

The Decline of Fertility in China from the Perspective of Status Consumption

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ABSTRACT

Low fertility rate is a major demographic problem facing Chinese society. If it is not paid attention to, it may lead to systemic risks in the social and economic fields in the medium and long term. This paper argues that status consumption is also the leading factor leading to the decline of fertility rate. By analyzing the influence mechanism of status consumption on fertility intention, this paper explains the continued low fertility rate in China. The stratified system and vertical mobility model caused by the consumer society have a great impact on people's psychology and fertility intention, among which the prevailing status consumerism is an important factor leading to the decline of young people's fertility intention and fertility, and the consumerism culture has changed young people's values and fertility view. Under the background of consumption society, it is necessary to deal with the problem of consumption and fertility among different classes, guide young people's consumption concept reasonably, eliminate the negative influence of consumerism culture, and ensure the sustainable development of population.

Keywords: *Status Consumption, The Fertility Rate, Consumer Society.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Low fertility is becoming a new global population problem. Many countries around the world have fallen into the "low fertility trap", and a series of social problems brought about by it and population aging have become urgent problems for many countries to solve. Under the great wave of "low fertility trap", China's total fertility rate (TFR) at the present stage remains at 1.2 or even 1.047, [1] far lower than 2.1, which is required to maintain the normal generation replacement level of the population. Therefore, China has entered the list of countries with low fertility in the world. According to the United Nations Population Agency forecast, under such a low fertility state, China's population will accelerate to decline to 1 billion to 600 million at the end of the 21st century, there is an "inverted V" reversal, that is, China will be in less than 100 years from a population explosion to a population collapse.[2]

Through literature review, it can be seen that many scholars have explained the causes of the continuous low birth rate in China. The representative literatures in China include: According to Chen Wei et al., China's floating population migration has a significant impact on fertility rate. By comparing floating population, rural native population and urban native population, it is concluded

that the fertility rate of floating population is much lower than that of non-floating population.[3] Guo Zhigang also showed through empirical research that population mobility is one of the powerful driving factors of fertility reduction. [4] Chen Jing studied the relationship between female employment and fertility rate in the policy of "two-child" era, and believed that under the background of the general improvement of female education level, female career development has gradually become one of the driving factors of low fertility rate, and the occupational gender discrimination brought by childbirth has a significant effect on fertility inhibition.[5]

Most domestic scholars have examined the influence of socioeconomic factors and individual characteristics on fertility rate. Generally speaking, there are few studies on the impact of stratification and vertical mobility mechanism on fertility in the academic circle, especially the change of social structure brought by consumer society and the restraining effect of upward mobility demand on fertility. This paper attempts to learn from the fruitful research results of existing scholars. By analyzing the influence mechanism of status consumption on fertility intention, we can explain the problem of low fertility rate in China.

2. THE DEFINITION AND SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF STATUS CONSUMPTION

2.1 The Origin of Concept of Status Consumption

In today's multi-value society, China's traditional fertility culture has been completely changed under the impact of the wave of consumerism. The phenomenon of low fertility caused by the fertility culture dominated by fewer births, late births and no births has voluntariness, spontaneity, stability and continuity. People family late childbirth education and even less to give up is not because "can't afford to child" "only one is enough" surface psychological reasons, such as what is more important in the modern consumerism and individualism in the prevailing social people found many than birth can bring more valuable things, also as a more important things, gradually reduce the importance of birth or offspring.

Among them, social status as one of the signs of self-realization has become the basic and priority needs of many young people. Social status refers to an individual's rank or position in a society or group in the eyes of others,[6] which is determined by reputation, fame, and the degree of obedience to the individual by other members.[7] Foreign scholars divide social status into three categories: the first is prepossessed status, the second is self-induced status, and the third is consumption status, which refers to the status obtained through constant consumption behavior, that is, by purchasing goods or services to show or mark their social status. The status referred to in this paper is in the third sense. In this case, status consumption has become a "public scale" representing personal status.

2.2 The Sociological Significance of Status Consumption Mapping

Status consumption is born in the consumer society, which develops so rapidly that the lifestyle and culture of most young people are more or less influenced by consumerism. This society mainly shows three characteristics: first, it emphasizes the individuation and diversification of products, which impairs the holistic thinking of traditional society and strengthens the publicity and selectivity of individual character and life style. Second, symbol consumption replaces object consumption, object is no longer the target of consumption, but the symbol contained in the object is the purpose of consumption. Third, modern life is moving towards a highly rational and dehumanized society, what Riesel calls the "McDonaldization" of society.

