

# ***Possible Ways to Help Raise China's Fertility Rate***

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the reasons why the current problem of fertility reduction in China is mainly due to the unclear future family planning of women and young people and the incomplete inclusion of the responsibility of raising children in their future planning. By comparing the three types of countries in the world - backward countries, developing countries and developed countries - as "three small islands" and comparing the welfare they provide to their citizens, as well as their demands for different productive forces and human resources, we gradually determine the orientation of China and its future development direction. Finally, by citing and learning from the fertility policies of Japan and South Korea, the article gives several feasible plans to help China raise its fertility rate. With mild encouragement and some financial support, young families can be helped to settle down in their plans to start a family.

**Keywords:** capability in taking responsibility, "Islands", contrasts, emulate neighbors

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Current background and policy inadequacies**

China's steadily declining fertility rate is a growing concern. According to the United Nations, China's fertility rate has been declining for many years and is even lower than the global average and was ranked fifth from the bottom in a United Nations study of fertility in 2022. The fertility rate in China has declined to 1.18, compared to the world average of 2.1. This downward trend may bring a series of problems and challenges for a country with such a large population. The government has adopted some policies to counter this trend, but whether the fertility rate will recover needs more concrete plans and time to observe. It can be seen from the survey that China's current birth encouragement policies are relatively imperfect, and most of the policies are relatively general and do not correspond to different age groups.

### **1.2. Investigate findings and improve plans**

The work studied the underlying reasons why young people are reluctant to have children at an early age or not, and analyzed some feasible plans through group discussion and comparison with other neighboring countries. According to the study, the reasons for China's declining fertility rate are multifaceted, including economic, social, cultural, and policy factors. The combination of these factors has led many Chinese women to delay or reduce their desire to have children. Through detailed research and comparison, this paper seeks to analyze the social factors that directly or indirectly affect

and reduce women's intent and expectations for having a new baby. Additionally, the paper will also explore potential policies that could boost China's fertility rate in the short term.

## **2. Research and analysis**

### **2.1. Self-improvement conflicts with childbearing age**

In the paper "Gender Equality Concept and female fertility intention," the author defines fertility intention as "people's attitude and expectation towards having children, usually including the intensity of fertility intention and fertility plan, which gradually evolves from concept to reality" [1]. The change of women's mindset is an important factor that affects these variables. With societal progress and the elevation of women's status, an increasing number of women prioritize self-development and career success. The values of Chinese society are changing, and the ideas of individualism and free choice are spreading gradually. This inspires people to think more about personal aspirations and goals, rather than simply following family traditions and expectations. According to "Female identity and Fertility Intention: Moderating Effect of Education Level"-The construction of female identity originated from the Enlightenment movement, which represents the awakening of female subject consciousness, women are eager to get the recognition of society and family, and pay more attention to the promotion of self-identity. [2] Women nowadays pay more attention to the realization of personal value and careers, rather than the traditional family role. This shift has led many young women to delay marriage and family planning to pursue education and careers.

### **2.2. Economic pressure cannot give enough living conditions to child**

The implementation of nine-year compulsory education and other relevant laws has resulted in most Chinese women not having children before the age of 18 (out of protection). After the age of 18, many women choose to attend university for three to four years or even pursue even longer postgraduate or doctoral studies. A higher degree often means a better salary and an improved social status. However, this period of intense study and career growth also means that even if they enter long-term relationships, they would be more reluctant to have children. Otherwise, they will be saddled with financial pressures and responsibilities that run against their capability to improve their social status. During this time, most women will experience unprecedented levels of stress and postpartum depression, which they have almost never been exposed to during their upbringings. So most women and even some of their families would not want to undergo such changes. At the same time, these women also worry that they cannot provide satisfactory living conditions for their children with their current abilities.

### **2.3. Family planning leads to workplace injustice**

In traditional Chinese families, 34 is often considered a late age to give birth to a baby, but the period from 22 to 35 is precisely when young women are moving up the career ladder. Many of the new generation are unwilling to sacrifice their personal growth to carry on the family line. At the same time, giving birth to a child also means great responsibility and pressure for women. Raising children requires a significant investment of time, energy and money, and can adversely affect a woman's career progression. Many young women worry that they will not be able to balance work and family while raising children might limit their career prospects. This fear is not unfounded – many companies in China implicitly accept that women's childbearing will affect their professional growth. Therefore, many companies use "how many years they plan to have children" as a criterion for hiring new employees. At the same time, during pregnancy leave, when women are unable to work as usual, their

earnings will be reduced. Even after returning to work, some of their roles will be delegated or replaced. This situation has led women to worry about their future.

