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The Chinese government's introduction of the one-child policy in 1979 to respond to their overpopulation problem has caused the quality of monogamist families to decrease, partially as a result of the drastic change from having the freedom to raise multiple children to being limited to only having one child. Traditional Chinese beliefs on gender roles and biases and the purposes that the family serves in Chinese culture have led to the preference for a male child as the only child in order to preserve the family's surname and blood line. However, children produced for the exclusive purpose of maintaining the family wealth and name are unlikely to experience happy and functional families. With the institution of the one-child policy, a growing crisis in Chinese marriages and families continues to spread throughout the nation, and undoubtedly, reform is necessary to control the rising numbers of dysfunctional families that continue to perpetuate traditional gender beliefs, chastising or disowning a mother for giving birth to a daughter, and eliminating female infants by abortion or infanticide. To counter these destructive tendencies, China must consider an alternative family structure that controls their population growth, while being more conducive to gender equity, nurturance, and a healthier society.

Jane Collier, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Sylvia Yanagisako's article entitled "Is There a Family? New Anthropological Views" proposes the intriguing perspective that the family should "not [be viewed] as a concrete institution designed to fulfill universal human needs, but an ideological construct associated with the modern state" (16), and observes that "contemporary families are unlikely to fulfill our equally modern nurturant needs" (24). In contemporary Chinese society, a family commonly consists of three people: a father and mother united in a monogamous marriage and the child. China's population growth has been successfully limited since the initiation of the policy, but at the cost of producing families driven primarily by the desire for a male child. Unfortunately, a triadic nuclear family does not function well for Chinese society, and the shortage of loving families and a gender-equal society bring to mind the observation by Collier et al. that "because a social institution is observed to perform a necessary function does not mean either that the function would not be performed if the institution did not exist or that the

function is responsible for the existence of the institution" (18). This observation raises the question of whether the basic nurturant functions of the Chinese family can be provided by the triadic, nuclear model, or whether a different social institution might be more suitable. Although the one-child policy and monogamous families are widely adhered to in China's urban areas, not all families practice monogamy and abide by the one-child policy. An exception is a minority group called the Moso, who live in the Himalayan region of China, and their matrilineal family formation may have distinct advantages as a radical alternative to the one-child policy.

The most unique characteristics of the Moso family structure are the absence of the biological father within a family and the importance of the community effort in raising children. Their familial institution is more supportive overall than a typical Chinese family in which the father lives with his children, in terms of Collier et al.'s idea of finding nurturance in the family because the "social forces" within the family and the community enable the formation of ideal families rather than "turn[ing] our ideal families into mere fleeting dreams" (24). The unique aspects of Moso society, according to Cai Hua, who researches the Moso lifestyle and analyzes their family structure in *A Society without Fathers or Husbands*, are their matrilineal family constructs and their deeper connections between the family and the community, both of which lead to their familial and social success. In the Moso family construct, Hua states that: "Usually, a woman does not tell her children who their genitor is, and a man does not tell a child that he is his or her genitor. A child never says who his or her genitor is, even if he or she knows. All of this is because of the taboo on sexual evocation" (228). The biological father does not live with his children, as in a monogamous family; instead, the children will always live with their maternal grandmothers, so the maternal males serve as the father figures in Moso families (145). Critics of Moso society might claim that children living away from their biological father will result in unfavorable development effects for the child, as Marcia J. Carlson argues against fatherless families in her article, "Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes." She claims that "[e]xtensive research has shown that living apart from one's biological father is associated with a greater risk of adverse outcomes for children and adolescents, regardless of race, education, or mothers' remarriage" (137). However, this is not the case in Moso families.

