will while I was laying unconscious, completely unaware, and unable to defend myself.<sup>39</sup>

Compared to the other cases, Yeqing was implanted with the IUD directly for neither the first time it was required (after her first pregnancy) nor the second time after her first abortion. The Family Planning Commission agents went through a process of persuading Yeqing to have the IUD inserted. However, Yeqing took this process as a chance to have a boy and thought she and her family still had some control over their family planning. This misconception and the lax process forced her to undergo another abortion in the end.

In addition to the inconsistency of coercion among the counties, having advanced contraception knowledge is not a tool for maneuvering the force of the policy. Studies have shown that the IUD device was not mandatory for every woman with one child in the 1980s. Among 318 randomly selected women of reproductive age from four different counties, 24 percent were using oral pills or barrier methods. This suggests that women have become more knowledgeable about user-controlled contraceptive options around the 1980s.<sup>40</sup> Yeqing and Dongfang's cases show the nuance between the situation when the female holds advanced contraception knowledge and the status when the female does not have it. In Yeqing's case, she

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<sup>39</sup> The Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights of The Committee on Foreign Affairs, *China's One-Child Policy: The Government's Massive Crime Against Women and Unborn Babies*, 112.

<sup>40</sup> Joan Kaufman et al., "Family Planning Policy and Practice in China: A Study of Four Rural Counties," *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (1989): 707, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1972596>.

maneuvered the painful process of inserting the IUD by utilizing her advanced knowledge of contraceptive methods. Her knowledge temporarily helped her to use contraception based on her needs. However, her primary purpose was to get another boy. Meanwhile, the lax coercion of the policy regarding the IUD insertion gave her a misconception about her and her family's role in family planning. Therefore, the conflict and disconnection between the one-child policy and individual family desire still existed, resulting in repeated abortions.

The ineffectiveness of contraceptive methods like IUDs has also contributed to the abortion rates. For example, a survey focused on Keshan shows that 80 percent of abortions in the region were operated after the contraceptive method failure. The most failed method is the stainless-steel IUD, also widely used in China. Most importantly, the data demonstrates that not all the reported contraceptive methods that resulted in abortions are real "failures." Some of them are cover-ups for an intended pregnancy. Therefore, although some reported data includes planned pregnancy, there is a close connection between contraceptive method failure and abortions.

Moreover, Shanghai, where Yeqing came from, is one of China's most economically and educationally advanced cities in China. In 1982, 86% of Shanghai's married couples used contraception. After a decade, this rate has risen to 92 percent. In the two years, the contraceptive prevalence rates are both higher than the prevalence rate in the whole country respectively. Despite the widespread utilization of contraceptive services, it does not guarantee that these services adequately meet the requirements of couples to prevent pregnancy. Chinese couples rely heavily on a limited selection of methods, primarily sterilization and intrauterine devices (IUDs).

A notable percentage of couples employ inherently ineffective practices, and the prevalence of induced abortions is alarmingly high, reflecting many unintended pregnancies.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, IUDs and other contraceptive methods can not sufficiently complement abortions in controlling the birth population for the one-child policy. Women who accidentally got pregnant due to contraception failure would still confront abortion because they violated the national policy though they incorporated birth control.

Inconsistent coercion for requiring married women to insert IUDs due to different localities' implementation and various individual adaptations caused or complicated women's experience with abortion. Also, whether advanced knowledge of alternative contraceptive methods from individuals, the effectiveness of contraceptive methods, or the span of selective methods, they cannot go around the result of operating abortions. Abortion was heavily relied upon by localities in China to control the birth population and archiving demographic goals.

