

Reflections on the System for Coping with Population Aging

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Abstract—In order to cope with the increasingly serious problem of population aging, the top-level system design must be done well. How to take multiple measures to effectively contain the decline of fertility rate in China is the fundamental strategy to cope with the challenges of aging. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate and implement effective population policies and integrate such policies with relevant socio-economic policies, so as to play a synergistic role.

Keywords—population aging; fertility rate; socio-economic policy

I. INTRODUCTION

Aging of population is an irreversible worldwide problem. How to effectively cope with the increasingly serious problem of population aging is related to the sustainable development of the economy and society of all countries. It is necessary to not only ensure that "the elderly are looked after properly", but also put off the speed of population aging and its impact on social and economic development. Life expectancy and fertility rate are two decisive factors that affect population aging. However, the extension of life expectancy is irreversible, and population aging can only be put off by increasing fertility rate. Based on the background of both declining fertility desire and fertility rate in China, it can only use combination blow to contain the decline of fertility rate and fundamentally put off the process of population aging.

II. FERTILITY RATE IN CHINA IS BELOW THE LEVEL OF POPULATION GENERATION REPLACEMENT

The sustainable development of population is one of the crucial factors to ensure the sustainable development of social economy. Generally speaking, when the life expectancy of the population is relatively stable, it is necessary to ensure the replacement of generations, with an average of two children for per couple. If the fertility rate is higher than the level of population generation replacement, the population will increase and vice versa. Due to the influence of factors such as the stage of national development, infant mortality rate, child-bearing period mortality rate and sex ratio at birth, the normal generation replacement rate of population is more than 2. However, from the perspective of world, the birth rate of all countries has a descending trend.

Relevant data show that from the beginning of the 19th century, the fertility rate of developed countries in Europe and the United States has been declining continuously. Although it has been rising since the end of the last century, it has only maintained at about 1.62. [1] Since the 1960s, the birthrate in middle-income countries has been declining continuously. Although the birthrate in low- and middle-income and low-income countries is much higher, it has seen descending trend compared with the past. Mu Guangzong (2016) believes that at present, most regions of China have entered the marital and childbearing pattern of "very late marriage and very late childbirth" and "low fertility desire and high fertility cost". [2] Since the implementation of the "comprehensive two-child" policy in 2016, the overwhelming majority of post-70s have missed the best child-bearing period that puts them in a situation where they want to give birth but cannot and dare not give birth, while post-80s and post-90s are able to give birth but not willing to give birth and dare not give birth. According to the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, China's fertility rate is 1.7 in 2016 and becomes 1.8 in 2020, which is still lower than the normal level of population generation replacement, including the consideration of the factors such as under-reporting and rising fertility rate affected by population policy. Thus, it is a fact that China has entered the era of low fertility rate.

III. FERTILITY HAS BECOME A STRATEGIC PROBLEM AFFECTING THE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA AND CHINESE NATION

The problem of fertility is not only related to putting off the process of population aging and dealing with the problems of old-age in the future, but also to the healthy and sustainable development of the country and the nation. It can be seen that it is a major strategic problem that should arouse widespread concern and great attention of the whole society.

From 1820 to 2015, the proportion of China's population in the world's population declined from 36.6% in 1820 to 18.7 in 2015 for nearly 200 years. Although it rebounded in 1980, it was still in the descending trend. [3] Although the total population of China reached 1.375 billion in 2015 that is 249 times of the total population of 552 million in 1950, the number of new-born people in 2015 was only 16.55 million that is far below the average number of 21.1 million new-born people in 1950-1954. According to the 2010 population census

data, the population of post-80s, post-90s and post-00s are 219 million, 188 million and 147 million respectively. In less than a generation from the post-80s to the post-00s, the newly-born population shrank by 32.87%. [3] If things go on like this, the total population of our country will decrease sharply in the next 50-100 years in case of effective measures are not taken.

