

How Does the Changes in Population Policy Shape Gender Role Socialization in Contemporary China?

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the effect of China's population control policy from the perspective of gender role attitudes, showing the different effects of the one-child policy and the two-child policy on gender equality. It shows that under the one-child policy, women, especially girls, can avoid competition within the family. Thus, they can obtain complete educational resources from their family, and thereby gain a higher social status in career. However, under the two-child policy, it allows girls and boys exist in one family. With the strong effect of son preferences, it reduce the educational resource and opportunities for girls. This article provides suggestions on how to maintain gender equality that women received under the one-child policy.

Keywords: *Population control policy, two-child policy, gender equality*

1. INTRODUCTION

At present stage, there are still obvious gender discriminations in China. This article will focus on the impact of China's population policy on gender inequality. The gender discussed in this article refers to men and women in the traditional sense. [1]

In China, the inequality between men and women in social life is manifested in many aspects, such as the different level of payment in employment, certain occupations excluding women from entering, and women's lower status inside family. [2]

There are many reasons for gender inequality. The physiological and social recognition of different genders, labor environment and regulations, traditional concepts, social customs, and economic structures can all cause gender inequality. In addition, China's special population policy is closely related to the status of women. [3]

After the 1979, China began to implement the one-child policy, which was originally intended to control the number of new populations each year. The biggest reason was to control the total population so as to avoid conflicts between the large number of people and the limited number of natural resources. According to the one-child policy, each family can only have one child, so each family can only have one boy or one girl per generation. This policy had led to changes in the family's demographic structure and gender structure as well, which has changed the role of different genders in the family and therefore affected the gender role in the whole society. How this influence occurred is exactly the subject of this article. [4]

In the second part of this article, two backgrounds will be introduced in detail: the first one is about China's population control policy, including the past one-child policy, the current two-child policy, and possible changes

in the future population control policy. On the other hand, it introduces the currently widely accepted gender role attitude theory, which will be used to discuss the impact of population policy on gender inequality. [5]

In the third part, the one-child policy and the two-child policy will be compared and analyzed. In the end, readers will see that in terms of family structure, school education, peer relationship, and labor market, the one-child policy had a huge impact on gender inequality while the effect of the two-child policy is completely different from the one-child policy. On this basis, in the fourth part, I will recommend possible policies to solve the problems raised in the new population policy. The final summary and conclusion are to be shown in the fifth part.

2. THEORY

2.1. China's population policy

After the civil war, in the early 1950s, China's population experienced a rapid growth. At that time, mothers who could gave birth to more children were called "hero mothers" and were praised by people. Prior to this, Chinese traditions also encouraged the birth of a large number of children, but due to the long-term of international and domestic wars, China's population had decreased to a low level. After the civil war, the peaceful and stable environment provided good conditions for population growth.

In 1953, China conducted its first population census. According to the data, China's population has exceeded 600 million. Compared to China's grain production at that time, this population was already quite large. Ten years later, in the second census, the population of China had

reached 723 million; in 1969, the population of China had exceeded 800 million. [6]

However, in contrast, in the early 1960s, due to various reasons, such as the low industrialization rate, problems with economic policies, and concentrated occurrence of natural disasters, China encountered food shortages. After the economic policy changed and the natural disasters ended, the food shortage problem was temporarily resolved. However, Chinese leaders and elites began to worry that the land would not be able to feed the growing population. Amidst such concerns, population policies have emerged.

In the 1970s, the Chinese government began to advocate late marriage and late childbirth, requiring a couple to give birth more than 3 years apart and have no more than 2 children. After 1980, the policy changed to advocate that a couple only have one child nationwide. This is called the one-child policy. The implementation of the one-child policy was enforced through specific rewards and punishments, among which compulsory methods include forced abortion, forced labor induction, and forced ligation. Those who have overborn would be punished with a fine called "social support fee," while government employees and state-owned enterprise employees who have overborn would be fired. This policy has been implemented until October 2015 and has had a great impact on China's population structure and gender ratio for more than 30 years.

