

Chinese Female Individual Independence and Fertility Desire --- -from the Perspective of Feminism

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Abstract. In response to the aging population, the Chinese government has changed the birth policy to change the population structure. However, encouraging fertility policy faces the challenge of women's independence consciousness and the reality of striving for gender equality. The core of women's independence consciousness is to change their weak position in the labor market and pursue a more equal division of labor within the family. Under this pursuit, women's attitude towards fertility has also changed, and the value of fertility to women has been measured. This study aimed to explore the effect of female independence awareness on female reproductive choice. The study focuses on the dual pressure and role contradiction of women in the family and workplace under the sense of independence, and gives appropriate policy advice. The results show that under the influence of women's independent consciousness, women's control of their reproductive rights will make women more independent to their reproductive choices. In addition, the discrimination in the workplace and the pressure of family affairs that they may face after giving birth will make the reality of life different from the vision of pursuing career and independence, and this difference will also make women more cautious about their reproductive choices.

Keywords: female; independence consciousness; fertility desire.

1. Introduction

China began its only-child policy in 1979, which has managed to maintain low population growth rates over the past three decades, which benefits China's economic growth. But China now faces the unprecedented challenge of an aging population. Low fertility rates and increasing life expectancy contribute to the current aging dilemma. The transformation of demographic structure, the increase of the elderly population and the decrease of the prime labor force lead to the potential labor shortage, which causes increasing pressure on China's sustainable development. On December 28, 2013, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China adopted a resolution on relaxing the one-child policy, allowing couples with both parents to have a second child. On May 31, 2021, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee adopted a resolution that a couple could have three children, namely the three-child policy. Under the reality of aging, "healthy birth and healthy care" and "encouraging fertility" have become the hot spots and goals of the current fertility policy. However, encouraging the fertility policy currently faces the challenges of women's independence consciousness and the reality of gender equality.

With the rise of women's educational level, the ability of economic independence and social status are gradually enhanced, the development of feminism and the awareness of female independence are enhanced. The first manifestation of gender equality and women's independence is economic equality, which requires a change in women's weak position in the labor market. Therefore, under the traditional family structure and concept of "the male dominate the external, the female dominate the internal", Chinese women's sense of independence has obvious anti-tradition. A sense of independence will not only change women's demands for career and social roles, but also change the power distribution and division of responsibilities within the family. Under the new family role and division of labor, women's attitude towards childbirth has also changed, and the value of childbirth brought to women has been measured again.

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Although people realize that in the new era, women seeking independence have different attitudes and understandings of childbearing, the reasons are not clear and complete. In terms of the exercise of reproductive right, the existing research mainly studies the reasonable regulation of reproductive right and the legal effect of new fertility methods from the perspective of legal discipline. From the perspective of female independence, there is a lack of reassessment of reproductive power and the exercise of power. Under the sense of independence, contemporary Chinese professional women are troubled by role conflict, and under the dual pressure of work role (social role) and family role (wife role, mother role, etc.) [1]. Although studies have shown that the fertility policy will not have a substantial impact on women's labor participation [2]. However, under the invisible discrimination, after the life event of "childbearing", women's career opportunities, career roles and career ideals have all changed significantly [3]. In the family, there are still gender differences in the collaboration of child care, and women are still the main bearers of parenting [4].

The article takes women's independence consciousness as the core influence factor. This article mainly discusses two factors that affect women's fertility intention. The first aspect is how women's pursuit of independence and mastery of reproductive rights affect their reproductive intention before childbearing. The second aspect is the impact of workplace discrimination and family division of labor on women's reproductive intention.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 3 is a discussion of the solutions. The following section presents the conclusion.