As the comprehensive quality of the new generation of employees in knowledge, skills and other aspects is boosting, which strongly promote China's industrial economic upgrading and leapfrog development. However, the continued decline in fertility rate will inevitably affect the sustainable development of China's social economy and the realization of the ambitious goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct a favorable "population ecology", promulgate and put in place the relaxed population fertility policy, improve the fertility rate of our country, and make it reach the normal level of generation replacement, so as to put off the process of population aging and its negative impact on economic and social development.

IV. TO FORMULATE AND IMPLEMENT ACTIVE POPULATION POLICY

From the historical experience of the change of world population quantity and structure, when the fertility rate of a country or region is much higher, there should be many measures taken to control the rapid growth of population and its effect should also be better. But when the fertility rate is lower than 1.5, there are numerous difficulties to take a variety of measures to encourage population production, cope with the problem of population aging, contain the negative growth of population, and raise the fertility rate to above 2.1 generation replacement. Nordic countries, Japan and South Korea are good examples.

In order to improve the population fertility rate, put off the process of population aging and optimize the population structure, China began to intensively promulgate an active population policy in 2013, from the "double only two-child" policy to the "only two-child" policy, and then to the "comprehensive two-child" policy in 2016, in order to achieve better results. After the implementation of the "comprehensive two-child" policy, the number of two children increased while the number of one child decreased significantly. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that in 2017, the number of newly-born population was 17.23 million, a decrease of 630,000 compared with 2016, while the number of newly-born population of one child was 7.24 million, a decrease of 2.49 million compared with 2016, and the number of newly-born population of two children was much higher than that of one child for the first time in nearly 20 years. Therefore, it can be seen that the decline of the fertility rate of our country is mainly due to the decline of the fertility rate of one child, and the introduction of the comprehensive two-child policy has gradually played a role [1].

At present, scholars such as Qing Lianbin have put forward two kinds of population policy ideas: "single-pass" approach and "two-step" approach. "Single-pass approach", that is, to liberalize the population fertility policy in an all-round way. The "two-step" population policy is to liberalize the fertility

policy in those provinces and municipalities where the population is more aging, and to sum up experience as a pilot project. When the time is ripe, it will be unfolded in other areas. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. The "single-pass" population policy can quickly contain the trend of population decline, while the "two-step" population policy is more stable, but it will take a long time to reverse the trend of population fertility decline. [4]

V. TO FORMULATE AND PROMULGATE A SERIES OF SUPPORTING POLICIES TO PROMOTE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHILDBEARING POLICY

The report of the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasizes that the government should "promote the matching of childbearing policy and related economic and social policies, and strengthen the strategic research of population development". The proposal of these conclusions is of great practical significance for promoting the implementation of childbearing policy. In view of such current situation as the declining fertility desire of women of childbearing age, the low fertility rate and birth rate and the high birth cost in China, it is necessary to improve the relevant laws, regulations and policies to safeguard women professional development, vigorously develop nursery and kindergarten institutions, render corresponding subsidies to families with two children, tax reduction and exemption and other measures to boost the landing of the "comprehensive two-child" policy and promote the sustainable development of China's economy and society.

Li Zhi and Lan Qingqing (2017), through the research of the influence factors and childbearing pressure of the two-child in the city, show that economic pressure, work pressure and family relationship pressure all have adverse effects on the fertility tendency, among which family relationship pressure is the strongest, economic pressure is the main factor containing the birth of the second child, followed by the children are unattended, and the work is affected. [5] In addition, more than a quarter of women may be forced to stop working because of giving birth to the second child. Sexual discrimination in secondary employment is prominent, and reemployment is more difficult, so female employees' personal career development is limited. Giving birth to the second children will increase the employer's labor costs that results in inadequate implementation of maternity leave, breast-feeding leave and other leave rights and interests of female employees, and inadequate construction of maternity and infant facilities. Many factors lead to low fertility willingness of women. Therefore, the government should draw lessons from the successful experience of foreign countries and relevant regions, and formulate and promulgate a series of supporting policies to encourage childbirth and promote the implementation of childbearing policies on the basis of an all-round investigation and research.