*Abortion as a Solution that Goes Around the Tension between the Policy and Families.*

In June 2003, Yeqing had her second pregnancy and did a check-up at the only gynecologist clinic nearby her home, the Jiading District Women and Children's Clinic:

The clinic was in close cooperation with the Family Planning Commission of Xiaomiao Village, Jiading District of Shanghai, and reported my pregnancy. The day after my checkup at the clinic, Li Chunping of the Family Planning Commission and three other agents came to our home and told me that, according to China's one-child policy, we could not have a second child. I was pregnant again. I had no choice but to undergo an abortion; otherwise, we would be sabotaging the family planning policy and breaking the law. Not only would we be fined 200,000 yuan, equivalent to \$31,300, which was more than three times our combined annual income, but also, we would be fired from our jobs. We were very afraid at the time of losing our jobs. We could never acquire enough money to pay the exorbitant fines.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Yan Che and John Cleland, "Contraceptive Use before and after Marriage in Shanghai," *Studies in Family Planning* 34, no. 1 (2003): 44–52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4465.2003.00044.x>.

<sup>42</sup> China's one-child policy: The government's massive crime against women and Unborn babies: Hearing before the subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and human rights of the committee on foreign affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, First Session, September 22, 2011.

At the same time, her in-laws continue putting pressure on her about a grandson. They even expressed that they would be willing to be responsible for paying the fee for breaking the law. Therefore, after going through an abortion for the first unauthorized pregnancy, the couple decided to have another pregnancy. They went to the same hospital for a check-up, so the Family Planning Commission learned about her unauthorized pregnancy the next day.

Li Chunping and a group of five other agents visited her residence. They questioned her decision not to have the IUD inserted and why she had chosen to become pregnant once more. In response, she expressed the desire to have another child and clarified that they were prepared to pay the imposed fine. Li said that having a second child was prohibited according to Chinese law. In addition, even if the child were to be born, they would be unable to be officially registered the child and denied access to education. The consequences involved financial penalties and the termination of their employment, and their child would remain unregistered in the census. Although Yeqing and her family were not afraid of the penalties this time, the Family Planning agents still forcefully dragged her to a clinic and made her undergo another abortion unconsciously.

Yeqing's story of negotiating with family planning agents shows how the localities incorporate punishments to stimulate individuals' physical and emotional fears according to individual cases. According to Aird, "Any action in the fertility control to employ force, the threat of force, or extreme penalties and pressure that leave people no choice but to comply should be defined as coercion."<sup>43</sup> In this case, during her first unauthorized pregnancy, informing the punishments that would come up for Yeqing and her family can be defined as coercion. On

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<sup>43</sup> John Shields Aird, *Slaughter of the Innocents: Coercive Birth Control in China* (Washington: AEI, 1990).

the other hand, during Yeqing's second unauthorized pregnancy, fines, employment termination, and children's denied access to education could no longer serve as punishments that she and her family would fear.<sup>44</sup> Yeqing and her family thought paying the fines and accepting all the penalties could trade off the living of the unapproved baby. Still, the outcome that the Family Planning Commission cared about was controlling birth rates. This transition caused the difference between the natures of two different times of abortions: the first time, Yeqing underwent a persuaded abortion, and the second time, she was forced to abort. Therefore, the punishment that family planning agents informed individuals of is merely a tactic for them to control birth rates. Whether with or without coercion, abortion was the only result at the time of an unauthorized pregnancy.

Abortion, persuaded or forced, is a simple solution for complicated conditions like Yeqing's case for Family Planning agencies. Sex selection increases the tension between the government's one-child policy and the peasant's autonomy in deciding the number of children in households. To my knowledge, few studies consider sex selection as a causal factor of repeated abortion. Still, all the above elements, including sex selection, intertwined and resulted in repeated abortion because coercive abortion helped family planning agencies to avoid confronting the conflict of the policy and family desire and eventually take the local birth population under control.

#### *Systematic Use of Coercion.*

While living in Tianjin and working in a state-owned textile factory during 1983-1998, Liu Ping was strictly controlled by the one-child policy and monitored by the local Family

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<sup>44</sup> According to Nie (see note 35), local cadres frequently blur the boundaries between persuasion and coercion. It is crucial to bear in mind that the Chinese government wields near-absolute authority over the lives of its citizens.

