

# Under the Background of Compressed Population Transition: The Change of the Youth Group's Concept of Gender, Marriage and Family

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## ABSTRACT

Based on the data of CGSS in 2006 and 2016, this paper analyzes the gender role concept and marriage family concept of Chinese youth under the background of the population change of compression in the past ten years from four indicators. The results show that, firstly, the concept of gender role of youth groups tends to be modern as a whole; secondly, the concept of marriage and family of young people is still conservative, and the youth's consciousness still attaches importance to the stability of marriage and family, and tends to build intimate relationship within the family. Under such background, since the double squeeze of external social capital and the value of internal family doctrine brought by the compressed population transition, the individualization and housewifization of youth is emerging.

**Keywords:** *Compressed population transformation, Youth, Gender role, Marriage and Family*

## 1. COMPRESSED POPULATION TRANSITION AND THE YOUTH

As the industrial revolution has created the modernization of material (production), the population transition has produced the modernization of human (reproduction). The first population transition refers to the fertility and mortality rate of population slowing down. The reduction of fertility rate and mortality is the key to the transition. First, with the decrease of children a couple has given birth to, the emotional and financial input for raising each child increases, and there is an intergenerational relationship centered on children, and the modern family model has formed. Secondly, the reduction of mortality makes it possible to have a stable and universal life plan. It is necessary for everyone to go to school, to get employed and to establish a solid family relationship based on marriage. However, with the total fertility rate falling to the replacement level of 2.1, the number of people who choose not to form a legal marriage increases, the divorce rate increases, and the tendency of individualization is obvious. This phenomenon is called "the second demographic transition" by the demographers D. J. van de Kaa and R. Lesthaghe.

The first population transition in the European and American countries usually occurred between the 1880s and the 1930s, followed by the steady growth rate. Then the second population transition began when the fertility rate dropped to the replacement level in the late 1960s. Both Europe and America have experienced a relatively stable stasis of total fertility rate. The stasis of Japan in Asian countries lasted about 20 years (1950-1970). South Korea, like China, has been declining continuously, and there is no such stasis in the middle. Suppose the replacement level of 2.1 is taken as the node, China should experience the second population transformation in the 1990s. But it is worth noting that the first fertility rate in European and American countries is 100 years as early as that in China. That is to say, the long way of population transformation in Europe and America is being experienced by our country in a compressed way, which will eventually result in a different modernization path from the West.

Without the stasis of fertility decline, the compressed population transformation speeds up the deepening speed of population aging in the future. It took 40 years for Germany, 47 years for Britain, 85 years for Sweden and 115 years for France to transit from aging population to an aging society. Under the influence of the compressed

population transition, China will quickly enter the aging society, which is expected to take only 23 years. Countries that have experienced the platform stasis have enough time to build social welfare system, accumulate social security capital and buffer the impact of population change. However, due to the rapid aging process in China, the social security capital is weak, which leads to the problems of “getting old before getting rich” and “getting old before getting ready”, which causes great burden to the family centered pension network.

This also has a huge impact on the social role of women in China. After the founding of new China, the development of industry needs a lot of labor input. Under the influence of Marx’s women’s emancipation of the mind, women respond to the call of “women can hold up half of the sky”, go out of the house to work. The state has actively promoted the socialization of domestic work, set up nursing homes, canteens and other supporting facilities with the “unit” as the center. The implementation of the family planning policy has accelerated the decline of the fertility rate, at the same time, it has systematically reduced women’s reproductive burden, and women tend to be “de-housewifization”. “equality between men and women” has been written into China’s constitution, and the promotion of “equal pay for equal work between men and women” has greatly enhanced women’s independence. However, after the 1990s, with the reform of state-owned enterprises, the unit system was almost annihilated in the process of market-oriented transformation. The re composition of the public and private sectors made the family private. Parenting and other housework were once again undertaken by the housewives.