A. To Vigorously Develop Nursery and Kindergarten Services

The report of the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly put forward the goal of "seven possessions" to safeguard and improve people's

livelihood, one of which is "young children can be nurtured". However, the relatively backward development and insufficient supply of nursery and kindergarten services in China are the main reasons why many women are reluctant to give birth to two or even one child. According to the survey, 68.4% of the women who give birth to two children said that, because the elderly are in a better health, they can help them take care of their children in recent years, which is one of the main reasons why they give birth to two children. Therefore, in the 13th Five-year Plan of China, it is explicitly put forward that 85% of preschool children should be enrolled in kindergartens, and 80% of them should be enrolled in inclusive kindergartens, so as to solve the problems of difficult and expensive kindergartens for preschool children.

The development of nursery and kindergarten service is one of the main contents of family friendly policy, which needs to be researched and explored from three aspects: firstly, combining the educational function of nursery and kindergarten service with the inclusive national welfare; secondly, pursuing the road of combining public welfare with marketization, the government should incorporate nursery and kindergarten service into the scope of public service, and do a good job in guiding service work such as the promulgation of relevant legal policies, financial support and land allocation or transfer, personnel employment, charge policy, enrollment operation management, and build a government-led, community-based and unit-assisted three-dimensional nursery and kindergarten service system. Firstly, it should integrate community resources, construct and improve nursery and kindergarten service institutions in the neighbourhood based on communities; encourage enterprises and public institutions with ability to provide welfare nursery and kindergarten services for employees, and for those units without ability for set up, they can jointly cooperate with neighboring communities or other units to solve the problems of breastfeeding and child care for female employees. [6] Thirdly, the government should provide necessary subsidies for child care services for two-child families.

B. To Improve and Implement the System of Paid Maternity Leave and Paternity Leave

In many laws and regulations of our country, it is clearly stipulated that female employees enjoy paid maternity leave and breast-feeding leave, and their spouses can enjoy paternity leave and other leave rights. However, some couples of childbearing age are unwilling to give birth because they are worried about the reduction of income, the restriction of career development and other problems during maternity leave. Therefore, there is a long way to go to improve and implement the paid maternity leave and paternity leave system.

Learning from some foreign practices, the problems can be solved by the following aspects: first, extend the duration of maternity leave. At present, German maternity leave is three years, and Russian maternity leave is 4.5 years. Swedish law stipulates that parents can enjoy 480 days of parental leave before their children reach the age of 8. At present, China's statutory maternity leave is 158 days, which is relatively short. Without affecting the normal production and operation of enterprises and public institutions, it is suggested that the

number of maternity leave days be extended appropriately and paternity leave be established as soon as possible. Second, it should strengthen the supervision and inspection of the implementation of the paid maternity leave and paternity leave system. The All-China Women's Federation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and other departments can regularly and irregularly supervise and inspect the implementation of the system in enterprises and public institutions, publish the inspection results to the public in time, and reward and punish them according to the inspection results. Thirdly, the government can reduce the cost increase of employers due to the birth of employees through tax reduction and exemption, support and other policies. Because fertility is not only a matter for women, their families and units, but also a matter for the whole society, it should be shared by the whole society and it can reach compensation and balance through tax and fiscal policies.

