

Fertility Trends and the Prospect of Family Planning Program in China: Its Future Changes and Related Policy Selection

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Since the 1970's, when family planning policy was carried out, great achievement has been achieved during the past 30 years in China. Although many people doubt about the family planning policy, most countries agree with China's family planning policy and praise the contribute of Chinese government's birth control to the whole world. Especially those countries with fast population enlargement hope to learn something from China's family planning policy to solve their population problem.

Many demography index shown, that China has entered into a period of "Low fertility rate, low mortality rate and low growth rate". Many demographers think that China has entered into the post-population transition period. How will the fertility change in China? Can the current family planning policy fit into the new situation? Should it be kept up? Those are what the article will answer. The following discussion is based on the censuses data, especially the fifth census of China.

1. The Achievement of family planning policy and fertility transition

Population problem is one of the most important factors influencing socioeconomic development in China. Family planning policy is necessary to China's development. After the found of People's Republic of China, the government and people came to realize the importance of controlling the number of population and improving the quality of the population. Since the 1970's when family planning policy was carried out, great achievement has been achieved through 30 years effort. Although it is still a developing country, China has controlled the population growth below the replacement rate and entered into a period of "Low fertility rate, low mortality rate and low growth rate" and finished a historical transition. That is a Chinese successful way to deal with population growth, which improves socioeconomic development, enhances people's living standard and makes contribution to world population control.

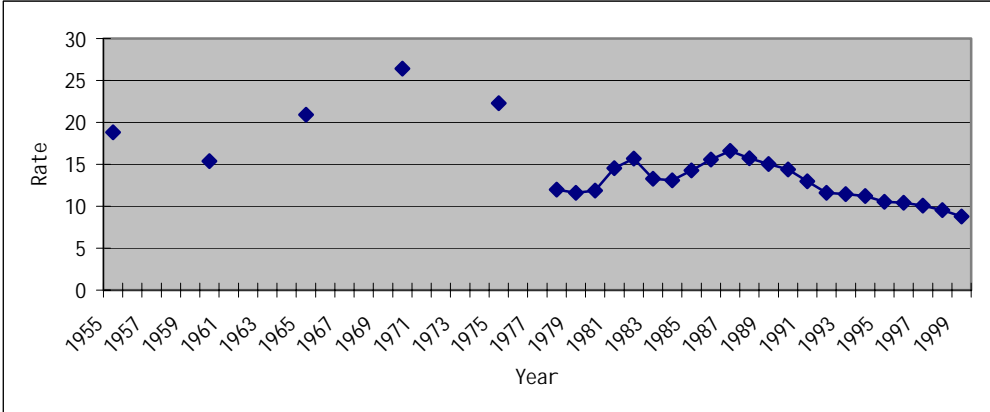
The following is the main achievement of China's family planning policy:

1.1 The changes of yearly population increasing rate.

Increasing rate is a main index measuring population change, whose change can show the achievement of family planning. Chart 1 shows the change of China' yearly population growth rate. From the chart, we can see that 1970 is the highest point, when China has implemented population control and family planning policy, but owing to population reproduction inertia, the population growth rate keeps up increasing. Then, with the strict

family planning policy and large-scaled propaganda and the weakening of population reproduction inertia, population growth rate begins to fall down dramatically. Because of the periodical population reproduction inertia, population growth rate starts to rise up a little but is still very low in the 1980's. After the 1990's, population growth rate is somewhat stable around 10‰ and falls down a little.

Chart 1: 1955-1999 change of population growth rate in China (Unit: ‰)

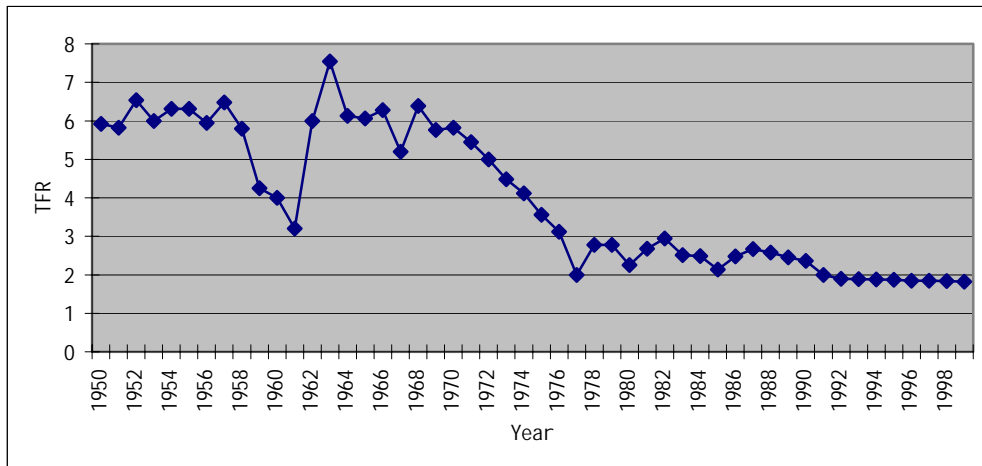


Source: Department of Economics and Social Affairs, and Population Division of United Nations (1998), World Population Prospects: The 1996 Revision, New York: United Nations, 1998

