

Research on China's Three-Child Policy and Gender Equality

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Abstract: Population issues have always been fundamental to a country's economic development. Chinese In May 2021, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee proposed to implement the policy that a couple can have three children and supporting measures, marking a new stage in the development of Chinese. However, from the available data, after the implementation of the three-child birth policy, the effect is minimal. Through comparative analysis, this paper explores women's attitudes towards fertility in the two periods before the implementation of the family planning policy and after the implementation of the three-child policy, and analyzes the deep-seated reasons for this difference in attitudes, including the improvement of women's education level, the improvement of China's urbanization development level, and the pursuit of gender equality by Chinese women.

Keywords: China's three-child policy, family planning policy, fertility intention, education level, gender equality

1. Introduction

As a country with a large population, China's aging population has become increasingly serious in recent years, and the two-child policy and the three-child policy have begun to be implemented one after another, but the birth rate is not impressive, which will have a long-term and profound impact on China's economic development, and is related to the national economic situation and innovation ability. However, the demographic problem is different from monetary policy and other fiscal problems, not overnight can be changed, similarly, the reasons for the continuous decline of China's population birth rate are also multi-source, long-term, women's attitude to childbirth changes, Chinese families for the redefinition of parenting costs, the lack of social welfare in China, gender inequality will have a negative impact on it, to change this status quo requires all-round, multi-level policy support and people's comprehensive quality improvement.

2. Chinese Women's Attitude Towards Fertility and Reasons

From the founding of New China to the implementation of the family planning policy in the 70s of the 20th century, under the influence of China's traditional fertility culture and wartime population concept, China implemented the population policy of "natural birth", [1]. During this period, China's fertility rate and growth rate continued to rise, the highest population fertility rate reached 43.60 ‰ population growth rate of 33.50 ‰ [2], many women will have two or three or more children in their

lifetime, at the beginning of the implementation of the family planning policy, many families would rather accept punishment than violate the national policy to have a second or third child, especially when the first child is a girl, people always want to have another boy. The reasons for this are as follows:

2.1. Traditional Ideas of Succession

Under the influence of China’s long-standing patriarchal society, China’s traditional fertility culture has shaped a patriarchal social atmosphere. Despite the fact that our Constitution clearly states that women have equal rights with men in all respects, gender inequalities still exist in society. Procreation seems to have become an obligation for women, rather than a right for them as individuals to choose whether or not to procreate. People emphasize the sanctity of the mother’s figure, but in practice still focus on family inheritance, reducing women to tools of fertility.

2.2. Labor Needs for Social Development

Where New China was founded, China needs sufficient labor to restore production and develop the economy, under the combined effect of people’s patriotic enthusiasm and women’s education of husbands and children, although Chinese women were treated unequally, still willing to have children, during this period China is still based on agriculture, men have obvious advantages in physical strength, so the vast majority of families pay more attention to men, willing to give birth and raise boys.

2.3. Chinese Society Lacks Public Benefits

China is still in the primary stage of socialism, social public welfare is not perfect, which means that the family is still the only reliable personal welfare in Chinese society, that is, we proverbially say “raising children to prevent old age,” in our country’s traditional concept, the main purpose of people to have children is to be able to get the support and care of children when they are old and lose the ability to work, can not take care of themselves and need the help of others, it is the purpose of fertility generated by actual life needs, and the basic function of the family after the emergence of private ownership [3].

2.4. Inadequacy of Contraceptive Measures

Before the seventies of the 20th century, China implemented the population policy of “natural childbirth”, so contraceptive measures are very imperfect, after China began to carry out family planning, women in some areas underwent sterilization, but in the following table [4] we can see that even women who received ligation in the later stage have given birth to multiple children, and most families survive more male fetuses than female fetuses.

Table 1: Fertility status of partially ligated women in Xicun in the 1970s [3].

Name	Number of births	Number of surviving fetuses	Number of surviving boys	notes
Jinyuan Xu	4	4	2	
Zhifang Cao	5	4	1	An abnormal death
Qingxiang Xu	4	3	1	Abort one
Juying Chen	6	3	1	Three abnormal deaths

Table 1:(continued).