The main reason for implementing the family planning policy was initially due to the contradiction between agriculture productivity and population size, and later included educational resources and industrial output. However, since China has experienced rapid development after the 1990s and has become an important member of the international grain trade, the supply of grain and industrial products no longer brought major restrictions, and the purpose of the family planning policy has begun to be questioned. This kind of questioning became an important social opinion in the 2000s and finally prompted the Chinese government to partially change the one-child policy, allowing families where both parents are the only-child can have two children. Later, it changed to allow a family to have two children as long as one of the parents was an only child. In 2015, it was finally revised to a comprehensive two-child policy.

The full implementation of the one-child policy has greatly reduced the growth rate of China's population. According to estimates of the population growth rate when the one-child policy was not implemented, the one-child policy has reduced the population of China by 400 million people. This is the direct effect of the family planning policy, but the family planning policy also brought other effects and has caused great controversy. The most direct consequence is that the family planning policy has strengthened China's original concept of patriarchy.

In traditional Chinese culture, male offspring have the right and obligation to inherit family property, honor, power, and surname. Most of these responsibilities cannot be assumed by women. Therefore, having male offspring has always been an important goal for Chinese families.

Nevertheless, in traditional society, families could have as many children as they wanted, and it was hard to know and to "control" the gender of the children; as a result, the number of men and women in China has remained at a normal level.

However, the one-child policy allowed each family to have only one child. Therefore, if parents maintain the traditional concept that boys play a decisive role in the family inheritance process, then they would be more eager to know and determine the gender of their children. Although the policy did not allow any medical examinations on gender, once parents know the sex of the fetus through various means, especially if the fetus is a girl, many parents will choose to abort a pregnancy. This gender-selective abortion had a great impact on the sex ratio of the population. It caused the proportion of male newborns greatly exceed that of females. This gender structure problem will cause a series of social problems.

Due to a series of social problems caused by the low fertility rate, after the 2010s, although the Chinese government still adhered to the family planning policy, it started allowed couples under certain conditions to have a second child until the full liberalization of the two-child policy in 2015. In fact, after 2015, the attitude of the Chinese government tends to encourage couples at reproductive age to have a second child. [7]

However, due to the profound influence from the one-child policy, the domestic economic structure and asset allocation of many families is no longer suitable for having a second child. For example, many Chinese families cannot provide separate rooms for the second child. After 2010, real estate prices in China have risen rapidly, surpassing the growth of residents' income; the price of education resources has also risen sharply. All these make young Chinese couples unwilling to bear the additional burden of a second birth. Therefore, the two-child policy did not lead to an increase in the birth rate as expected, but instead brought more social problems. One of the problems related to this article is the exacerbation of gender inequality.

When the one-child policy was enforced, because each family had only one child, no matter whether the child was a girl or a boy, she or he could receive all the family's resources for growth. Under this situation, she or he was less likely to face discrimination in education, work place, and inheritance. However, after the full implementation of the two-child policy, some couples originally had a daughter would choose to have another son due to the traditional son preference. Under the influence of the traditional Chinese concept of patriarchy, their daughters could not receive appropriate family support. Here comes the gender inequality that did not exist when the one-child policy was implemented.

For the present, the Chinese government still adheres to the family planning policy, requiring each couple not to have more than two children. However, the age structure of China's population has begun to aging. Similar situations have already appeared in South Korea and Japan earlier. Due to the extremely low fertility rate, Japan and South Korea were already inferior to the aging society,

causing serious social problems. It not only aggravates the work pressure of young Japanese and Korean, but also adds a great burden to the pension payment of the whole society. Therefore, in the future, the Chinese government may further revise the family planning policy to provide greater freedom on fertility.

2.2. Gender Role Attitudes

Gender role attitudes express what roles people of different genders are supposed to play in a particular society. Generally, gender is divided into male and female. In traditional gender role attitudes, men are supposed to be the main source of family income, while women are responsible for housework at home.

However, gender role attitudes are closely related to social changes, and are affected by the economic relations at the time, presenting a very different appearance. In Ruggles' (2015) research on American families, the author analyzed the data from 1800-1925 and found the relations between the impact of new economic models and gender role attitudes after the Industrial Revolution.