Planning Commission. She mentions three levels of supervision: the factory level, the factory-clinic level, and on the factory floor.

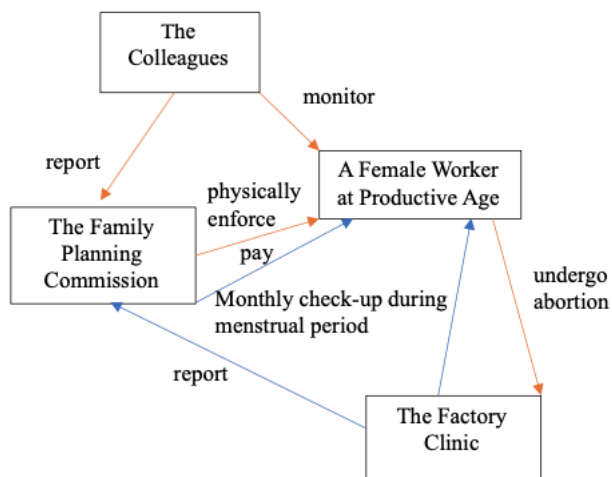


Figure 2 A web of control in Liu Ping's case from 1983 to 1990. The orange line is unauthorized pregnancy related monitor; the blue line is monthly monitor.

There was a system of collective punishment at the three levels. If one worker broke the rules, all workers would be punished. Workers monitored each other, and due to the one-child policy, women of reproductive age accounted for 60 percent of the factory floor. Colleagues were suspicious and hostile towards each other because of this policy. Liu Ping had two pregnancies reported by colleagues to the Family Planning Commission, resulting in forced abortions. The women had no choice and lacked dignity as potential child-bearers.

Additionally, the factory's Family Planning Commission required women to undress before a birth-planning doctor for examination during their menstrual periods. Failure to comply would lead to a mandatory pregnancy test at the hospital. After confirming they were not pregnant, the clinic would inform the factory Family Planning Commission to allow the women to collect their salaries(See Graph 1).

The Family Commission created a dimensional system of monitoring. This system utilizes the emotional and physical fear of every individual to function. This collective

punishment rule controlled workers at the factory, and they were afraid of being fined for one person's unapproved pregnancy. The Family Planning Commission also regulates medical staff at the factory. Even after Liu Ping's fifth abortion, when she was suspended from working in the factory and stayed home, the Family Planning Commission at her neighborhood committee replaced the factory's commission's position and continued monitoring Liu Ping's life. There is no way to hide.

In the meantime, Zhongxia Fang, a villager in Linyi County, Shanxi, and her family experienced a coercive web of controlling and punishing at a family level. She worked in another city and didn't attend the Family Planning Office for a pregnancy check. At this time, she was accidentally pregnant due to a contraceptive failure, but the Family Planning Commission could not find Zhongxia Fang.