Church Grandmother	10	5	3	Four miscarriages, one death
Qiuyue Luo	5	5	4	
Lijun Liao	3	3	2	
Yuying Hu	7	5	3	Two abnormal deaths
Xiuying Zhang	7	6	4	An abnormal death
Peijun Wang	7	7	0	Not ligated

3. Chinese Women’s Attitude Towards Fertility after the Liberalization of the Three-Child Policy and the Reasons for It

After the implementation of China’s three-child policy, the government introduced a series of welfare policies to encourage childbirth, but the effect was not satisfactory. The advent of the emerging media era has made us more clearly see the attitude of Chinese women towards fertility in the new era. Now most of the women of marriageable and childbearing age were born in the era of the 80s to the early 21st century when the one-child policy and the reform and opening up policy were parallel, so most of them are only children, and they are also the most educated group of women so far, who have a clear understanding of their own rights and interests and are cautious about childbirth. Here’s why:

3.1. The Influence of One-Child Status on Fertility Intention

As only children, they bear greater family responsibilities, lack sibling sharing, and face heavier pressure to retire, so they alleviate financial and time constraints by reducing births [5]. Only children grow up with family resources and rarely experience gender bias, but after entering school and the workplace, gender bias inadvertently creates an unprecedented gender awareness and aversion to sexism in this generation of women [6], which has an impact on their willingness to marry and have children.

3.2. Issues Such as Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

In recent years, female workplace problems have been frequent, and female employees are facing great pressure and challenges. Some companies are reluctant to recruit female employees because they consider the impact of women’s paid maternity leave on profits, resulting in increased employment pressure on women. According to a survey, only 24% of female employees can continue to work according to their original career plan after giving birth, 36% of female employees choose to stabilize in their existing positions, 27% of female employees hope to engage in more relaxed work [7] to alleviate the pressure of raising children and balance the difficulties of family and work, and even 13% of female employees choose to resign and devote themselves wholeheartedly to their families. This reality has exacerbated gender inequality in the workplace, with many women choosing to have fewer or no children in order to avoid the impact of childbirth on their work [7].

3.3. Increase in Social Development Level and Fertility Costs

The cost of childbirth includes material costs, opportunity costs, and health costs [8]. Under the combined effect of these three high costs, a decrease in women’s willingness to have children and an increase in concerns are inevitable outcomes. We will conduct a specific analysis of these three parts.

3.3.1. Increased Material Costs

As the level of social development increases, so do people's expectations for living conditions and the education of their children. There is a phenomenon of "involution" and excessive pursuit of children's success in society, which leads to parenting pressure and rising education costs. Contemporary young people are suffering from high fertility costs and survival pressure, gradually changing from "not daring to give birth" to "not wanting to give birth".

3.3.2. Higher Opportunity Cost

The opportunity cost of childbearing mainly refers to the "maternal punishment" due to work-family conflicts [8]. Childbirth has an impact on women's work, and contemporary young women have a sense of independence, especially the pursuit of economic independence. Opportunity cost factors undoubtedly significantly influence their fertility decisions.

3.3.3. Consumption of Health Costs

According to the medical point of view, even if the body recovers quickly, it will take nearly a decade for a woman to give birth at intervals of one to two years, if the three-child policy is really implemented. In China, where society is developing rapidly and employment is tight, it is difficult for women to find work. As a result, women began to think about marrying late or even not marrying, let alone having three children.

4. The Reasons for the Difference in Attitudes Towards Fertility Between the Two Periods

Between these two periods, China underwent great changes, rapid social development, and the introduction of a number of important policies, including family planning policy, reform and opening up policy, compulsory education policy, etc., which profoundly affected women's thinking, and subtly changed women's attitudes towards childbirth, for the following specific reasons.

4.1. Improvement of Women's Education Level under the Role of Multiple Policies

The implementation of nine-year compulsory education has improved the overall level of education in China, especially for women, education is no longer the prerogative of men. With the improvement of women's education level, the value of work gradually equals that of men, and the gender income gap narrows, resulting in an increase in the opportunity cost of women's childbirth and a decrease in their willingness to have children. At the same time, the improvement of education level also triggers a "quantity-quality" substitution effect, women pay more attention to the quality of children's education than the quantity, which increases the cost of raising children and weakens women's willingness to have children [9].

The implementation of the one-child policy has increased the level of education of the population. When there is only one child in a family, both boys and girls have a higher level of education than children in non-one-child families [10]. In order to combat gender inequality, single-child families pay more attention to the upbringing of daughters in order to establish an economic foundation under the patriarchal system and ensure social status and living standards.

As shown in Table 2, we can see that compared with children with siblings and sisters, the education level and annual income of only children are significantly higher than those of non only children, and the higher the average number of years of education, the higher the annual income of families, most of them pay more attention to the cultivation of only girls. The data presented is that the average number of years of education of only girls is 11.1 years, which is 10.7 years higher than that of only boys.

Table 2: Comparison of only children and children with sibling(s) [10].

