The Way of Strategic Adjustment of Fertility Policy in China

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Abstract. The most prominent problem of China’s current population structure shows that optimizing the population structure will be an important task in next half century. In order to promote economic and social sustainable development, the key point to solve the contradiction of population structure is gradually increasing fertility rate. The government should take measures to improve the fertility rate by perfecting social security measures, grasping adjustment opportunity, lowering the price of housing, expanding the scope of the compulsory education, promoting the gender balance of birth, etc.

Introduction

The optimization of population structure is closely related to the strategic adjustment of Child birth policy, reasonable population structure is necessary for the sustainable development of society and economy. In the past decades, the One-Child Policy has succeeded in inhibiting population growth rapidly. However, currently, accumulating of socioeconomic risk under the policy has begun to affect China’s long-term sustainable development. [1] Therefore, the strategic adjustment of child birth policy of China is imperative.

Current China’s Population Structure and Its Conduction Effect

With the implementation of population control policy in China, the following changes have taken place in the population structure: the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is 1.4, in the world, a lower level, it is facing to the low fertility trap (refer with: Fig.1, Fig.2); the population growth rate and the birth rate decreased gradually, the population of young labor force is declining, the average age of the population is rising and the aging trend is accelerating. In 2050, China’s population will approach average age of 53.4 years, compared with less developed countries (in 2015 and 2050, the average age of less-developed countries are 24.5 years and 35 respectively), will be far more than their average age of 35 years (refer with: Fig.3, Fig.4); One-child families are increasing; Imbalance of birth ratio between male and female becomes serious(Figure5 and Figure6). [2] The aging trend in urban and rural areas increase year by year; demographic dividend disappeared gradually, etc.

Through investigation, we found that: since "comprehensive two-child" policy took effect, the family fertility intention is low, only 43%. Fertility intentions are affected by the factors such as housing, education and medical treatment. Among them, the housing spending accounted for about 33% of household disposable income, the education costs accounted for 22%, medical treatment charge is 17%. For most of the young families, housing, education, medical and other expenses directly decrease household disposable income, and then reduce the second-child will of families. Undoubtedly, family income and fertility intentions are positively and closely correlated, the higher the income, the higher the proportion of the second child birth. On the contrary, the proportion of second child birth is lower. Altogether, "Low income" is the root cause of low fertility rate.

The above problems emerged the conduction of the “butterfly effect”: the low fertility rate led to a decline in the population growth rate, which led to an increase in the average age of the population, and then led to a decline of population of young labor. [3] Meanwhile, low fertility rate also led to more one-child families and make sex ratio imbalance. Therefore, optimizing population structure in China is an important task in half century in future. The crucial issue to solve the
The contradiction of population structure is improving the fertility gradually. For the topic discussed in this paper, fully understand the above problems is important the premise and foundation of following research and discussion.

**Figure 1.** In 2010 TFR contrast on China and the world

**Figure 2.** In 2011-2015 China TFR average compared with some developed countries

**Figure 3.** In 2015 the average age of China population compared with some developed countries

**Figure 4.** In 2050 the average age of China population compared with some developed countries
Adjustment of China’s Fertility Policy and Its Practical Effect

Main Process of the Adjustment of China’s Fertility Policy

Since the reform and opening-up, China has experienced a lot of adjustments of fertility policy: A couple has only one child, both husband and wife as the only children can have two children, both sides of husband and wife as the only one children can have two children and comprehensive two-children and so on.\(^4\) In the late 1970s, in order to control the rapid population growth and alleviate the contradiction between population and economy, society, resources and environment, China started to implement the policy of “giving birth to only one child”. The 12\(^{th}\) National Congress of the Communist Party of China determined the regulations of family planning as a basic national policy and wrote it in the Constitution in November 1982; At the beginning of the 21\(^{st}\) century, China started to allow both sides who are only single child to have second child; in November 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the 18\(^{th}\) CPC Central Committee launched a new policy which allowed parents to have second child if one of both sides is only single child; On September 29, 2015, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18\(^{th}\) CPC Central Committee decided to implement the policy of “Comprehensive Two-Children” which allows all parents to have second child. Since on January 1, 2016, new fertility policy came into effect, and the effect of this policy needs to further observe and assess on it.

The Practical Effect of China’s Fertility Policy

Although China has already had some practice in encouraging childbirth, the actual expected effects of these policies are very limited.\(^5\) For example, after implementing second child while one of the sides is only single child, the actual number of China’s population growth in 2 years was 6,460,000. Only 5.87% family which met the policy conditions chose to have second child, accounting for 36.7% of the reproductive number. Undoubtedly, this proportion is relatively low. Of course, this was also associated with shorter policy implementation times, lower fertility rates, pregnancy cycles, change of fertility ideas and other factors.