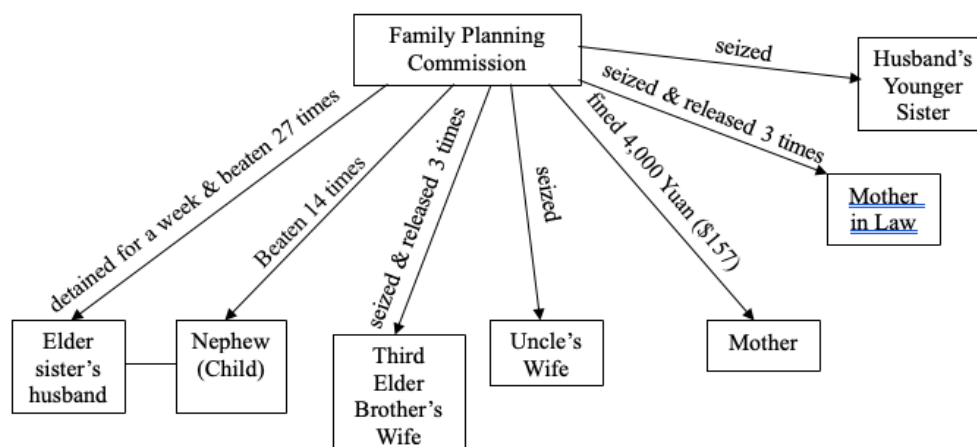


Figure 3 A web of control at the family level for Zhongxia Fang's case in 2004

In 2004, Family Planning officials searched for her and demanded a deposit of 1,000 Yuan from her mother. The mother went into hiding after the conversation. Subsequently, the officials found and harassed Zhongxia Fang's mother-in-law and third elder brother's wife. They also detained and released her elder sister's husband, subjecting him to beatings. They also seized her nephew

and elder sister, subjecting them to beatings. Other individuals targeted included Zhongxia Fang's uncle's wife and her husband's younger sister, who came from another town.

The following year, the Family Planning officials searched, charged, detained, seized, and beat Zhongxia Fang's relatives. This dense web of searching, harassing, and abusing her family members left her no choice but to show up. She was then forced to have an abortion:

My third aunt's husband phoned me: 'If you don't return, your aunt will be beaten to death.' I was forced to go back on 31st, March. I was already pregnant for seven months and was forced to inject an oxytocic drug. My baby was aborted one day later. I had ligation at 9:00 in the morning of April 13, 2005. They let my aunt go after that.<sup>45</sup>

If one person is having an authorized pregnancy or attempting to hide away from abortion, almost everyone around this person will be punished. Like Liu Ping's case, Zhongxia Fang's case also illustrates the utilization of collective punishment by the Family Planning Commission but at the family level. The Family Planning officials beat twenty-two of her relatives because of her pregnancy and absence. Collective punishment is a common tactic of family planning to compel people to submit the demands against their wills. The implementation of collective punishments and rewards aims to engage the entire membership of a factory, institution, or rural political unit. The intention is to encourage peers to actively persuade and compel women who have unauthorized pregnancies to align with the policies set by the central government.<sup>46</sup>

When evaluating the problematic integration of mathematical and engineering science into the policymaking of PRC, Greenhalgh highlights how "Human values, social structures, and politics have a little place" in the society, and "the population is treated like an inanimate object,

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<sup>45</sup> Women's Rights Without Frontiers, *The Chen Guangcheng Report: Coercive Family Planning in Linyi, 2005* (Teng Biao, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Jing-Bao Nie, "The Problem of Coerced Abortion in China and Related Ethical Issues," *Applied Ethics*, 2017, 393–403, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315097176-57>.

to be analyzed, optimized, and controlled by the scientist- technician.”<sup>47</sup> This point of view should be incorporated when people contemplate the systematic use of coercion in implementing the one-child policy by the Family Planning Commission and localities. The Family Planning officials objectified the population that they’re responsible for regarding controlling the birth population. Individuality was disregarded, but every individual was mechanized as the force for the functionality of family planning. For Liu Ping, every colleague became a “surveillance camera” in a human body. For Zhongxia Fang, every relative was a “thread” that restrained her mobility even though she was out of the range of the Family Planning Commission in the region she was based in.

*Expression: Fractured Family and Traumatized People.*

In every case this research presents and analyzes, the victim expresses the physical abuse, torture, and emotional distress they experienced before and after the forced abortion. For instance, Yanling Guo, who was forced to abort her seven months baby in 1995, testified:

After that [the abortion], the Chinese Communist Party’s family-planning officials captured me, and then I was forcibly sterilized. I was beaten and without any strength to work anymore... Not only that, I was also handcuffed by these family-planning officials. They used electric shock batons and electrified my hands. And I was imprisoned twice for this, for violations of China’s one-child policy.<sup>48</sup>

Yanling Guo and her family finally fled to Thailand after 21 years. It was unclear from her statement where the story took place, but her tribulation and pain are shared among the victims of forced abortion.