1.2 The changes of Total Fertility Rate.

The Female Total Fertility Rate is one of the most important indexes measuring the birth rate. Chart 2 shows the change trend of female TFR from 1950 to 1999 in China. From it we can see that the latter half of the 1960's is the highest point. With the implement of family policy, it began to fall down. At the end of 1970 and the beginning of 1980, TFR was below 3. After the 1990's, TFR was below 2 and below the replacement level (TFR=2.1). In addition, after then total fertility rate is stable, demonstrating that the TFR potential to fall is limited.

Chart 2: The Change of Female Total Fertility Rate in China (1950-1999)



1.3 The most obvious achievement of family planning policy is the slowing down of the population growth rate.

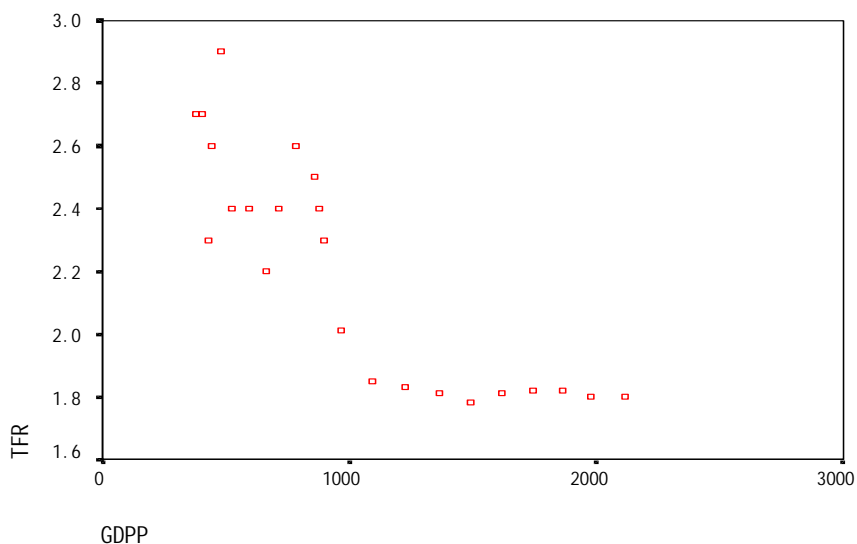
The fifth census in 2000 shown, that the total population of China was 1,296,000,000. Based on the specialists’ former projection, the population scale of China has been reduced 250,000,000 by family planning policy from 1972 to 1997(Jianmin LI, etc. 1999). That relaxed the population growth pressure to influencing China’s socioeconomic development.

1.4 The focuses of family planning policy are “Controlling the number of population” and “improving the quality of population”.

The implement of family planning policy in China is not only changed the population growth rate, total fertility rate and population scale, but also change the index of population quality, such as infant mortality rate, illiterate rate declined quickly and primary school enrolment and high school enrolment rate increased quickly.

1.5 Family planning policy not only results in the changes of population index, but also leads to the changes to some socioeconomic development, such as average GDP, average resource, average consumption level and etc.

As the important index measuring socioeconomic development, average GDP rises up swiftly, which has much to do with the family planning policy. From chart 3, we can conclude that average GDP is negatively related to the birth rate. With the implement of China’s family planning policy, total fertility rate falls down. Especially when the potential



for the total fertility rate is very large (between 2.2 and 3.0), they are quasi-lined related. After the total fertility rate is below the replacement rate, because the space for falling is limited, their relation is: when total fertility rate is low, average GDP will rise up. At that time they have little to do with each other.

Chart 3. The Relativity of average GDP and TFR (1978-2000)

Therefore, Seen from the index list above and the living experience of the people, since the 1970s when family planning policy was carried out, great achievement has been achieved. The whole Country and the people benefit from it. We can say that without family planning policy, China's achievement since 1970 wouldn't exist.

2. The Challenges and problems of family planning program

Although family planning policy contributed much to China's development, many people including some demographers and family planning workers come to doubt its suitability and should sustainable in today's China, because the situation of today is quite different from that of the 1970's, when the family planning policy was started. The answer is YES. Although the situation has changed, people's life has been improved, the contradiction between population and resource and environment had been lightened, and however, the population problem hasn't been resolved from the root. Family planning policy hasn't finished its historical task. At the same time there are many challenge to family planning policy. For example population aging and high birth sex ratio. So it is important for the family planning policy maker to know how to face these challenges.