According to the values in the consumer society, consumers are not only satisfied with practical and

experiential consumption, but also affected by utilitarian needs and social symbol needs. Social status is undoubtedly the most influential factor in satisfying individual utilitarian needs and symbol needs. Status has become the main motivation for individuals to struggle in society, and it is the basic need to maintain the social status and sense of self-recognition of contemporary "migrant workers". Modern society is different from traditional society, in which people's status depends on rank, class and birth. With the process of social change, the role of preattribution of status gradually disappears, the mechanism of social stratification changes, and people change the way to obtain status. In modern society, material wealth, image, fame and achievement are more recognized as status symbols.

Status consumption has become a status symbol, reflecting social inequality, social stratification, upward mobility and other sociological facts. Consumption plays the role of constructing individual role in modern society and has become an important mechanism of social differentiation and social inequality. People will display and maintain a social gap by consuming different goods to achieve different social status. Therefore, in order to narrow the social gap and pursue a position in the social class, consumers will pay higher prices for status products. Even for universally owned items such as mobile phones, many people consume them as status symbols rather than for communication or other purposes. Status consumption is not limited to the rich. Studies have shown that poor consumers also use "knockoffs" to express their status to others in order to satisfy functional and status needs.

3. THE INFLUENCE MECHANISM OF STATUS CONSUMPTION ON FERTILITY

The decline of fertility rate is an inevitable trend in the process of social change. Harvey Leibenstein's cost-utility analysis can provide a classical explanation from the perspective of microeconomic theory of population. From the perspective of sociology, it should be explained from the more complicated aspects such as fertility culture, fertility concept, social mobility and consumption concept.

3.1 The Phenomenon of "Childbearing Fear" Under the Theory of Childbearing Cost - Child Utility

American scholar Harvey Leibenstein clearly pointed out the application of cost-utility analysis of childbearing, that is, by comparing the cost and benefit of childbearing to choose a childbearing mode, and divided the cost of childbearing into direct costs (such as monetary and physical expenditures) and indirect costs (time, energy, psychological and opportunity costs). Leibenstein then proposed the "marginal child rational choice theory," in

which the need to have a marginal child can be weighed by comparing the cost and utility of the NTH child and based on economic, social, and cultural factors. When class in the inverse relationship of income and fertility, Gary Becker proposed "the number of children - quality replacement theory" and points out that the quality of parents to the child's demand is greater than the number of demand, the improvement of income level to parents choose number of child sacrifice quality, the substitution effect can play a certain inhibition.

Since the two-child policy was lifted, there has been a voice in the society that people call "having only one child is enough" or "not having a happy life". At the present stage, the willingness to bear children is low, and Chinese youth have a strong "fear of childbearing" or even "infertility" psychology, and the "Dink" group is growing. The cost-utility theory of microeconomics provides a good explanation for the formation of this pattern: In other words, there is a cost of childbearing. At the present stage, social transformation has led to a sharp rise in the cost of childbearing and the opportunity cost of rebearing. The pressure of young people's life is increasing, "house slave", "car slave" and "migrant worker" have become the exclusive titles of contemporary "80s" and "90s". It is these common worries that keep young couples away.

On the other hand, the awakening and upsurge of Chinese fertility rationality also makes fertility enter the stage of cost constraint. With the improvement of education level and the development of network media, people's lifestyle is becoming more and more "McDonaldized" and rational. The direct and indirect costs of childbearing are more easily perceived by people, such as the input of education cost and living cost, the loss of energy, fatigue, worry and other psychological costs. More importantly, with the advent of the consumer society, people care more about the loss of indirect costs such as personal freedom and opportunity for achievement, which severely inhibits the reproductive behavior of the contemporary young people who pursue the quality of life and the quality of life, and produces the "childbearing fear" psychology.

3.2 The Impact of Status Consumerism on Traditional Conception of Childbearing

With the continuous change of a new generation of young people consumption idea, related to the consumption of leisure, fashion, travel, sports and lifestyle to improve more and more get their attention, but its in the consumer a conflict between desire and spending power, which makes them have to make changes in the way of life, including family mode and marriage mode change.