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<sup>47</sup> Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> 1. Continued human rights attacks on families in China: Hearing before the subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and human rights of the committee on foreign affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, Second Session, July 9, 2012 § (2012).

Before the forced abortions, victims expressed the degree of physical coercion by using, “grabbed me by the arm,” “dragged me,” “pulled me,” “held me down,” “pushed me to the ground,” and “had a cloth stuffed into my mouth.” They described the effects and experience of forced abortion, including “felt empty,” “something was scooped out of me,” “very depressed and despondent,” “weak,” “alone, sick, and weak,” “did not want to live,” and “did not know what to do.”

Besides the monitoring and control from the Family Planning Commission, the experience of being physically forced to abort their babies per se distorted marriage relationships and broke families. Yeqing Ji expressed, “I lost all the hope and confidence in my marriage.” Eventually, her husband divorced her because her pregnancies would only face repeated abortions, and she would never give a son to their family. Furthermore, Liu Ping mentioned “afraid of family life with my husband,” “refuse any intimacy demands from my husband,” and “arguments and fights became a common thing every day.”

When recalling the memories of forced abortion, she also implied, “whenever I thought about losing my child, I would cry” and “saddest day of my life.” In addition to the words of the victims, Yanling Guo’s case has some replenished details from outside of the testimony regarding her traumatization after the forced abortion. Christophe H. Smith, a committee member of The Committee on Foreign Affairs, indicated that Guo's husband described an unusual incident where she exited the restroom with her arms cradling an imaginary baby before the Hearing. When questioned about her actions, she explained that she had a vision of their son while in the restroom and believed he had returned. Astonishingly, she claimed to have seen not only their eight-month-old son but also many other babies following her.

*Alternative Perspectives: “I had no choice.”*

In the documentary film, *One Child Nation*, the director Nanfu Wang interviewed many people in the village where she was born at in Jiangxi. In the interviews, when being asked about how the one-child policy has impacted their lives, the interviewees all responded one answer: “I had no choice.”

Huaru Yuan is a midwife who delivered all the babies in the village during the time of one-child policy. She was also a member of the medical team that was organized on the county level. She travelled around with the team to do sterilizations and abortions for 20 years. She implies that she have done between 50,000 to 60,000 sterilization and abortions:

I counted this out of guilt because I aborted and killed babies. Many I induced alive and killed. My hands trembled doing it. But I had no choice; it was the government’s policy. We didn’t make decisions. We only executed orders.<sup>49</sup>

She also described how the women she aborted were forced:

In those days, women were abducted by government officials, tied up, and drugged to us like pigs.<sup>50</sup>

During her 27-year retirement, she refused to do anymore deliveries, inductions, abortions, or sterilization. She started only treat infertility disorders. When being asked the reason for her decision, she answered:

I want to atone for my sins for all the abortions and killings I did...I have done so many bad things in the past. While some might say that these were not bad things because it was my job, I was the one who killed.<sup>51</sup>

Shuqin Jiang was the family planning official in the county. She provides a unique view on one-child policy and forced abortion:

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<sup>49</sup> *One Child Nation*, 2019, [https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B08CS76S8W/ref=atv\\_dp\\_share\\_cu\\_r](https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B08CS76S8W/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r).

<sup>50</sup> See note 40 above.

<sup>51</sup> See note 40 above.

If I could go back in time, I would do this work again. Looking back, the policy was absolutely correct. Our leaders were prophetic. If not for this policy, our country would have perished.<sup>52</sup>

Although she is very supportive of the work of family planning and the national policy, her work started with hesitation and questioning:

I was only 19 when I started working in family planning, I initially thought that forcing abortions was an atrocity. I wanted to quit several times. But the leader said to me: 'It is a national policy and as a party member, the more challenging the job, the more determined you should be to take it on.'<sup>53</sup>

Unlike the women who experienced abortions this paper included, Huaru Yuan and Shuqin Jiang do not show much of tension between individual interest and the national policy of forcing abortion and controlling birth populations. As a village doctor, Huaru carried self-critic and shame alongside with her abortion and sterilization works. She then contributed on treating infertility disorders and disease, and charity to alleviate the emotional pain she got from self-critic and shame. As a family planning official, Shuqin gradually adapt to a collectivist and statist ethics.