2. The Influence of Female Independence on Fertility Intention

2.1. Before Childbirth

2.1.1 Emphasize women's fertility rights

The use of reproductive right is a multifaceted issue spanning law, ethics and human rights. Since the promulgation of the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests" in 1992, the state and local governments have continued to explain and regulate women's independent reproductive rights. In the legal sense of our country, women's reproductive autonomy refers to the basic rights enjoyed by women of reproductive age to decide whether to have children, in what way to have children or give birth, and to decide the number and spacing of births conditionally, as well as the rights to enjoy reproductive health education and informed reproductive information in order to realize these rights [5].

However, under the strong inertia of traditional culture, women's fertility choices are often influenced and even forced by the family and even the surrounding groups. The influence of filial piety culture on Chinese people is profound. Cultural forces encourage women to have children, such as "having more children and more happiness", "there are three unfilial, no offspring is the greatest". Women not only have to give birth, but also have to give birth to boys, and there is a tradition of "raising children for old age," especially in the countryside. In Chinese village culture, a person's value is often not determined by himself, but by the born small group of —— family that he belongs to [6]. Under the dilemma of family pressure and the determination of their value, many women choose to give birth under invisible coercion, expecting that their value can be affirmed by the family and the group after giving birth.

Under the consciousness of independence, on the one hand, women emphasize the freedom of childbirth, that is, the final decision of birth or not birth is in their own hands; on the other hand, their unwillingness to be constrained by heavy family affairs and traditional family relations after childbirth is also the reason for the decrease of women's willingness to have children. With workability and financial strength, women are no longer willing to be trapped in their homes and kitchens but are more focused on achieving their own careers. For more and more young women,

becoming a successful woman can realize the value of personal life, be more respected by society, and have a better quality of life than being a good wife and mother. In this situation, giving birth and raising children will directly cause women to give up the life of only focusing on themselves, instead of taking care of their husband's children, so there are popular phrases "They don't need to get married" or "They don't have to have children".

2.2. After Childbirth

After childbirth, women's own career development, social family status, and individual economic ability are also important factors for women to measure fertility choice. Under the influence of traditional ideas, it was once advocated that women should take full care of their family members. However, under the influence of independent consciousness, contemporary Chinese professional women are troubled by role conflict and are under the dual pressure of work role (social role) and family role (wife role, mother role, etc.) [1].

2.2.1 Workplace discrimination

In modern society, employment is the main way for women to participate in social life, and also an important means to determine the survival and development of individuals. Under the sense of independence, occupational status is an important indicator to measure the success of their personal value and social role. At a time when most women have received higher education, their desire for career development has changed a lot from before. More and more modern women pay more attention to their career development and move their value source from the family to the workplace.

Career stress is an important factor affecting the fertility intention of urban women. At present, urban women are under great career pressure, and they have to consider that childbirth will increase the opportunity cost of their work. Although overt gender discrimination in employment has been explicitly prohibited by national policy, and other studies have concluded implying that the relaxation of the One-Child Policy is unlikely to affect substantially the female labour force participation in urban China [2], implicit discrimination in the workplace still remains. Therefore, the study of the impact of childbirth on women's career cannot be limited to the "labor participation rate", and the exploration of workplace treatment and job development can reflect the hidden discrimination that repress women's career development.

After some women have birth, their workplace treatment will be affected. Women are affected by birth, and the salary or welfare they should get is reduced due to the time and money costs incurred during the maternity leave, which infringes on the equal rights of childbearing women in the workplace [7].

In addition to workplace treatment, most women's career opportunities are affected to a certain extent after giving birth. First, the company treats women after childbirth as taking key jobs or being deprived of more career development or promotion opportunities. When faced with company layoffs or personnel changes, they often bear the brunt [3]; second, employers prefer young people and only value the work value of the young in previous years, while older women, especially women with children, even with good education, are in a relatively weak position in the occupational market [3].