Even though the Moso children's father lives with his own mother's family, living separated from his own children, the father still preserves an emotional bond with his children. In Yang Erche Namu's autobiography of her Moso life, *Leaving Mother Lake*, her father would still visit Namu and her siblings, and he would display his paternal affection by giving them gifts after for being away from their community for weeks at a time because of his nomadic job (61-63). The key to circumventing the negative effects of children that live away from their biological father that Carlson advances is the supportive structure of the Moso family. Even without the father living with the family, the children's maternal males assume a role in the caretaking for the children, although the females fulfilled the majority of the caretaking task (Hua 146). When Moso children develop from infants to adults, living and interacting with their uncles throughout their lives, the maternal males essentially serves as the father figures within the family. These father figures substitute for the love of their nieces and nephews' biological father, and the collaborative caretaking efforts of the maternal uncles definitely outweigh and surpass the efforts of the sole biological father's caretaking. Additionally, the Moso's deep sense of community contributes to eliminate the negative effects of living without a biological father. Namu writes, "Children could roam at our own will and visit from house to house and village to village without our mothers' ever fearing for our safety. Every adult was responsible for every child" (69). In conforming to the Moso culture, the nurturant needs of the family members are satisfied to a greater extent under the Moso family construct than the monogamist construct since the community plays a role in the care for the children, regardless of how miniscule the role. Thus, instead of being entirely devoid of a father figure, Moso children will always have the influence of a father figure and have a chance to develop properly, unlike the Chinese children in a conventional society in which their families lack biological fathers and downplay the significance community involvement.

In view of her emphasis on families that satisfy nurturant needs, Collier et al. would probably be advocates of the Moso's multigenerational and highly community-oriented society instead of conventional and modern Chinese societies. Collier et al.'s main concern is that "what we fail to recognize is that familial nurturance and the social forces that turn our ideal families into mere fleeting dreams" (24). According to Collier et al., the familial nurturance we receive from our archetypal idea of the roles of families is "unlikely to fulfill our... modern nurturant

needs,” and they believe that we need “to analyze the social forces that enhance or undermine the realization of the kinds of human bonds we need” (24). The Moso family and community are significantly different from Chinese monogamous families and their communities because all Moso family members, in addition to the community, contribute to the nurturance of the children. In the modern Chinese nuclear family, the father typically serves as the breadwinner, which restricts the amount of nurturance provided by the father, and the task of the children’s caregiver is mainly placed in the mother’s hands, not nearly as efficient as Moso families. The most influential aspects of the Moso family in the children’s nurturance and development that separates them from typical Chinese families are the maternal meals and community involvement as the father figures and caretakers for their sisters’ children, two virtually non-existent components in typical Chinese society. Utilizing the maternal males’ nurturance will ensure that the children will have father figures, at least, actively in their lives. Chinese families which consist of only a single parent, a mother, and her children, are more likely to be devoid of a father figure for their children and such families lead to “less effective parenting than married mothers,” (138) along with negative behavioral problems, as shown in Carlson’s research. Collier, et al. would condemn the one-child Chinese families and their lack of social bonds with intermediate family and community, and therefore might argue that Chinese families should try to strive towards establishing these extended human connections to achieve more nurturant families through the contribution of not only the intermediate family but the community as well, as seen in Moso families.

The involvement of the biological father in the family, and specifically his parenting methods, is also a concern for Chongming Yang, et al., in “Fathering in a Beijing, Chinese Sample: Associations with Boys’ and Girls’ Negative Emotionality and Aggression.” Their research attributes a direct correlation between the fathers’ coercive parenting methods, such as love withdrawal or physical force, and their children’s negative emotionality. In father-son and father-daughter dyads, the father’s use of coercive parenting was positively correlated with the child’s physical and relational aggression, since the father’s use of force implies that “physical force is an acceptable form of social interactions” (186), thus hostile parenting methods in Chinese families have inflicted children with aggressive and disruptive social behaviors. Although Yang et al. only researched families in Beijing and admit that their research does not necessarily represent all Chinese fathers, it can be assumed

