

# Eugenics in China through the lens of cultural additivity

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“One man’s trash is another man’s treasure” is what we often use to describe the value discrepancy of a subject when possessed by different owners. Likewise, in cultural studies and sociology, a society’s trash could also be other societies’ treasure, and Eugenics is a vivid example.

As a theory that was partly responsible for starting World War II (WWII), the notorious Eugenics refers to a set of controversial beliefs and practices that were developed with the [intention of enhancing the genetic quality of a human population](#) [1].

Eugenics has been a forbidden discipline in the West because it led to [catastrophic and humanitarian crises](#), such as the Holocaust during WWII. It is now negatively associated with many deplorable terms, such as [colonialism, racial oppression, nationalism](#), white supremacy, etc. [2-5]. Nonetheless, in East Asia Spheres, such as China and Japan, Eugenics survived and thrived in different eras of the 20th century through various regimes, parties, and political figures with various ideologies and political claims.

Chung [6] presented the history of Chinese Eugenics from the Qing Dynasty to the current Communist regime, demonstrating how it was intertwined with national character, the national body, and national survival via social movements and political campaigns. The most [recent revitalization of Eugenics in China](#), as the author noted, was during the 1980s when the Party-State tried to advance the controversial “One Child Policy” [6]. In this campaign, Eugenics was once again propagated as the goal of the government’s population control measure in Communist China and the justification of government-led endeavors, such as forced abortion for rural women and sterilization of the mentally disabled.

However, it is quite strange to see Eugenics's vitality in China, where Confucianism is deep-rooted in the people's beliefs, influencing their thinking and behaviors. Specifically, Confucius's doctrine "There are three kinds of unfilial piety, no offspring is the worst" entails people having more offspring, especially boys, to show filial piety to the family.

A possible explanation for this is [the cultural additivity concept](#), which indicates that "people of a given culture are willing to incorporate into their culture the values and norms from other systems of beliefs that might or might not logically contradict with principles of their existing system of beliefs" [7]. The high level of cultural additivity among Chinese people might give them a high resilience toward the induction of conflicting values.



**Figure 1.** Eugenics propaganda in rural China "Having fewer but quality-oriented children, you will have a happy life". (Source: <https://new.qq.com/omn/20210409/20210409A09Z2N00.html>)

Usually, information (or values) that are in direct opposition to one another are frequently [excluded from the thinking process](#) [8]; however, there are still [situations in which both types of information \(or values\) can coexist](#) [9]. This occurrence takes place when the individual's multi-filtering system deems both kinds of information (values) as beneficial to the individual. On the one hand, the Chinese are aware of the repercussions of having no son and how it served as a contempt for filial piety. On the other hand, they still accept Eugenics as their population control measure focused on increased family happiness through

improved population quality, as Figure 1 illustrates.

## References

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