Indeed, gender role attitudes are not an easy indicator to measure. In general, many scholars studied gender role attitudes by designing questionnaires, which relying on the respondent's response to specific questions. Through both quantitative and qualitative research, data can be used to describe general attitudes towards gender roles in society.

The reason why gender role attitudes is important is that: although most gender discriminations may have multiple reasons, it can be generated from gender role attitudes. For example, in the case that men and women are not paid equally at work, it is not the case that the actual labor output of women is inferior to men in quantity or quality, but simply the supposition of the gender role attitudes of business owners or managers that women may not be competent for men's jobs.

The establishment of gender role attitudes is a long-term process. In family education, school education, and work, participants of different genders are often treated differently. This differentiated treatment itself also causes the educators who were treated this way to treat in the same way the educated of the new generation, and this kind of gender role attitude change is often later than the social relationship related to it.

This article will use the concept of gender role attitudes, combined with China's population policy, to explore how population policies affect gender role attitudes and thus the overall gender inequality.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. One-child policy

The one-child policy has a huge impact on family structure. The original family composed of parents and the only-

child does not need to consider the separation among siblings due to the one-child policy. Therefore, parental investment to their children is unconditional, and there is no possibility of increasing investment on one child while reducing investment on other disadvantage children. Under this condition, assuming that the educational resources invested by a family plan is determined, it can be provided to the only child inside the family, regardless of gender.

Therefore, in this sense, the one-child policy is beneficial for at least some women to obtain education. Before the implementation of the one-child policy, girls were significantly less likely to receive education than boys in Chinese society. However, after the implementation of the one-child policy, girls' right to education has been better protected.

This may also cause problems: many parents insist on giving birth to male offspring, which may lead to gender-selective abortion, and possible abandonment behaviour, which even deprives many opportunities to be born of many women. Therefore, the one-child policy can only change the direction of parents' investment in children's growth, but it cannot really change gender role attitudes.

Another impact brought about by the one-child policy is about family structure. Due to the long-term one-child policy, most of the children born in the past 30 years are mostly only-child. They grew up in an environment without siblings; sociological studies show that they have different characteristics, personality and mode of thinking on diverse personal and societal questions.

In fact, this result disintegrated the foundation of the traditional and big families, which accelerated the transition from a clan society to a modern society. However, only children who lack sibling relationships, as well as competitors and collaborators in the family during their growth. On the one hand, this makes their growth environment easier; on the other hand, it can increase the possibility of social disorders and psychological problems.

From the perspective of parents, the two-child policy reduced the chance that parents treat their children differently based on gender. They also take care of the only child more carefully, which weaken the authority of parents over their children, forcing parents to educate their children in a gentler way. This change also makes the relationship between children and parents become more equal. But this also increases the risk that parents take when investing in their children, thus increases parents' motivation to manipulate their children.

From the perspective of school education, the only child enjoys all the educational resources that the family can provide, especially for girls, compared to the era before the one-child policy, they gradually had access to higher education. Due to the implementation of the one-child policy, in order to reduce resistance, the Chinese government had stronger motivation to promote the concept of equality between men and women. In the textbooks compiled by the government, the concept of equality between men and women is widespread, which has further led to the equal treatment of women in school education.

In the labor market, since women have obtained relatively equal educational opportunities, and therefore can obtain a higher status in the labor market than before. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the one-child policy can help women to achieve equal pay. This is because that the change in gender role attitudes is relatively slow. Even though the one-child policy has been implemented for many years, people still have certain stereotypes about the occupations that women are suitable for and believe that women are quite likely to be incapable of men's jobs.

In addition, before the implementation of the one-child policy, son preference and old traditions in Chinese society lead to the results that women often could not receive help from the older generation in their original family in childcare. Thus, they invested more time and efforts on housework and childcare. Under the one-child policy, if parents are willing to help take on part of the parenting functions, even women can get help from their parents in parenting. Parenting assistance from the previous generation can prevent women from interrupting their work due to parenting, which helps women to be more competitive in their careers.