	Children with sibling(s)	Only Children		
		All	Girls	Boys
Average years of schooling (years)	9.4	10.8	11.1	10.7
Annual income (yuan)*	6,748	8,402	9,505	7,781
Occupation*	3.3%	9.27%	14.0%	6.6%
Professional/technical worker(doctor, professor,teacher.editor, photographer)				
Office staff (secretary. office helper)	3.5%	14.04%	21.1%	8.5%
Farmer.fisherman, hunter	44.4%	15.19%	7.0%	19.8%
Skilled worker (foreman. group leader. craftsman)	6.6%	7.87%	0.0%	12.3%
Non-skilled worker (ordinary laborer, logger)	19.0%	17.30%	22.8%	14.2%
Army/police	2.1%	4.22%	0.0%	6.6%
Average height (cm)	161	166	159	170
Average weight (kg)	52	57	51	60
Smoking (%)	4.8%	4.09%	0%	6.4%
Drinking alcohol (%)	8.0%	14.88%	4%	21%
Sample size	1,047	322	116	206
*The information is drawn from the latest survey wave2006or2004 Sour 1997,2000,2004, and 2006 CHNS				

4.2. The Change of People’s Understanding of Traditional Filial Piety

With the implementation of the reform and opening up policy, urbanization in various places has become more and more intense, the authoritative filial piety of individuals has been significantly weakened, and the acceptance of authoritative filial piety by urban people is much higher than that of rural people. Interaction analysis shows that urbanization experience has a greater effect on women’s authoritative filial piety, and compared with men, urbanization experience has lasting and thorough characteristics on women’s traditional filial piety [11]. Influenced by China’s mainstream traditional Confucian culture, the concept of gender hierarchy in rural China is strong, and people’s thinking is generally fixed that “husbands and children” are still women’s obligations, rather than husband and wife supporting each other. With the improvement of China’s urbanization level and the rise of China’s secondary and tertiary industries, women’s sense of independence has gradually awakened, and more and more women realize that childbirth is a life choice as an independent individual, rather than imprisoning their own responsibilities and obligations.

4.3. Internet Development and the Impact of Online Public Opinion on Women

The advent of the new media era has made each of us a “gatekeeper” in the communication process, this communication model is people-oriented, their own control, everyone has the right to speak in the public domain of the Internet, in recent years, once it involves topics related to “gender equality” and “women’s rights”, it will trigger heated discussions among netizens, on the one hand, the Internet provides a new channel for women to protect their own rights and interests, on the other hand, some platforms for traffic, by manipulating public opinion, maliciously causing gender confrontation, In

this way, women are resistant to getting along with the opposite sex and “getting married” and “procreation”.

5. How to Deal with the Persistently Low Birth Rate

5.1. The Policy Clarifies Men’s Childcare Responsibilities

People’s thinking change requires long-term, intergenerational efforts, but as far as China’s current population problems, the loss of demographic dividend, labor shortage, increased pension pressure, and serious social aging, these problems need to be solved urgently, so simply rely on people’s natural thinking change to change the family division of labor structure, men and women in the family division of labor time cost is too high, need the government to shorten this time, in the policy to clarify men’s childcare responsibilities.

5.2. Social Improvement of Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

Combined with the actual situation analysis, women in order to keep their jobs, dare not marry and have children increasingly serious, which has become a major resistance to the implementation of the three-child policy, China’s workplace lacks similar to foreign DEI type of company culture training and gender ratio requirements, its methods have certain reference significance, such as “shielding” social identity, specifying objective evaluation standards, separating personnel evaluation from personnel decision-making, using different decision-making teams, monitoring decision-making models, etc., can be used as a reference for improving workplace discrimination in China.

In addition, the phenomenon of the continued low birth rate can also be improved by introducing preferential policies to alleviate family economic pressure, improving old-age security to reduce the pressure of family old-age care, reforming the maternity insurance system, regulating the trend of Internet public opinion, developing childcare undertakings, and building a childcare service system [12].

6. Conclusion

Behind the difficulties in implementing China’s three-child policy, it not only reflects the uneven distribution of social resources and gender discrimination in the workplace, but also reflects the idea that modern Chinese women focus more on their own development and refuse to be bound by their families. Based on statistical data, this article studies the fertility rate of the population after the liberalization of China’s three-child policy in the 70s of the 20th century and recent years, and it can be found that the fertility intention of Chinese women to give birth has generally weakened, and the reasons for this phenomenon are analyzed and explored, and the reasons include the improvement of women’s education level under the role of multiple policies, the development of urbanization in China has changed people’s cognition of traditional filial piety, and the development of the Internet. According to the previous analysis, this paper puts forward suggestions on how to deal with the phenomenon of persistently low birth rate, but the suggestions are still only hypothetical, requiring human costs and time costs to practice, and the next research can make substantial contributions to the solution, and the issue of China’s three-child policy and gender equality involves the long-term stability of Chinese society and China’s long-term development.

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