### **3. Categorical discussion of development**

#### **3.1. Groups discussion**

First the research needs to analyze China's current development progress and future development direction before we can formulate more concrete plans and policies. If considering undeveloped countries, developing countries, and developed countries as ABC three small islands respectively, the small islands of developing countries can be divided into left and right parts (one side tends to just start developing, the other side tends to have a relatively complete development plan and is learning from developed countries), such a structure will help to distinguish China's situation more clearly.

#### **3.2. Under developing island A and incomplete developing part of B**

While non-developing countries mainly need to meet basic survival needs, the needs of developing and developed countries are more diversified, including economic, social, medical, and educational goals. Island A, which is the underdeveloped country, is generally challenged by high birth and death rates, with a high population growth rate due to inadequate health facilities, poverty, hunger, and disease. The whole island has needs for population growth because most areas are engaged in agricultural production, which requires a large number of low-wage labor. This is where China was 60-70 years ago. Island B's preference for the undeveloped first pass is very similar to Island A's, but they will take over more foundry business than Island A. In China, for example, thousands of workers assemble the iPhone invented by the American company. These workers have more regular incomes than the people of Island A, but still barely make ends meet. This part is still not free from the need for large numbers of people, after all, such jobs are the main source of construction funds in the country.

#### **3.3. A more developed part of B—China's point**

The more developed side of Island B (the developing county) may have implemented a more complete development plan, including family planning policies, education reforms, and health care improvements. Their direction of development has also shifted from relatively cheap labor to specialized technological inventions and other businesses. At present, China is just in the B island stage, at this time, the Chinese market has appeared with distinctive products, such as some brands of mobile phones, precision advanced equipment and so on. These irreplaceable items in the international market have helped China's relatively rapid economic development in recent years. People are generally more educated. As a result, the needs of the population are more diverse, including better health care, higher education, career opportunities, and social welfare.

#### **3.4. Imitation target--developed island C**

Similarly, Island C (a developed country) faces low birth rates and a relatively high population aging. This trend is due to higher education levels, economic development, and extensive family planning measures. The thinking of the new generation of young people in China and their future family planning is precisely thinking about the direction of birth planning in developed countries. As a result, China, which needs a large population base, is faced with the dilemma of having the fifth lowest fertility rate in the world. Economic prosperity can provide more career opportunities and higher standards of living, but it also brings with it more financial responsibility. "Research on the Fertility System Based on Fertility Rights" illustrated that "The preference for larger families will continue

under conditions in which a family needs a lot of labor to survive and there is no social insurance to replace the obligation of children to support the elderly." In contrast, nowadays people have children only for the happiness and satisfaction they bring" [3]. This is also why Chinese families no longer need children to increase the labor force. On the right side of Island B and Island C, people generally pay more attention to career development and quality of life, and the factors analyzed above are the sources of fertility decline. This shows that the positive social resources have brought about the negative situation of slow population growth. China, the country on the more complete side of Island B, should be a model for local learning from Island C despite the countries' individual historical and cultural background differences.

#### **4. Compare and set up plans**

##### **4.1. Mimick Japan and South Korea**

By comparing and examining the policies implemented by China's neighbors Japan and South Korea, to raise the fertility rate and to maintain economic stability, it is not hard to find some feasible solutions for China's current situation. Japan, which has the ninth lowest fertility rate in the world, has been grappling with an aging population and decline birth rates since the last century. On the other hand, South Korea's fertility rate has plummeted in recent years, making it the country with the lowest fertility rate in the 2022 United Nations survey. Despite the differences in population size and cultural background between China, Japan and South Korea, relevant institution can nonetheless gain insights from their experiences to increase the fertility rate.