C. To Establish and Implement the System of Childbirth Allowance and Child-rearing Allowance

In order to encourage fertility, boost the implementation of the "comprehensive two-child" policy, it should establish and implement the system of childbirth allowance and child-rearing allowance by drawing lessons from foreign experience. Although different countries have different projects related to childbirth allowance and child-rearing allowance and levels of allowance also varies, however, their purpose is to reduce the family burden of bearing and rearing and encourage child-bearing. The Nordic countries not only provide free examination, childbirth and hospitalization for pregnant and lying-in women from pregnancy to childbirth, but also provide childbirth allowance for puerpera for more than one year. Although the payment level is different, it generally accounts for 70-100% of the original wage. Among them, Danish and Norwegian puerpera can enjoy 50 and 47 weeks' childbirth allowance equivalent to 100% of the original wage. For low-income or non-income families, Sweden provides childbirth allowance of 180 kroner per day to families with child birth. In Sweden, when a child is sick, parents can enjoy a 120-day care allowance for sick children, equivalent to 80% of their salary. France provides various family allowances from birth to adulthood for families with two or more children, including child care, nursery, school attendance, and so on. In order to enable women to better consideration to family and work and to provide more care for infants and young children, Japan increased the child-care leave allowance within six months from 50% to 67% in 2015. Children under three years of age can also enjoy a child allowance of 15,000 yen per month. Children aged 3-15 can enjoy a child allowance of 10,000 yen per month to encourage childbirth and reduce the burden of childbearing families. Russia also provides one-time or batch child allowances for children. [6]

By sorting out the advanced experience of all countries in the world, it can provide reference for establishing and optimizing the system of childbirth allowance and child-rearing allowance in our country. First of all, the definition of maternity insurance and childbirth allowance. At present, China has gradually established a three-dimensional social

security system. As of 2017, China has seen 192.4 million people covered by maternity insurance, but those women of childbearing age who do not have employment and employment units are not covered by the insurance. Moreover, maternity insurance belongs to the category of social insurance, and its funds mainly stem from the insurance premium paid by employers. The childbirth allowance belongs to the category of social public welfare, and its funds stem from the government's financial revenue. Therefore, the maternity insurance and the childbirth allowance cannot be exchanged, but complement each other, so as to alleviate the economic burden of the maternity women and their families. Secondly, it is the definition of childbirth allowance and child-rearing allowance. The childbirth allowance is designed to compensate couples whose incomes decrease or lose during child-bearing because of childbirth. Child-rearing allowance is a subsidy for families whose real living standard has declined due to the rising cost of living occasioned by the raising of infants and young children. Thus, it can be seen that both childbirth allowance and child-rearing allowance belong to inclusive social welfare. Thirdly, through the establishment and implementation of childbirth allowance and child-rearing allowance, the purpose is to reduce family burden to encourage fertility, improve fertility rate and alleviate population aging.

D. Reform of Individual Income Tax

The vast majority of countries and regions with low fertility rate and serious population aging generally provide corresponding tax reduction and exemption for multiple-child families through the reform of individual income tax in order to alleviate the economic burden of multiple-child families in child-bearing and child-rearing. At the same time, it is also an affirmation and economic compensation for multiple-child families to make contributions to the reproduction and development of the social population, so as to reflect social fairness and justice. In the design of individual income tax, tax credit can be made according to the number of children. In the individual tax reform in 2018, China has designed six individual income tax deductions including children's education deduction, which serves as also a great progress, but there is still a lot of room for optimization. Therefore, it is necessary to combine the improvement of fertility rate and the construction and implementation of the aging delay system with the reform of the individual income tax system, give full play to the advantages of the system to promote the effective implementation of the "comprehensive two-child" policy.

In order to cope with the strategic ideological problem that the fertility rate and the birth rate of our country are continuously declining and the process of population aging is speeding up, which is related to the sustainable and healthy development of our country and nation, China should learn from the advanced experience of foreign countries, construct a scientific, feasible and effective population system, and take a variety of measures to ensure its effective implementation.

VI. CONCLUSION

In order to cope with the increasingly serious problem of population aging, it is necessary to learn from the advanced experience of foreign countries and design the top-level system

in light of the real situation of our country. By improving and implementing relevant laws, regulations and policies of safeguarding women vocational development and paid maternity leave system, it should vigorously develop kindergartens, give subsidies to families with two children and tax relief measures to ensure the successful implementation of the "comprehensive two-child" policy, and to achieve the fertility rate return to the normal level of population generation replacement, so as to promote the sustainable development of China's economy and society.

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