The acceleration of population aging has increased the demand for providing for the aged, and the continuous decline of fertility rate has reduced the mutual aid network of families. Under the appeal of traditional family values, “women return home” sounds again, and the trend of female housewives begins to rise. According to the data of the survey report on the living conditions of Chinese professional women in 2009, from 2007 to 2009, the proportion of people who think that they have achieved “giving consideration to both career and family” in real life has decreased from 31.2% to 29.4%, among which the proportion of people who think that “the focus of life is in the family” has increased year by year, from 22.9% to 34.1%, while the proportion of people who are willing to become housewives has increased by 5%. At the same time, the pressure from marriage and family is increasing day by day, and the tendency of youth individualization is becoming more and more obvious. In the face of pressure, young people choose to postpone their marriage. The age of first marriage is rising. From 2005 to 2019, people aged 25 to 29 replace those aged 20 to 24 to become the “main force” of marriage, and the proportion of marriage registration over the age of 40 is rising sharply. At the same time, the scale of single youth

is expanding rapidly. From 2000 to 2015, the number of unmarried women over the age of 30 increases from 1.54 million to 5.9 million, and the divorce rate is also rising, giving up marriage and living independently seems to be a common choice for contemporary youth.

Some studies explain the decline of youth fertility rate and the rise of divorce rate from the aspects of economy and education. It is said that the rising cost of raising children and the decline of expected utility for children lead to the accelerated decline of fertility rate. The higher the education level of young people, the stronger their economic independence. As a result, they tend to choose marriage independently. Some scholars try to do research from the perspective of family and gender, but they come to the opposite conclusion about the causes of individualization of youth and feminization of housewives: on the one hand, the concept of family has changed; the role of traditional ideas among generations is weakened; young people are afraid of marriage, regard parenting as a burden, and lack a sense of family responsibility; on the other hand, some scholars point out that the traditional marriage and family concepts such as “dutiful wife and loving mother” are still deeply rooted in the mass consciousness, and have an important impact on the feminization. To a certain degree, assisting their husband, looking after their children and doing housework are regarded as a traditional moral standard to measure the female, which solidifies the female gender image. But the feminization is conducive to family stability and the development of economy and society.

On the whole, the youth individualization and housewife feminization brought by the two population changes have been considered as two different types of development in most of the researches and two different interpretations of the family values are concluded. However, these conclusions only stay in the surface of “contradiction”, but do not pay attention to the deep unification. It fails to consider the effect of the two successive demographic changes on the shaping and role compression of youth. At present, there are few studies on youth groups, and most of them are based on cross-sectional data. They compare young groups with older groups, or men and women. They pay too much attention to the generation trend and gender influence, and ignore the change trend of gender role concept and marriage and family concept in the period of change.

What kind of gender concept and marriage and family concept are hidden behind the phenomenon of individualization of youth characterized by late marriage and late childbearing, freedom of marriage and housewives characterized by the traditional concept of gender role? Does the compressed population change weaken the atmosphere of Chinese familism narration? Is the individualization of Chinese youth and the feminization of housewives the opposite trend under the confrontation between western liberalism and Chinese

family moral consciousness? This paper uses the data of China's comprehensive social survey in 2006 and 2016, and analyzes the survey data of representative youth samples in China, so as to deeply understand the changes of values of domestic youth under the background of compressed population change, and clarify the internal logical consistency of youth individualization and housewifization.

## **2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study focuses on the youth's concept of gender role and marriage and family under the background of compressed population change. After defining the dynamics of individualization, this paper compares the data of "2006 National Comprehensive Social Survey" (CGSS2006) and "2017 national comprehensive social survey" (CGSS2017) to analyze the changes of youth's gender role concept and marriage and family concept in the past ten years. The CGSS data of the two years adopt the multi-stage random sampling method, and more than 10000 individual samples are selected from various provinces and cities in mainland China, collecting the basic attributes, family, work, values and other information of the respondents. Among them, the data of 2006 and 2016 included in the family survey module of CGSS2006 and CGSS2017 involve the issues reflecting the concept of gender roles and family values, and comprehensively include the basic aspects of people's marriage and family life in modern society, which is a suitable data for analysis. According to the needs of the study, we analyzed the youth who met the age standard in the two surveys, and extracted a total of 3170 samples.