First, there is a strong desire for upward mobility. According to dumont's "social capillary theory", people

have a universal desire to improve their social status and economic status, which includes the desire for more power and wealth, and the hope for success and more and better things. This is a tendency to move from a lower position in society to a higher position, and the upward mobility of people happens to be similar to the way the lamp oil rises on the wick. In modern society, the greater the desire of people to pursue upward mobility, the more intense the status consumption, status consumption has an increasingly increasing nature.

Secondly, "social scarcity", expensive and visible are the major characteristics of status consumption. The so-called social scarcity refers to the fact that some commodities are not only restricted by the material expansion of reproduction, but also restricted by their use. Only when they remain scarce can they give consumers the sense of satisfaction and happiness of status consumption. The social scarcity of status products makes consumers pay more attention to the perceived value in social comparison, which is not only limited to the material value of products, but also includes the sense of bragging generated by consumers when they compare with those who cannot have status products and the avant-garde sense of keeping up with others in social comparison. Visibility attributes indicate that positional consumption products belong to positional goods, that is, tangible goods that can be seen, such as watches and cars. Consumption of such goods will deepen consumers' perception of their status in a certain social environment. Expensive refers to the high price of status goods. In order to show the role of status, status goods must be of high quality and require people to pay high prices. A series of characteristics of status consumption make consumers have to maintain a high level of consumption habits, and with the rise of social class and income, the corresponding status goods are more expensive, and the proportion of spending for status consumption is larger. In fixed income, as a larger proportion of income is used for status consumption, the "living space" of fertility is squeezed, so that the ability to pay for fertility is worse, the desire to give birth is smaller, and the result is inevitably very few children. The decline in fertility rate caused by status consumption does not only occur in the low or middle class. In fact, with the increase of income, more budget pressure may be felt, as explained by the inverse relationship between income and fertility described by Reibinstein.

Status consumption affects fertility mainly from social mobility and social stratification. It is a population problem on the surface, but a social problem in fact. The characteristics of status consumption determine that people's consumption expenditure is often greater than their income, coupled with the soaring cost of population reproduction, resulting in the young people who love status consumption to further reduce the budget for bearing children. Under such social stratification mechanism that encourages status consumption, people's

conception of fertility and values will be greatly changed, which will give contemporary young people a paradox of "unable to have children". In addition, under the consumption storm, in order not to reduce the consumption level and quality of life before birth, people will choose to satisfy the consumption and sacrifice the fertility behavior with higher cost. Therefore, more young people will choose infertility to cope with the current pressure of life. More importantly, the young people the satisfaction that comes from status consumption and brings a person than the birth of "happy family", obtains the consumption ideas serious erosion of the traditional procreation conception, the young man of today's individualism and hedonism gradually make the "quality of life" of "life enjoyment" more important than the importance of family.

Therefore, in the context of today's consumer society, the willingness of young people to give birth continues to decline, and so does their enthusiasm for giving birth. The transformation of Chinese society has created a culture of ultra-low fertility, making China closer and closer on the road of "low desire society", which confirms the propositions of "development is the best contraceptive" and so on.

4. CONCLUSION

China on the basis of the model of fertility is shaken, after decades of rapid economic development, China's social structure, the big, fundamental changes have taken place in social stratification is more significant, social mobility, social inequality is also highlighted, people's values more diversified, gradually produced the yukon sterility, less social thought. Such a change of will is an impact on ideas and a symbol of social modernization. Such a development will inevitably lead to the further accumulation of the risk of people making sterile choices and cause more social and economic problems. Social policy should do something about it. On the one hand, should focus on values in today's society, to strengthen the education of social values and guide, and carry forward the traditional family ethics and responsibility of modern significance, such as play a role consumerism brings positive effect, such as effort, progress, eliminate the ill effects of position of consumer culture, such as comparison, sporting, enjoyment. On the other hand, it focuses on the value guidance of contemporary young people. Young people are the main force of birth after birth. We should help them establish a correct outlook on life and consumption, advocate appropriate consumption, timely consumption and other concepts, so as to avoid them falling into the "consumption trap".

Finally, the change of fertility pattern and fertility concept is also a symbol of national and social development, which is inevitable in the process of modernization. We should adapt to the change of fertility model, carry out reasonable adjustment and reform,

complete supporting policy content as far as possible, establish a series of comprehensive supporting policy system to encourage fertility, strengthen the connection between fertility policy and other social policies, and create a fertility friendly social environment.

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