The following is the main challenges and problems of family planning policy and work:

2.1 Large population basis. On account of population production inertia, China's population will continue to growth in a long time. On the one hand, although the proportion in the world population has reduced, the absolute number is getting larger. Accounting to the fifth census, at November 1, 2000, China's total population is 1,296,000,000. On the other hand, although female total fertility rate is below replacement level, owing to the population growth inertia, the number of women at the birth stage will continue to increase and it hasn't been to the peak. During the 2001-2005, the women at the birth age will increase by 10,000,000, with 2,000,000 every year. That means family planning policy and work are still very important in the future.

2.2 The low fertility is not stable and the fertility is possible to rise up again. By family planning policy, population reduced dramatically in China. Fertility rate is reduced from 30‰ in the 1970's to 15.23‰ in 1999. The total fertility rate is reduced from above 5.0 in the 1970's to 1.82 in 1998. The speed is very fast. Since the low fertility rate is not resulted in people's willing, it is called "exogenous low fertility". The stable of low fertility is based on the socioeconomic development. Now, China is still a developing country, living style and birth concepts haven't changed, there is difference between people's birth willing and current family planning policy. So the fertility is possible to rise up again.

2.3 Population structure is off-balance and population aging is serious. With the family planning policy and birth control policy, China has entered into a period of "Low fertility

rate, low mortality rate and low growth rate”, that is the post-population transition period, but there still are some problems. Firstly, sex ratio at birth is higher and about 110, even 130 in some areas. Secondly, population structure has been aging. The fifth census shows that by the November 1, 2000, the population between 0 to 14 years old is 289,790,000, accounting 22.89% of the total population, which has reduced by 4.80 percent points of the fourth census in 1990. However the population above 65 is 88,110,000, accounting 6.96% of the total population, which has increased by 1.39 percent points of the fourth census in 1990. Based on the international standard, China has been an aging country. However, it is not on the peak yet. According to a project, the peak will reach between 2030 and 2040, when the aged above 65 will account for more than 20% of the total population (Zhenyu XIAO, 2000). In some cities, the proportion will come to 1/4 or 1/3. In addition, the eldest elder trend is obvious. The life expectation is relatively higher. For example, in 1998 the aged above 65 accounted for 6.69% of the total population and the life expectation is 69.9. In contrast, in the developed counties, when the aging is 8%, the life expectation is only 66.6.

2.4 Population development is not on balance between rural and urban China. So people’s birth concepts and behavior are different. That is a main character of China’s population growth. Two aspects can embody that: One is the area gap of population growth. That is because the socioeconomic difference among the eastern, middle and western areas, which lead the higher population growth in the western and middle areas than in the eastern area. It is reported that the fertility was below replacement rate at the end of the 1960’s and at the beginning of the 1970’s in Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai, where has been the first area to finish population transition. However, the fertilities of Guangxi, Guizhou, Qinghai and some other western provinces are still above the replacement level. The other aspect is referred to the population growth gap between the rural and urban areas. Because of the difference of economy, culture, tradition and mechanism between rural and urban areas, the birth concept and birth behavior are different. Currently, rural fertility is much higher than urban fertility.

2.5 Population migration and urbanization is speeding up. Population urbanization is the result of the socioeconomic development and an important indication of the modern civilization. Recently, with the development of the Chinese economy, Population registration regulation system is loosened. Population migration is more and more popular, which fastened the urbanization. Accounting to the fifth census, China’s urban population is 455,940,000, accounting 36.09% of the total population; rural population is 80739, accounting 63.91% of the total population. The urban population has increased by 9.86 percent points than the fourth census Of 1990.

On the one hand, population migration and urbanization is helpful to founding the new birth concepts, relieving employment pressure, allocating human resource and improving population quantity. On the other hand, population migration and urbanization result in the increasing of the mobile population, which will hinder the population macro control and make the family planning work more difficulty.

2.6 “ Improving population quality” will be the main objective of the family planning work. In the long term, although “improving population quantity” and “controlling

population number” are the same important in family planning work, the latter is much more stressed than the former in practice. With more and more emphasis placed on human capital and socioeconomic transition, more and more attention will be paid on “improving population quality” by the government.

2.7 Family planning policy will face many challenged of mechanism, concept and culture. Family planning policy is implemented when the social security system is not well developed in China. With the transition of population and socioeconomic status, it is more and more necessary to set up a good social security system, such as one child security regulation and so on. After entering WTO, foreign culture, concepts and value will swarm into China. Therefore there is challenge in the idealism. How to adjust to these challenges? That is also a new problem for family planning work.