In the measurement index of gender role concept, young people's family division, family care and work choice were inquired. In the measurement index of family values, young people's concept of marriage, family and personal choice are asked. Most of the questions are presented in the form of a 7-level scale, which enables the respondents to make independent judgments on a series of indicator questions, and the answers are gradually transferred from "totally agree" to "totally disagree". According to the degree of agreement of the respondents to the opinions put forward in the relevant questions, the answers of the respondents were assigned from 1 to 7 points. The higher the score of young interviewees, the more equal their gender role concept tends to be and the stronger their family departmentalism tends to be.

## **3. CHANGES OF VIEWS ON GENDER ROLE, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY OVER PAST TEN YEARS**

### ***3.1. Changes of Views on Gender Role***

The concept of gender role belongs to a more abstract concept. In this study, we concretely ask the respondents

about the degree of agreement on the two questions of "husband's responsibility is to make money, wife's responsibility is to take care of the family" and "female employees should be fired first in the economic depression", which can be divided into seven levels from very agree to very disagree.

According to the CGSS data in 2006, in terms of the attitude of "husband is responsible for making money and wife is responsible for housework", 27.3% of young people choose to disagree very much, quite disagree and some disagree, 53.8% choose to agree very much, quite agree and some agree. The proportion of negative attitude is 26.5% less than that of like attitude. This shows that at the beginning of the 21st century, the youth groups agree with the traditional gender division of labor, and the concept of gender role is relatively conservative. In the CGSS data of 2016, 55.8% disagreed with the traditional gender division of labor, an increase of 28.5% compared with 2006; 32.6% agreed, a decrease of 21.2% compared with 2006. According to the data in 2016, the proportion of negative attitudes among young people is about 13 percentage points above that of positive attitudes. Young people who disagree with traditional gender division have become simultaneous interpreting.

According to the data of CGSS in 2006, 14.4% of young people choose to disagree with the attitude of "female employees should be fired first when the economy is in recession", 13.4% choose to disagree with it, 28.9% choose to disagree with it, 56.7% in total, and 19.6% agree with it. According to the survey data in 2016, the proportion of young people who choose the attitude of disapproval has increased to 81.9%, while only 7.1% of them choose the attitude of very agree, quite agree and some agree. This shows that young people hold a negative attitude towards the concept of "men outside and women inside" and regard women as inferior labor force. In the past 10 years, the concept of gender role of young people has become more modern. At the same time, it also shows that the concept of equality between men and women and equal rights between men and women in the workplace has been accepted by more and more young people.

On the whole, young people's cognition of gender roles in China tends to be more modern, and they place strong demands on the realization of equal rights between men and women in the workplace.

### ***3.2. Changes of Views on Marriage and Family***

In order to measure the changes in the concept of marriage and family of young people in the ten years from 2006 to 2016, this study focuses on the two issues that reflect the traditional ideas of familism in China, namely, succession and family departmentalism: "it is not necessary to have children after marriage" and "cohabitation even without marriage". The degree of

agreement on the two questions is also divided into seven levels.

In 2006, when it comes to the treatment of “not necessarily having children after marriage”, 6.4% of young people choose to disagree very much, 11.4% choose to disagree fairly, 28.3% choose to disagree some, 46.1% in total, and 30.7% agree. This shows that at the beginning of the 21st century, in the concept of youth groups, marriage and childbearing are inseparable, and “getting married and having children” and “inheriting the family” are more recognized by the youth. In 2016, 57.3% of young people chose to disagree with this attitude, an increase of 11.2% compared with 2006; while 26.5% of young people agreed, agreed and agreed, a decrease of 4.2% compared with 2006; meanwhile, the data of 2016 also showed that the proportion of young people who disagreed with this attitude exceeded the proportion of those who agreed by more than 30 percentage points. This shows that the youth groups who do not agree with the division of marriage and childbirth account for a relatively large proportion, and compared with the data in 2006, the concept of youth groups has been strengthened in the past decade.