that these findings apply to a majority of Chinese families because they sampled families from various socioeconomic classes in China (186, 197). Their research implies that the father's parenting style must change in order to reduce possibility of developing negative emotionally-driven personalities for his children. Therefore, I suggest that the parenting problem can be solved by adopting the Moso family construct to counteract the biological father's poor parenting in a typical Chinese family. As shown in the analysis of the Moso family, although the biological father does not live with the family, the children still develop properly under the care of father figures. Namu's family illustrates the versatility of Moso families in which, when one father figure does not entirely fulfill the task of properly raising the children, another maternal male or a male member of the close-knit and loving community assumes the role (6). Yang et al., like Collier et al., would probably favor Moso families over the mainstream Chinese families because the maternal males fulfill the task of nurturance and care as a father to their "children" to a greater extent than their actual biological fathers.

Engels argued in his work *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, gender equality could only be achieved through the elimination of economic considerations (86), but the Moso family construct complicates Engles' ideal society because of the Moso's ability to maintain a society closer to a state of gender equality than today's Chinese society, despite the presence of monetary concerns (86). The same assertion that gender equality can coexist alongside of economic considerations cannot be made concerning contemporary Chinese society, as seen most notably through their favoritism towards raising sons rather than daughters as their only child. However, the Moso have managed to successfully unite gender equality with economic considerations within their society. Ownership of land exists in Moso society, but the crucial difference between their society and the standard Chinese society is clarified in Hua's research on the Moso landownership system:

certain commoner and serf *lignée* (family) became rich and owned not only a great deal of land but also serfs. We can see by this that the status of a *lignée* neither guaranteed its economic circumstances nor prevented it from degradation. Therefore, each household's economic level can be disassociated from its status. (98)

According to Hua, a person with a low social status such as a commoner or a serf has the possibility of attaining an affluent status through owning land and other serfs.

Likewise, a person that is considered to be of a high social class could be destitute in terms of his or her economic situation. These two possibilities infer that the Moso practice economic equality, irrelevant of their social status. Regardless of the presence of economic considerations, the gender gap serves as a more negligible role in Moso society than in the general Chinese society. For example, Namu states, “we Moso tend to favor daughter over sons...[b]ut a family needs sons as well as daughters. We need men to herd the yaks in the mountains and to travel with the horse caravans to trade in the outside world” (6). While a slight bias exists in favor of daughters, the Moso are satisfied and delighted by children of either gender, as opposed to the general Chinese families’ clear preference for male children. The Moso have realized a greater sense of gender equality without eliminating economic considerations, as Engels had suggested, and this equality in gender preferences is the first step toward overall gender equality between men and women in Chinese society. Furthermore, the Moso families’ division of rule better illustrates the Moso emphasis on gender equality. In their institution, a maternal uncle serves as the male chief, while a mother serves as the female chief, but Hua states that:

The idea of pure matriliney does not, however, imply that authority be allotted mainly to the [female] chief...In this respect, the individual’s ability prevails. But, in most *lignée* (families), the male chief is more influential than the female chief. (461)

Even though male chiefs generally hold more influence in the Moso family than female chiefs, family base overall leadership on a meritocratic system, permitting females to lead as well, rather than absolute male leadership seen in traditional Chinese families. Gender equality is more evident in Moso families, where economic considerations still exist within their society, than in Chinese families, and therefore, Moso families complicate Engels’ simple causality theory that a society can achieve gender equality by eliminating economic considerations.

Engels also theorized that prostitution would be absent from a society without economic considerations; however, the Moso society challenges Engels’ claim. Prostitution is limited in Moso society because it is heavily criticized (Hua 225); in fact, since the Moso people rarely received outside contact until the 1930s, prostitution was non-existent until visitors invaded the Moso enclave and some women earned monetary rewards or gifts for engaging in a relationship with the men. While these women claimed that their sexual relationship with these men were within the moral

boundaries of Moso culture because they were merely practicing their right to sexual freedom, the general Moso belief was that “[t]his practice was clearly understood to be prostitution (in Na, the Moso’s language, *doub tçi*: to sell your ass) and was disparaged by society” (Hua 225). Although prostitution is not widespread, the presence of prostitution suggests that outside environmental factors, with their greater emphasis on economic considerations than Moso society, has corrupted some Moso women. As a result, economic considerations do breach the ideal society that Engels’ imagined. In spite of this, the Moso society shows that valuing moderation and equality in economic status can lead to an ideal society without prostitution. When societies place excessive significance on money, as seen when outsiders disturbed the monetary equilibrium of the Mosos, the disparity in gender equality grows, and the women in such a morally-deprived society became devalued to objects for pleasure rather than nurturers.