China's system can be described as collectivist because it prioritizes the interests of the country and collective enterprises over the personal interests of individuals. It can also be labeled as statist since the state, Party, or government represents the overarching interests of China as a nation and its entire population.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Shuqin is an example that successfully adapt to and absorbed this culture of collectivist and statist ethics.

## Limitations and Concluding Words

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<sup>52</sup> See note 40 above.

<sup>53</sup> See note 40 above.

<sup>54</sup> Nie, *Behind the Silence*, 2005.

This research integrates multiple narratives for establishing and strengthening its arguments. I'm aware that those narratives rely on the subjective experiences and perspectives of the women, which can lead to a biased sample selection. Most of the narrators this paper selected escaped China and came to the United States for searching asylum. Also, some of some of the selections are cases with extreme physical coercion based on the regional implementation of the one-child policy. Meanwhile, narrators' memories can be imperfect and influenced by the degree of physical and emotional distress during their experience with abortion and family planning, leading to potential distortion or inaccuracies. While statistical data can create a generalizability to a larger population, the selected narratives are context-specific and may not resent broader patterns or trends. Therefore, during the narrative analysis, I also involved other studies' claims and results using statistical analysis to provide a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of family planning and abortion.

On the other hand, narratives help this research to delve into the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals and families, providing rich and detailed accounts of their stories, emotion, and subjective realities. This qualitative approach can generate a deeper understanding of intersectional and multi-variable impacted phenomena, such as sex-selection worsen the tension between people's autonomy and family planning, leading to repeated abortion. Quantitative methods cannot easily capture complex phenomena alone. Furthermore, those narratives provide contextual information that goes beyond numbers and statistics. They shed light on the social, cultural, and historical factors that shape people's experience and perception about the national family planning. They also facilitate the exploration of diverse perspectives that may be marginalized in quantitative data.

This space provided by the U.S. congressional hearings, Chinese human rights advocates and interviewers, and documentary films allowed the victims of the one-child policy and forced abortion to have their unique and various viewpoints to highlight the nuances and complexities of family planning cases. Most of the sources conducted the personal statements and interviews out of an intention to shame PRC's policy-making and execution for the inhumanity and advocate for human rights at an international level.<sup>55</sup> Those narratives also humanize this research.

The narratives of women impacted by forced abortion and the one-child policy provide essential insight into family planning coercion, the complex interaction between population policy and cultural practices resulting in abortion, and physical and emotional distress left within individuals and families after abortion. First, they showed that coercion in IUD implantation was inconsistent and exacerbated women's painful family planning experience. They also showed different levels of knowledge acquired for contraception. The various degree of knowledge differentiated individual cases of forced abortion. However, women with advanced contraception knowledge can still expect unintended pregnancies and abortion due to the high rates of contraception failure. At the same time, narratives reveal the complex interaction between sex selection and population policy. They explain how abortion can be a simple solution for the complicated tension between families' desire for family planning and national family planning.

Adopting the frameworks of Greenhalgh, this paper illustrates how the narratives further specify the objectification of people during the one-child policy. They provide alternative family planning perspectives, exclusive monitoring, and controlling at more micro levels. This paper also includes alternative insights from a doctor and a family planning official. Their stories

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<sup>55</sup> Although the intention for the U.S. to hold congressional hearings could be supporting human rights, it could also be related to political reasons.

illuminate the possibility of the co-existence of individual moral judgment and acceptance of coercive abortion as part of daily work.

Therefore, implementing Chinese family planning policies created a dynamic between individuals and communities that encouraged disregarding personal identity and emotions while also fostering the segregation of individuals through objectification. Consequently, women who wished to have a second child were left with no alternative but to opt for abortion as their sole "choice."

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