In addition to blatant discrimination by enterprises, women themselves are also prone to lose their workplace pursuit in an environment of insufficient tolerance and patience for childbearing women. During pregnancy and after childbirth, professional women have to balance children and work. Due to the weakening of physical strength and energy after childbirth, most women are reluctant to spare some spare time to make up for the backward knowledge after childbirth or to further study and explore the knowledge of unknown areas related to work [8]. Therefore, after giving birth, women will either take the initiative to adjust their positions or simply give up their jobs out of their own consideration. There are also working women, although there is no substantial career change, after the birth of women on their career planning adjustment, they no longer put work in an important position, but put more energy on the children [3]. Due to the possible loss of career pursuits, women are more concerned about maternity decisions.

2.2.2 Double pressure in the family division of labor

In the construction of women's identity in Chinese families, traditional values play a very important role and concepts such as "caring for husband and raising children" still exist. In the core family, the division of labor between men and women is relatively clear, with the division of labor characteristics of "men dominate the outside and women in the home", and women have the dual roles of "wife" and "mother". It is the traditional duty of women to have children, take care of the elderly and husbands, do family sideline, and do laundry and cooking. With the awakening of women's self-awareness and the need for social development, more and more urban women pursue the realization of their own values, are unwilling to devote too much time and energy to their family life, and are more eager to become excellent and independent professional women.

Today, women are more free to participate in the workplace, but the division of labor between men and women within the family is different from the vision of gender equality. Having children and raising children brings heavy housework and still takes up a lot of women's time. Although some of the traditional housework has been undertaken by certain departments and institutions, with the increasing focus on education, they still have to spend their time understanding and arranging their children's education, sports, and cultural activities. Nowadays, in parenting affairs, the wife is the protagonist and the husband is the helper, showing a clear gender difference [4]. The mother is responsible for the comprehensive planning and decision-making of the parenting process. Mother is a parenting manager, such as children's education, selecting kindergartens for children, arranging weekend or holiday activities, and so on [9]. Housework does not require more energy, but children's education has increased greatly. The change in housework does not deeply affect the status of the husband and wife in the family. Even if both the husband and wife work in a family, when the family and work conflict, the husband gives priority to work, while the wife would rather sacrifice the work to help the family.

On the one hand, the family role retained by the traditional family division of labor, which requires women to become the main undertaker of housework, and the division of labor is not eradicated due to the root of culture and has been completely internalized in the whole social culture and female concept, it is not alleviated by women gaining social role [9]; on the other hand, due to the economic development, the progress of independent consciousness, the progress of modern society has changed the single family role of women, and the social role has become an important role of Chinese women. And under the concept of independence and equality, the standard of measuring career success is rigid and unified, and it does not vary according to gender. Men and women are treated equally when assessing their work [10]. At the same time, it is hoped that women, as wives or mothers, can play a good role within the family, taking care of family members and dealing with family affairs, regardless of whether she is employed or not.

Therefore, for women, on one side is heavy family affairs, on the other hand, is the social work of survival and livelihood. The dual role causes the role overload of married professional women in China. After giving birth, women face the double pressure of social career development and traditional family responsibility. These difficult difficulties reduce women's willingness to have children.

3. Discussion

3.1. Raise the Cost of Workplace Discrimination

To protect the rights and interests of working women, supporting policies need to be improved to increase the cost of gender discrimination in the workplace. First of all, a sound maternity insurance system should be established, to expand the coverage of maternity insurance and effectively increase the allowance, and to avoid the damage of the rights and interests of birth women and the deepening of gender discrimination in the workplace. At the same time, while ensuring the welfare allowance system for women who have children, the society should also improve the maternity leave system to

enable male employees to get the same right to leave, to reduce the pressure on childbearing women, and help the reasonable distribution of parenting work within the family.

3.2. Implement Social Welfare to Reduce the Burden on Women

In order to give enough support to the fertility family, adjust the function of earning income and family service function, and reduce the double burden of women and the contradictions within the family, the help of social welfare is also needed. Social welfare improves the family's economic ability to keep up with the change in women's independence consciousness in society, and at the same time, it also plays an educational role through policy support to make more people realize the legitimacy of women's independence.