Although Moso society did not follow the one-child policy, a policy which still propels China’s traditional gender discrimination in the preference for a male child, the policy was probably not even required to control China’s overpopulation, and promoting voluntary birth control most likely would have slowed China’s population growth quicker and more efficiently than the policy. In the article “The Effect of China’s One-Child Family Policy after 25 Years,” Therese Hesketh, et al., analyze the effects of the one-child policy, and argue that the policy has worsened traditional Chinese gender beliefs. Therefore, I believe governments should not limit the size of the family by statute. Restricting the number of children that a family can legally produce changes family dynamics drastically, and as a consequence of limiting families to one child, the government has magnified the age-old Chinese preference for male children. Hesketh, et al. state that

[s]ex-selective abortion...undoubtedly accounts for a large proportion of the decline in female births...actual figures are impossible to obtain, because sex-selective abortion is illegal but is known to be widely carried out, helped by a burgeoning private sector. (1173)

Gender-specific abortions have resulted in a high male-to-female ratio of approximately one hundred fifteen males for every one hundred females, a skewed ratio that will continue to present a difficulty to males in finding a mate (1173). Additionally, the fertility rate, defined as children per woman, dropped from 5.9 to 2.9 between 1970 and 1979 when the government promoted a voluntary plan of

producing fewer children, and since implementing the policy, from 1979 to 2004, the fertility rate has decreased to 1.7 (1172). I believe that population growth would have been controlled to a greater extent if people had the right to voluntarily limit the size of their family by means such as oral contraceptives rather than a compulsory and restrictive policy. Hesketh et al. provide a statistic to further their claim of the policy's inefficiency:

many countries have had substantial declines in fertility during the past 25 years [without the need of limiting family size through a government-enforced policy], and China's neighbors in East Asia have some of the lowest total fertility rates in the world: 1.04 in Singapore, 1.37 in Japan, and 0.91 in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. (1172)

Although East Asian countries also emphasize having more sons in the family than daughters, countries without the one-child policy have more opportunities to produce that son they immensely desire. According to Hesketh et al., a partial explanation to these lowered fertility rates in countries where families are permitted to decide the size of their family is their greater development and urbanization compared to China's urban area (1172). In light of Hesketh et al.'s claim, there still exist developed and urbanized areas in China that exhibit high fertility rates compared to the national average. In *Birth Control in China: 1949-2000*, Thomas Scharping examines the formulation of the one-child policy and argues that it was ineffective by studying fertility rates in various urban and rural areas in China. In a developed and urbanized city such as Guangdong, the fertility rate is still at 2.21, higher than the national average of 1.78 (267). Ultimately, the reason behind the lowered fertility rates lies in the fact that the population of China's neighboring countries will not continue to have more than one child because they are satisfied with one as a result of financial burdens in raising a child (Hesketh et al. 1175). In China, if their firstborn was a daughter, urban families were most likely to disregard the monetary fines imposed for having more than one child and attempt to have a son, while they stopped childbirth if their firstborn was a son (1171). Hence, the one-child policy has successfully lowered fertility rates, but at the cost of magnifying the traditional principle of having a selective preferential for sons over daughters. Voluntary measures, as seen in other Asian countries, would have worked just as well, if not

better, than the policy, possibly without the consequence of increased gender inequality and the proliferation of in an illegal abortion industry.