According to the CGSS data in 2006, in terms of the concept of “cohabitation even without marriage”, Among the youth groups, 5.6% chose to disagree, 12.3% chose to disagree, and 24.2% chose to disagree. In total, the disagreed youth group accounts for 42.1%. 2.3% chose to totally disagree, 6.3% chose to quite agree, and 21.0% chose to partly agree. In total, the agreed youth group accounts for 29.6%. The proportion of those who disagree is about 12.5% higher than those who agree. It reflects that in the early 21st century, the majority of young people do not agree with unmarried cohabitation and refuse to build close relationship outside the family. The idea of familism is widely accepted by young people. According to the survey data in 2016, the proportion of young people who hold the attitude of approval has decreased by 2.6%, accounting for 27.0% in total; the proportion of young people who hold the attitude of disapproval has increased to 48.2%. Although the increase rate is not large, it can show that the idea of attaching importance to family and marriage has not weakened in the concept of young people in the past decade, but in the narrative atmosphere of Chinese familism, the surrounding area has been further strengthened.

Overall, in the past ten years, the sense of identity of Chinese youth groups for marriage and family has not been weakened. The family-oriented values are still the mainstream consciousness of young people.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This paper examined the status quo and evolution of the concept of gender role and marriage and family of

youth groups in China, based on the analysis of China’s comprehensive social survey data collected in 2006 and 2016. The results can be shown as the followings:

First, the views of the youth on gender role tend to be modern in the whole. They do not agree with the traditional division of labor between men and women, featuring “men outside and women stay”, but they simultaneously interpret the practice of enterprises sacking female employees in the economic downturn. This shows that young people are more in favor of the concept of equality between men and women. Based on the national representative data, this study strongly refutes the view that the phenomenon of women returning to the family in recent years is simply attributed to the influence of the traditional concept of gender division of labor, and clarifies the contradiction between the concept and the actual situation.

According to the data released by the survey on the current situation of Chinese women’s workplace, the employment rate of Chinese women is decreasing year by year. More than half of women are asked about marriage and childbirth when they are seeking jobs. About 20% of women lose their promotion opportunities because of family, marriage, childbirth and other reasons. The social living space of young women is gradually being compressed, and female social role is also being compressed from the public domain to the home inside the court. Behind this is the pain brought by the compressed population change and the weak social security capital to our youth. With the liberalization of birth restrictions and the acceleration of aging, our youth will face greater pressure from the family. “Settling down” and “getting married” will become two difficult propositions that make people hesitant; If they choose to “start a family”, they have to give up their job opportunities and return to their families.

Second, in the ten years from 2006 to 2016, the concept of marriage and family of young people tends to be conservative on the whole. They attach importance to the stability of marriage and family, and tend to build close relationship within the family. This shows that familism still plays an important role in the consciousness of young people in China, and the conclusion that the youth’s consciousness of marriage and family is weak advocated by some media is untenable. It is also because of the influence of family departmentalism, under the background of the reduction of family mutual aid network and the weakening of family function, some young people choose to return to the family, which leads to the recurrence housewifization.

The implementation of family planning policy has compressed the process of population transition and weakened the social network built with family as the center. The return tide of domestic work brought by the market-oriented transformation in 1990s, accompanied by the decline of family function, has gradually changed

“family” from social capital to load. The young people who were held in the way of “settling down” and “getting married” had to make choices, so there was a wave of “Housewives” returning and individualizing. This is not the result of Western individualism and liberalism ideology, but the inevitable phenomenon under the circumstance of Chinese family narrative, the lack of external social security resources, the institutional decline of family and the double squeeze of the internal traditional family values. This is not a symbol of the weak family values, but a manifestation of the family oriented deep rooted in the youth consciousness. The individualization of youth and the housewifization in China are not two trends which are contrary to each other, but the two characteristics of the young groups who have experienced the transition of the compressed population.

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