However, different from the welfare pluralism advocated by the current Western social policies, the subject of welfare service provision in China has an obvious familism tendency. The lack of social welfare will aggravate the problems faced by these women, namely, family care responsibility and financial income responsibility, but also affect the quality of life. This reduces the fertility willingness of many urban women, especially those with average household income levels.

Social welfare aimed at the cost of childbirth mainly refers to childcare and pension.

In the fertility stage, the defects of the maternity insurance system and the lack of maternal and child health care will also affect the fertility intention of independent women. A lot of units consider labor cost problems and do not give workers pay the birth insurance premiums. At the same time, some older women will worry about a second child to their disease risk, such as some high-risk complications, and fertility medical costs of fixed payment limit limited [11]. At the same time, the service function of maternal and child health service institutions is limited, and the medical personnel of maternal and child health care is insufficient [12]. As a result, women in the workplace face health and economic reproductive risks that cannot be reduced, so they are more careful in their reproductive decisions.

In the stage of parenting, for a long time, the public financial input of preschool education is very limited, and the family burden is heavy. The number of public kindergartens, exceptionally high-quality public kindergartens, is seriously insufficient, and the resource distribution of public kindergartens is unbalanced [11]. these reasons make early childhood education not only difficult and expensive. This situation means that besides the difficulty of the quality of kindergarten places, if the kindergarten education quality is insufficient, women need to pay more to compensate children in early development, which brings obstacles to women's career development, so early preschool education public lack also affect women's fertility will.

In terms of pensions, there are insufficient social pension funds, inadequate implementation of social pension and supporting policies, and the formation of diversified pension subjects, resulting in more pension burdens that need to be borne by families themselves. And women in Chinese families are the main responsibility bearers. In addition to financial and heavy time efforts, daughters in the family should not only meet the material needs of their parents but also be able to provide better life care and spiritual comfort. When the offspring take care of their parents and provide support in their later years, they will occupy the time and economy of raising children [13]. At present, there is a failure of women to have children due to the pressure and burden of supporting their parents. Improving adequate social welfare policies can help people relieve the economic and mental pressure of childbirth, and can affect people's fertility decisions under the background of the current comprehensive two-child policy.

4. Conclusion

With the development of women's independent consciousness and the actual improvement of women's working ability and economic strength, women have a more active sense of making their own fertility choices. More women will explore the significance of childbirth to themselves and measure the actual advantages and disadvantages of childbirth, rather than being forced by the

spiritual oppression of families and surrounding groups, believing that only childbirth can enhance their value. In addition, under the influence of independence consciousness, women pay attention to their own career development, but the unequal treatment and traditional expectations make women suffer from the dual pressure of workplace and family roles. At the same time, women have to face workplace discrimination brought by gender. In addition, women in the family are expected to be gentle and virtuous, taking the responsibility of taking care of their husbands, children, and the elderly. These two different roles increase the pressure on women and at the same time conflict with women's demands. This inevitable contradiction between self-development and family development reduces the fertility will of women with independent consciousness.

Protecting women's rights and interests in the workplace and cracking down on workplace discrimination are essential aspects of respecting women's pursuit of independence. Social welfare in parenting and pension is the external help to reconcile the contradiction between women in the workplace and family roles. Under the trend of the awakening of women's independence consciousness, only through the external assistance and reform of the government and all aspects of society can people truly respect the development of women and genuinely promote the equality of men and women. Only when their rights and interests are protected will women not feel so negative about childbirth.

This study uses qualitative research methods, and based on existing research, summarizes and sorts out the common reasons for the low fertility intention of women under the development of contemporary female independence consciousness. However, due to the diversity of individuals and differences of groups, subsequent studies can collect more specific data using interviews or questionnaires, and use quantitative methods to analyze the influencing factors of female reproductive choice under independent consciousness. It is also possible to compare the fertility intention of women of different ages through quantitative analysis. In addition, this study focused on urban women with jobs and the lack of attention to rural and unemployed urban women, which also requires further analysis in later studies.

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