The government's coercive policy will not completely solve China's population dilemma. As seen in surrounding Asian countries with voluntary control of their family size, fertility rate are significantly lower. Even within China, fertility rates are approximately similar to the national average in rural areas where the government officials are more lax in enforcing the policy or avoid it completely due to the difficulty in imposing it in small, rural communities. In rural Yunnan, China, where the Moso people live and do not abide by the one-child policy, the fertility rate was 6.17 in 1957 and dropped to 2.39 in 1995, whereas the national fertility rate was 6.21 in 1957 and 1.78 in 1995 (Scharping 267). The people of Yunnan significantly lowered their fertility rate without any violation to their child-bearing rights. A comparison of fertility rates where the policy was actively enforced such as Guangdong and other urban areas with rural areas where the policy was less stringent suggests that the government should take a *laissez-faire* attitude towards their country's family structure. I believe that there are issues that governments should not regulate, such as the number of children in a family, because the Chinese population displayed a gradual decrease in fertility rate without any strict government interventions (Hesketh et al.1172). The Chinese government merely obstructed the natural trend of its population by slowing down the natural decrease in fertility rate in China, as seen in the trend of Yunnan's fertility rates. However, the Chinese government still does not acknowledge the mistake, and persist with their one-child policy, even in light of its negative effects, after twenty-eight years and counting.

Psychologist Francine M. Deutsch suggests the policy is not entirely a disadvantage to Chinese society, but ultimately, I believe the advantages toward females that Deutsch promotes are only limited to certain social classes. Deutsch, in her article "Filial Piety, Patrilineality, and China's One-Child Policy," proposes that if only the direct results of the policy are examined, only the negative aspects of the policy are apparent. She argues that researchers tend to document only the obvious outcomes and overlook the other impacts of the policy, such as its effect on improving gender equality. Deutsch interviewed a total of twelve female college students who were the only child, and a total of seven female college students who had siblings. Seven of the twelve only children reported that their parents encouraged them to

break gender norms, while four out of seven students with siblings reported their parents encouraged them to conform to traditional female norms (379). In an interview, an only child who was a female college student reported, "My father...has great confidence in me. He thinks if I study abroad I can go back to China and make a good salary... My father wants me to concentrate on work [and] on study. For women, they should be independent first" (380). The traditional Chinese belief is that women have to depend on their husbands for their financial needs and their futures, so the parents of female children generally restrict their daughters' career and romantic aspirations only if their chosen husbands lack the ability to support their daughters. Because the parents are permitting their daughters to have more ambitious futures than if they had lived before one-child families, Deutsch believes that the gap in gender equality is beginning to narrow in one-child families (380). While four out of the seven female students that had siblings were limited by their parents in their future career and family aspirations, female students who were the only child appeared to have parents who were more liberal in their views and disregarded the Chinese traditional gender norms. This change in mainstream thought might possibly be a breakthrough in traditional Chinese culture and the beginning of a shift towards a more modern view of women and their abilities. However, I believe that China still remains fixed to their traditional views. Even though it is fortunate that high-status one-child families encourage their daughters to defy tradition, I doubt this is a widespread practice. The young woman Deutsch interviewed is a college student, and college is a privilege very few children achieve in China because of high level of competitiveness and the financial difficulties of many families. The liberal views of the affluent probably result from their greater education and more exposure to the more open-minded Western culture. A large majority of Chinese families are still poor, and prefer to have a son instead of a daughter since sons are traditionally better able to support their parents better than daughters when college is not an option.