Strategic Adjustment for Chinese Fertility Policy

The purpose of the adjustment of China’s fertility policy is to perfect the strategy of population development, to optimize the population structure and to make population adapt to the development of economy and society. In order to achieve these goals, complementary policies to support one another are necessary.

Improving Complementary Policies Directly Related to Fertility Policy

As above mentioned, either suppressing child birth or encouraging, there are only few countries made success in population control, fertility rate is influenced by economy, culture, society and
other factors. Therefore, improving complementary policies directly related to fertility policy is an important prerequisite to give full play to the function of population policy. To improve the fertility rate and to let people really “dare to give birth”, we believe that the following supporting measures should be developed and improved. First of all, we should abolish the restriction policy of late marriage and childbearing and adjust the marriage age to no less than 18 years old. Secondly, we must improve the maternity insurance system, eliminate the limited conditions to enjoy the maternity insurance and expand the scope of participation of maternity insurance. The third, we must reform current birth registration system as well as gradually establish the security system of childbearing incentives. The government should reward families which fulfill the national fertility policy. Fourth, we must vigorously promote public services and infrastructure to reduce the pressure on taking care of children, such as providing integrated social services of the childcare service, making maternity leave is shared between the spouses and is freely distributed by the spouses. Fifth, on the basis of Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women, various preventive measures shall be adopted to prevent women from obstructing their career advancement or harming their interest due to maternity (for example, basic wages, performance wages and bonuses shall not be withheld during the statutory maternity leave). In order to alleviate the pressure on women’s employment and career development, we should eliminate the stigma of female employment as well as establish a subsidy mechanism for enterprises whose interests are influenced by maternity leave. Sixth, we should choose family as an object to establish reward, protection and other supporting system. Seventh, we should extend maternity leave appropriately (preferably revising is to from the original 98 days to 180 days).

By Decrease Housing Prices and Education Costs to Increase Disposable Income of Urban-Rural Household

From our survey and research, income, education, housing prices and other factors have a significant impact on fertility rate. In the child-rearing costs, the highest proportion of costs is housing, education or health care, low income is the root cause of low fertility intentions. Although the expansion of domestic demand is an important way for the sustainable development of economy, and domestic demand stimulates economic growth which will increase both actual and potential consumption in society, the real estate industry and education industry are only two individual aspects to stimulate domestic demand and consumption. In general, household disposable income and economic development is positively correlated, and household disposable income is negatively correlated with housing prices and education costs. Over the years, the abnormal development of China’s real estate industry makes housing prices generally higher than people’s affordability. Meanwhile, education industry is over-market and its charge is very high as well. Thus, housing prices and education costs directly related to the amount of household disposable income, and the disposable income of the family has a direct impact on people’s willingness of fertility.

Grasping Opportunity and Intensity of Policy Adjustment

In the long term, China’s basic situation of large population can't be changed, contradictions between population and economic development can't be eliminated in a short term, “comprehensive two-child” policy is just a part of strategic adjustment of China’s population policy. Willingness of fertility and reproductive behavior are influenced by various factors, such as fertility policy, social-economic development, family income. Although the influence of fertility policy showed a weaken trend, its leading role is still irreplaceable. From the experience of China’s population control and the effect of implementation of fertility in some developed countries, the effect of “comprehensive two-child” policy can't be very optimistic. Therefore, the adjustment of fertility policy is a national long-term strategic policy planning, the government should grasp the opportunity and intensify policy adjustment.

Promoting the Gender Balance of Birth

The imbalance of the sex ratio at birth will inevitably affect the social harmony development, and
effective measures must be taken to prevent and solve it. Firstly, the concept of equality between men and women should be promoted, and the work of sex secrecy from the original ethical requirements into legal requirements to promote the gender balance of birth must be changed. Meanwhile, people who have gender preference can't get a chance to identify the sex of fetus. Secondly, safeguard the rights and interests of women and children to promote gender equality. The healthy growth of the girl with a happy family, social progress and national development are closely linked. The development of girls decided to achieve the goals of sustainable development. Finally, to promote gender equality, from actual conditions, scientific and reasonable policies in economic, political, cultural and social are much necessary. Ideology of son preference is the root cause for birth population imbalance of sex ratio, especially in China, Countries should seize the key link, strengthen advocacy work and guide the masses to change ideas so as to promote gender equality.

Reference