##### **4.2. Financial subsidies**

Lebenstein's "child cost-effectiveness" theory believes that raising and nurturing children involves a cost, including direct and indirect costs. As per capita income increases, both direct and indirect cost will also increase. As the cost of childbirth increases, the utility of children, and the number of children desired by families decreases [4]. The theory suggests that financial burdens and the time and energy parents must invest when their children are young are key deterrents for young couples considering starting a family. China, the latest country to embrace the problem, could emulate some of Japan's "child handage" schemes (also called Basic directions for future parenting support measures (1995-1999)), offering a fixed monthly stipend for each child up to the age of six, with additional support for young families where one or both spouses are under 25 -according to "The gains and losses of Japan's fertility promotion policy" [5]. These policies could alleviate some of the financial burdens of the young people. Although government subsidies may not drastically improve their lives, even 800 rmb a month could improve the quality of life of some families. These forms of aid can improve family finances and incentivize couples to have children.

##### **4.3. Provide educational benefits**

Second, relevant institutions can learn from Japan and South Korea's parenting support measures. In addition to financial support, providing comprehensive childcare benefits and services is crucial. This includes building more nurseries and kindergartens, allowing flexible working hours for parents and having a well-supported maternity leave system. In Japan, for example, the government has actively promoted the construction of nurseries and is committed to fostering family-friendly work environments. In South Korea, the government has launched a "Happy Family Program" to support young couples in raising children by providing free nurseries and educational subsidies.

#### 4.4. Promote gender equality in the workplace

Additionally, promoting gender equality will also play a big role in promoting fertility. In China, women still face many challenges in the workplace, such as limited promotion opportunities and wage disparities gaps. China can learn from Japan and South Korea's progress in gender equality and adopt a series of measures to promote women's participation in social and economic development. In Japan, for example, a series of laws and policies have been introduced to protect women's rights and encourage women to work and start businesses. Additionally, Chinese government should consider involving fathers as well during pregnancy, encouraging them to take paid leave to take care of the mother. Through the current research, based on the paper "Study on the Impact of Fertility Costs on Women's Fertility Intention", opportunity cost has some significant effects on women's fertility intention: Position adjustment had no significant effect on female fertility intention. Maternity leave is not the key factor influencing a woman's desire to have children; The actual length of maternity leave had no significant effect on women's fertility intention. At present, in order to ease the pressure of female fertility, the extension of female maternity leave is strongly advocated in various places, but the extension of maternity leave cannot solve the family fertility burden from the root [6]. To ensure effective implementation, relevant government departments should be established to supervise the program in both public and private sectors. With equal paid maternity leave for both men and women, the society can reduce the imbalance in workplace recruitment.

#### 4.5. Friendly publicity promotes family formation

Effective and accessible education and information are also key in raising fertility rates. By strengthening sex education, marriage and family education, and promoting the concept of encouraging couples to have children, the society can positively influence people's attitudes towards childbirth. In recent years, Chinese fertility propaganda often emphasizes "have a baby soon" with pictures of happy moments from pregnancy. However, such propaganda often overlooks the role of fathers. (Yes) Only heartwarming scenes that truly encourage families unity and caring for pregnant women can have a positive impact. Governments and organizations should create advertisements that promote parent-child relationships. In "Female Identity and Fertility Intention: "Moderating Effect of Education Level" mentions that contemporary women play different roles in society and family, forming an identity based on their own and family roles. Therefore, this paper studies female fertility intention from two dimensions of family identity and self-identity [7]. Such efforts not only allow young people especially female to experience the joy and fulfillment of family life, but also subtly prompts them to reconsider their attitude towards family. For example, Japan launched a series of publicity campaigns such as "Falling in love, getting married and having children" to garner young people's attention towards family values. Utilizing social media's influence on youth, promoting positive family values on major social platforms can further stimulate young people's interests in having their families. In more advertising words, the society should emphasize the importance of women in the family and the greatness of being a mother or wife, so as to help women find confidence and settle their families in the uncertainty of the future. The government can strengthen sex education, providing scientific and comprehensive knowledge about sex, and helping young people to accurately understand the importance of fertility and family planning. At the same time, a robust maternity insurance system ensures that young couples have access to safe and reliable medical services.

### 5. Conclusion

Addressing declining fertility in China requires considering multiple factors, such as policy, social environment and education. This is not necessarily a negative trend, as it is usually accompanied by a higher quality of life and better women rights. However, it also requires government and society to

take measures to address challenges such as an aging population and growing demands for social welfare. By working to create supporting environments for women choices, implementing family-friendly policies, and strengthening sex education, the social can expect to increase China's fertility rate and achieve a more benign demographic development.

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