

Marketing to Children - China - November 2012

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“China’s ‘Little Emperors’ are the youth of the country’s nascent emerging middle class. Growing up in families with higher-than-average discretionary incomes, no siblings and active grandparents, they are the beneficiaries of rising expenditure on children.”
—Matthew Crabbe, Research Director, Mintel Asia-Pacific

This report looks at the following areas:

- How the phenomenon of The Little Emperors emerged
- Is there a gender imbalance?
- What are the consequences of the one-child policy?
- What has brought about the Little Emperor phenomenon?

China’s One-Child Policy was launched in 1979, just after the population topped 1 billion, and was aimed at drastically reducing the rapid population growth. As a result, more than eight in ten Chinese families in tier 1 and tier 2 cities now have only one child, the so-called “Little Emperor”. The major social consequence of the One-Child Policy has been that expectations for the Little Emperors are now exceptionally high. As parents don’t get a second chance to conceive, the pressure not to fail in raising their only child is intense. It created the now infamous images of the rather stereotypical, but not wholly inaccurate, representation of ‘Tiger Mums’.

These mothers tend to be hyper-involved in all aspects of their children’s upbringing and push their Little Emperors towards academic success, even at the expense of their leisure time. This pressure to succeed leads to a heavy investment in babies and young children, in order to improve their education, career and future earnings prospects, whilst also catering to their every need. However, as a result of mollycoddling, only children develop expectations of their own, as to what they should be provided with as they grow up.

This report delves into how the modern urban Chinese middle class family operates and structures itself around the single child, which is crucial to understanding how to design, market and sell a range of products and services to this important consumer segment. Quite simply, brands and manufacturers ignore the Little Emperor at their peril.

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