An analysis of the overall effect of the one-child policy on gender equality and the population and the condition of China's nuclear families thus far confirms the claims of Collier et al. that "while families symbolize deep and salient modern themes, contemporary families are unlikely to fulfill our equally modern nurturant needs" (24). We search for love and nurturance in establishing a family, but in general, Chinese one-child families lack these two main components. In traditional

Chinese families, the main purpose of the wife is to fulfill the wishes of her husband's parents by having a son to preserve the family name and wealth. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, in their book *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era* analyze families in a spectrum of social classes, and find that regardless of social class "if a woman marries, she agrees at least to try to have children, preferably a boy...[and that] women claimed that parents-in-law were the most frequent source of pressure to bear more children" (257, 265). Pressured women, sons who are supposed to function to "transform kin ties into the cement of great landowning and trading corporations...[and] daughters [who] are especially likely to be commoditized" (Davis and Harrell 256) cannot produce happy and functional families. The gender inequality still present between sons and daughters prevents the children, more particularly the female children, from receiving the nurturance they require for proper development. Thus, I propose a possible solution to the growing family conflicts is to gradually adopt some of the characteristics of Moso family life.

In general, the Moso matrilineal family construct surpasses the mainstream Chinese families in gender equality and the nurturance within the family and between the family and its community. Gender equality in the Moso society is much more apparent than in traditional Chinese families; especially in the decision concerning the leadership of the family. Adopting the Moso family structure would also be a major step toward gender equality in terms of the birth-rate. While Chinese families have an extreme partiality toward having male rather than female offspring, the Moso, even with their slight preference towards female children, do not exhibit absolute and one-sided favorite gender. The Moso believe that children are a blessing, whether they are male or female, because their concept of procreation is enveloped in the metaphorical expression "[I]f the rain does not fall from the sky, the grass will not grow on the ground"; Hua explains that "The identification of the offspring with grass is revealing, for it implies the initial presence of a seed in the earth (the belly of the woman) whose development is set in motion by a contribution from outside: the rain (sperm)" (119). The Moso consider the act of procreation as beautiful as Nature, and they regard birth as "a charity to the woman's household" since they find joy to continue their family lineages (119). The concept of having children for the sake of continuing the family name is similar to traditional Chinese families, but the main difference is that the Moso care and nurture every child without any regard to the child's gender. In addition, the Moso provide more

nurturance than the majority of Chinese families when the biological father is not living with the family. Through the bonds developed between the children and their maternal uncles, the maternal males nurture their nieces and nephews to a greater extent than most biological fathers in Chinese families. Moreover, the bonds between the family and its community assist the family in the care and nurturance of the children as every member of the community oversees the safety of the children. One major exception to the Moso tradition of gender equality, however, is that the women (like women everywhere) are more likely than the men to be responsible for contraception (Scharping 111). Nevertheless, the Moso family construct would be preferred by Collier, et al. and Engels over the traditional Chinese families because Collier, et al. would recognize that the social forces within the Moso family and community are more successful in turning turn ideal families into reality, and Engels would see that eliminating economic considerations are to have a greater sense of gender equality (86).

Given China's conservatism, the suggestion that the Moso matrilineal lifestyle would be beneficial for the whole country would initially be met with heavy criticism and denouncement, but as China and its government progress in the twenty-first century, they are beginning to become more receptive to visions that differ from the norm. Certainly, China must revoke their one-child policy first before any legislative actions occur and encourage gender equality within their families and the country. My proposal to introduce the Moso lifestyle into mainstream Chinese families, radical though it is, is actually not that impractical, compared to the introduction of the one-child policy. Instead of altering the family dynamics abruptly as the one-child policy did when it was initiated, a gradual launch and promotion to the voluntary adherence to Moso culture will be more successful than introducing yet another coercive policy. However, adopting the ways of Moso society might not be required if revoking the one-child policy does lead to greater gender equality and nurturant families than are evident in present-day China. As long as China starts to realize its mistake with the one-child policy and implicitly admits their blunder by abolishing the policy, I will be more than satisfied if China will have more gender-equality and nurturant families than today. What we, imbued with Western culture and society, consider an ideal family, differs from the traditional Chinese conception. But certainly, Chinese families will benefit from adopting some of the characteristics of Moso families. From greater equality to greater nurturance and care for children,

the Moso family construct promises and fulfills what can be considered as a step toward developing ideal families and, eventually, ideal societies.

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