In conclusion, although the original goal of the one-child policy is on birth control and limiting fertility freedom, it did have positive effect on promoting equality between men and women, thereby making the surviving women unique receive an increasing investment on education and can pursue their professional career. However, the one-child policy alone cannot directly change gender role attitudes.

3.2. Two-child policy

The two-child policy is a modification of the one-child policy. The purpose is to maintain a reasonable population size and a younger population age structure. The major goal is to avoid serious population aging problems due to low birth rates, not to maintain gender equality or change gender role attitude; but its result did have a greater impact on gender issues.

As discussed above, the reason why the one-child policy can protect women's rights is because it forces parents to devote all educational resources to the only child, even if she is a girl. However, the two-child policy completely reverse this effect from the one-child policy on maintaining gender equality. If there are boys in the family and the parents hold traditional gender role attitudes, then girls may not be able to receive equal educational rights and other investments.

In addition, the two-child policy will also bring about two serious problems.

One is that it will put greater pressure on families who are willing to have a second child, which may lower the living standards of family members, especially girls who are the first child. At present, the real estate is usually the largest property of an ordinary family in China. Having a second child is often accompanied by the demand for real estate replacement, which also brings additional financial burdens. In addition, women as mothers need to interrupt

their careers again when they have a second child, which will also bring a greater impair to women's status.

The second result is that, only the higher-income families can have a second child under the greater economic pressure. In the long run, this will weaken the competitiveness of the poor, aggravate the consolidation of the class, and intensify the gaps between different classes.

Therefore, although the Chinese government may implement a freer and flexible population control policy in order to control the size of the population, it will face many difficulties to completely abolish the population policy; rashly abolishing the population policy may cause serious social problems in a short period of time.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above analysis, it is easy to see that population policies can have a profound impact on gender equality between men and women. The implementation of the two-child policy is an inevitable requirement for maintaining the size of the population. Therefore, it is impossible to forcefully maintain the one-child policy merely for the positive impact one-child policy may have on gender equality. However, if we can introduce new policies supporting more women and families, it is possible to help women to obtain equal rights under the new population policy.

From the perspective of education, the cost of education in China is increasing, and the education input-output ratio is still not satisfactory. Under the one-child policy, even if the education investment is relatively high, the only child can always obtain a relatively good educational environment because the only child monopolizes the family's education investment. However, under the two-child policy, it is necessary to make further investment in the field of education, reduce education costs, and improve the quality and output of education, especially in rural areas, so that, on the one hand, the two-child policy still insists on the restrained use of resources and on the other. As a result, it can ensure that for families with two children, female offspring will not lose education opportunities due to excessive education costs and unsatisfactory education input-output ratio.

In addition, it is always the case that women need to interrupt their careers during the childbirth process, so professional women are unwilling to have a second child with the cost of their career. This is why the two-child policy is less effective than the one-child policy. By enhancing the benefits that women can enjoy during childbirth, as well as preventing women from interrupting their careers due to childbirth can make the two-child policy truly achieve the effect of maintaining the population size.

Finally, due to the fact that two-child families need to spend much more additional educational and housing costs, there should be better welfare policies to help two-child families to maintain a good standard of living. This particular helpful when many people in Chinese society are still holding a traditional gender role attitude; when a

family does not have sufficient resource for more children, the resources obtained by female offspring will be significantly lower than that by male offspring. Ensuring a good standard of living can facilitate women to improve their family status.

5. CONCLUSION

According to the discussion in this article, it is clear that in addition to its original purpose, the one-child policy had some levels of improvement in gender equality. This is achieved by the reduced number of children inside one household. Therefore, the one-child policy and the two-child policy may have very different effects in maintaining gender equality: the simple two-child policy does not have the effect of protecting women's rights, and may cause negative effect on women's family status and career development.

In addition, under the current stand of living in most Chinese families, having a second-child is so expensive; many families avoid a second child in order not to decline their living standards. This has led to the fact that the two-child policy is not achieving the expected effect of stimulating population growth. Therefore, we need a good social welfare system, as well as high-quality and low-cost educational service that are friendly to women and families. Only by implementing such a policy can the two-child policy truly achieve the goal of maintaining a reasonable population size and structure on the one hand and gender equality on the other.

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