



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 26, 2017

China, World's Oldest Living Civilization, Is Aging (Because of Atheism?)

China has long entertained dreams of being the world's dominant power, but it has at least one notable impediment: Its population is aging at a rapid rate.

Still the world's most populous country, the "Middle Kingdom" had a robust fertility rate (FR) of 3.50 children per woman in 1976. But the "one-child policy" instituted in 1979, along with further movement into modernity, changed this. Now China's FR stands at a low 1.66 — well below replacement level (2.10).



How is this a problem in a nation with 1.357 billion people? *Bloomberg* [explains](#):

Aging has big implications for China's economic growth, which could be undermined as the labor force declines sharply from 2021 to 2030. It also strains the nation's expenditures for public services, insurance, and health care, and puts a dent in domestic consumption.

China's latest population development [plan](#), released by the State Council late Wednesday, projects that about a quarter of China's population will be 60 or older by 2030. That's up from 13.3 percent of the population in the country's latest census in 2010.

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With the modern psyche having been shaped by the [Malthusian idea](#) of an ever increasing population yielding a Soylent Green [dystopia](#), the negative effects of a graying population are rarely understood. Yet approximately 80 countries have a FR below replacement level, and more nations are poised to join this group over time. Thus, the world doesn't face an unending population explosion, but a population implosion.

This has some serious implications. As I [wrote](#) in 2009:

Normally, a civilization can be represented with a population pyramid standing right-side-up, with the youngest people at the bottom and the age increasing as you move up (okay, we'll forget pharaoh buried underneath). So the aged would be at the very top, with lots of youngsters down below to do civilization's heavy lifting.

When birthrates collapse, however, this pyramid is turned on its head, with the elderly outnumbering the very young. This usually means hardship, as the young often have to care for their elders.... Worse still, it can create a vicious circle: as the young pay progressively higher taxes, the financial strain makes it even less likely that they will have children. It's a recipe for the winding down of a civilization toward the nadir of non-existence.

Yet there are problems even when social programs are removed from the equation. The young and vibrant are the worker bees; they are the inventors, innovators and creators of wealth. They drive the economy. Of course, the elderly may take jobs out of necessity or boredom, but they can match



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the economic engine of a peak-working-years population little more than they could match it on the athletic field. This is part of the reason why famed economist Adam Smith taught that decreasing population correlates with economic depression.

Consequently, “A shrinking labor force would further erode China’s competitive edge in manufacturing but would also be a drag on consumption, now a major pillar of the economy as it transitions away from old smokestack drivers of growth,” wrote Bloomberg.

Recognizing this problem, China began phasing out its one-child policy (which always offered many exceptions) in 2015. Yet this hasn’t yielded much fecundity.

The reason? Low fertility rates aren’t mainly caused by government policy, and they can’t be remedied by it. In fact, [according](#) to the excellent documentary *Demographic Winter*, there are five primary causes of fertility collapse: the sexual revolution, prosperity, the divorce revolution, inaccurate assumptions (e.g., concern about overpopulation), and female careerism.

The last is especially significant because when women trade domestic dreams for workaday ones, they delay childbearing or forego it altogether.

The only good news for China is, again, that it has a lot of company in its demographic misery. Western Europe’s FR is approximately 1.50, with northern Italy and parts of Spain coming in at below one. “As a result,” I [reported](#) in 2008, “Europe’s 65-year-olds now outnumber her 14-year-olds, and one German province had to close 220 schools in 2006. Children were present in 80 percent of U.S. households a century ago; that number is now 32 percent.”

The picture in Eastern Europe is no better. And Russia is losing 700,000 people per year, presenting the possibility that her population could be halved by 2050.

In fact, as [pointed out](#) by demographer Phillip Longman, author of *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten Prosperity*, [only devoutly religious people](#) are having large families today.

This gets at China’s main problem: It has a [higher percentage](#) of convinced atheists, by far, than any other nation on Earth. And as Longman [put it](#), “Single-child families are becoming the norm among those who do not feel themselves commanded by God ‘to go forth and multiply.’”

So it turns out that atheism is the most effective one-child policy in the world. And thus will the [religious inherit](#) the Earth.



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