3. The adjustment of family planning program and related policy selection

From those above analysis we can conclude that the most problem for the family planning policies of China is how to adjust them under new circumstances rather than whether it should be kept or not. Considering the present conditions of the China’s society and economy and the challenges the family planning policies are facing, the author put forward these aspects need to be adjusted as the following:

3.1 Deepen the understanding of the family planning policies and regard family planning tasks as a systematic project. In the new 21st century, population problems become more complex and multiple. We should extend the connotation and extension of family planning tasks, change the understanding of population control in a traditional and narrow sense and increase it to a new level. The intending population and family planning tasks should involve such various contents as the aging of population, the improvement of population quality, reproduction health, social security and population flow and urbanization. Meanwhile they can’t be finished only by administrative sectors of family planning. It should acquire the harmonization and cooperation from many sectors including sanitation, education, labor, public security and statistics sectors.

3.2 Treat the quantitative control and maintaining of the low fertility rate level as the core contents of family planning. Although the population control and family planning policies have brought distinguished effect in China, the population growth will continue to the mid of 21st century due to the rule in itself. Thus China must make “control of population quantity and maintaining of low fertility rate level” as the chief task in the new century. Only through this can the population problems be resolved entirely in China.

3.3 Realize the sustainable and harmonized development of the economy and society

as the primary approach for the family planning. Many macro and micro population economy theories have explained the close relationship between economy and population. The realities in China also show that population problems have close relationships with productivity level and social and economic development level. The birth rate is low with slow and even negative population growth in the areas of high productivity and economic development. And vice versa in the underdeveloped areas, especially in rural areas. Therefore, future family planning must be closely combined with the economic development. Population problems must be resolved through economic development. Particularly the focus should be put on rural areas. We must combine the rural family planning with economic development through advocating late marriage, excellent reproduction and good education, and strengthening the family planning administration of floating population and popularizing the villager autonomy on family planning strongly. So we can combine the rural family planning with developing economy, helping peasants to become rich through hardworking and constructing civilized and happy families.

3.4 Construct and perfect the institutional and legal system. In order to assure right development of family planning, the first law “Population and Family Planning Law” has been carried into execution since Dec.29th, 2001. Its execution will undoubtedly promote the family planning to a new level. However, due to the complexity and variability of population problems the family planning will be a dynamic process. The law must be perfected and adjusted continuously so that it can instruct the practice of family planning more effectively and realize the institution, legality and standardization.

3.5 Realize the transformation from ectogenic way to voluntary way of family planning and from administration to service. In the past 30 years, family planning has been completed through family planning policies and compulsory appointment. Therefore the low birth rate is “ectogenic”. With the social development and advance, so change the old opinion of carrying out work in a compulsory and administrative way is necessary. Only realized the transformation of family planning from ectogenic way to voluntary way, and through strengthening service consciousness and improving service level, the family planning can be carried out during the “market economic system”.

3.6 construct and perfect the benefit-oriented mechanism of family planning and the social security system of population under family planning. Particularly the aged social security system is the important institutional guarantee of the right execution of future family planning. Under the present low economic development level, constructing benefit-oriented mechanism will contribute to the implementation of family planning. One side, “three combination” program must be carried out actively to increase the income of household. On the other side, the government should set up the special fund for family planning to compensate for any possible adverse results such as single child’s accidental casualty and annuity subsidy for issueless household. Furthermore, because of the

imperfection of social security system in China the aging problems become more serious. With uncertainty and anxiety of aging care, people only depend on giving birth to more children to obtain aged security. Thus it has brought contradictions with family planning policies. To solve this problem we must depend on the perfection of social security system and improvement of social security level. Therefore it is one of the important approaches to build up various social security system especially aged social security system.

3.7 Increasing the population quality will be everlasting theme of population development. “Controlling population quantity and increasing population quality” is always the goal and objective of family planning in China. But in the past years family planning has emphasized the control of population quantity. Because of relatively low population quality, the educated level as a whole is far behind and the tasks of “increasing the population quality” are much tougher. Therefore, the emphasis of future family planning must be turned to the aspect of “increasing the population quality” and realize the final substitute of the quantity by quality and achieve the steady the balance of population development.

3.8 Broaden the international intercommunism and cooperation of family planning. With the development of economic globalization, all countries not only strengthen the economic interaction but also the interaction in culture, thoughts and value. With the deepening of China’ reformation and broadening of opening extent and especially after joining WTO, China will be combined with other countries greatly. As for the family planning, it will be significant for China to refer to other countries’ experience and perfect its family planning policies.

In conclusion, through 30 years’ efforts China has controlled the excessive population growth and decreased the birth rate to replacement level, basically completing “population transitions”. But they can’t mean that China has completed population and family planning tasks. On the contrary, China will encounter greater challenges with population problems more multiple, more complex and much shadier in the 21st century. Therefore, new ways must be found to resolve the population problems in the new time to stabilize low fertility rate, broaden the connotation and extension of family planning and explore the corresponding policies of population and family planning. This will not only have an important influence on the sustainable development of China’s society and economy but also play a great role on the development and stabilization of world population.

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