

# Cypress Lakes World News

*Special Edition*

*Class Set!*

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## **Japan's "Angel Plan":**

*Can government intervention reverse population decline?*

By ANDREW WHITE

**Tokyo** Japan is an island nation roughly the size of the U.S. state of California. Most of the Japanese islands are mountainous, so the majority of Japan's nearly 130 million citizens are crowded into large coastal cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Sendai. Japan's large population coupled with a limited amount of land has resulted in a relatively high cost of living. Most families require two incomes to make ends meet. Since Japan is a highly developed country, both men and women work in secondary, tertiary, and quaternary level jobs to help support their families. Japanese culture values hard work and the relentless pursuit of perfection. This translates into long hours at work and limited family time for most Japanese wage earners. While these values have created a booming economy, they have also had unexpected negative consequences for Japanese family life.

With both men and women pursuing professional careers, most Japanese citizens put off their first marriage until their late twenties. Furthermore, married couples in Japan wait longer to have children and more parents are choosing to have only one child because of the high cost of living. Due to these factors, Japan has one of the world's lowest fertility rates; in 2005 it reached an all time low of only 1.26 births per woman. Japan's abysmally low birth rate has not kept up with their death rate; currently, the country's population is declining at a rate of approximately 183,000 people per year. This dangerously low birth rate could cause serious problems for Japan in the future. Fewer births mean fewer workers for the economy. Japan's rapidly aging populous desperately needs these workers and the tax revenue they generate to help subsidize the rising cost of healthcare for elderly citizens.

To combat this problem, the Japanese government implemented what became known as the "Angel Plan" in 1994. This plan was designed to help encourage Japanese parents to have more children. The Angel Plan provides generous government subsidies for childcare, guidance counseling for new parents, and even ¥26,000 Yen (approximately \$280 USD) per month to help families offset the cost of childrearing. "The key is breaking the situation forcing people to choose between work or marriage and children." said Japanese Health Minister Yoko Komiyama.

Despite the governments best efforts, the Angel Plan has had limited success. 2008 saw Japan's total fertility rate rise to 1.37 births per woman; however, this figure is still well below the 2.08 children per woman needed to prevent population decline. If this trend continues, current demographic estimates predict that Japan's population will drop from its current level of 127 million to 90 million by the year 2055; 41% of these people will be over the age of 65. It seems that until the Japanese "workaholic" culture changes, the Angel Plan will continue to be an insufficient solution to Japan's population woes.

## **The "One Child Policy":** *A grand population control experiment yields unforeseen consequences for China's gender balance.*

By ANDREW WHITE

**Beijing** In 1949 a Marxist revolution swept through China. Rebel leader Mao Zedong became the first Chairman of the People's Republic of China. Due to their communist economic system, the government began a program of strict economic controls that extended to every aspect of people's lives. Mao thought that the best way for China to become rich and powerful was to increase the size of the workforce. The government began encouraging people to have more children to supply labor for the rapid industrialization envisioned by the government.

Another historic event that allowed a drastic increase in the size of China's population was the "Green Revolution"; the rapid development of new farming technology in the 1950's which resulted in an increased food supply. The impact of these changes was drastic; China's population grew from 600 million in 1958 to nearly one billion by 1978. This exponential growth led to food shortages and famine that resulted in the starvation of millions of people in China.

In an effort to curb their unrestrained population growth, the Chinese government implemented a new policy that limited most Chinese families to having only one child (the law does not apply to ethnic minorities). This law became known as the "one child policy" and has remained in effect ever since it was first adopted in 1979.

The Chinese government enforces this law by threatening heavy fines, forced abortions, and in some cases, sterilization for couples who do not comply. The government also provides generous

maternity leave for new parents who follow the one child rule. They have even been known to award “Certificates of Honor” to couples who decide to have only one child.

The result of the one child policy has been to drastically reduce the number of births in China. By some estimates, the law has prevented nearly 250 million births over the last 30 years. However, the one child law has had some unexpected social consequences for Chinese society.

Most Chinese parents who are forced to have only one child choose to have boys rather than girls due to cultural preferences. In the Chinese tradition, boys take care of parents in their old age and carry on the family name. Furthermore, boys have more employment opportunities than girls in Chinese society and often earn higher salaries. Because of these cultural preferences, female infanticide and voluntary abortions of female babies became widespread.

The Chinese preference for boys has also created an imbalance in the male/female ratio in China’s population. Currently, men under the age of 65 outnumber women by 50 million in China. This gender imbalance will no doubt cause many social problems for China, such as forced marriages and prostitution. Despite these concerns from critics, China’s authoritarian government refuses to abandon the nearly three-decade old policy. The rapid level of economic development in China has helped to improve the people’s standard of living. As China’s people become more educated and wealthy most demographers expect the birthrate is likely to drop naturally. Perhaps only China’s economic rise can stem the tide of population problems in the world’s most populated nation.

*\*Works Cited*

[www.cia.gov/worldfactbook](http://www.cia.gov/worldfactbook)

<http://www.prb.org/Articles/2010/japandemography.aspx?p=1>

**Now, answer the following Document Based Questions (DBQ’s) on your own sheet of notebook paper. All questions must be answered in complete sentences for full credit!**

### **Document Based Questions**

*Please use examples from the articles as evidence in your responses\**

- 1. How does a country’s level of development influence population growth?**
- 2. How did the unique cultural identity of the Japanese and Chinese people cause problems for their government population policies?**
- 3. Evaluate the successes and failures of both the Angel Plan and the One Child Policy. Which plan did you feel was most effective at controlling population growth?**
- 4. What kind of ethical problems are created when the government decides to encourage or discourage population growth? Should governments be involved in the private lives of their citizens?**