The Decline of Fertility in East Asia Society: Its Sociological Factors and the Meaning of Women's Equal Rights

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Abstract. Women's equal rights are women's corresponding self-defense measures against the inequality that still exists in employment, education, or life, and it is also a symbol of the pursuit of personal dignity and self-rights. The inequality between men and women is mainly manifested in the excessive output of patriarchal values, which lead to problems such as male-female ratio imbalance and marriage squeeze and have seriously affected the fertility rate in the Asia-Pacific region. The problem of increasing the fertility rate is imminent, and society can take corresponding measures to improve its fundamental factors, rather than crudely attribute the problem to the awakening of women's consciousness, to some extent this is the objectification of women's value. However, the road to women's equal rights is still a long way to go. In recent years, the fertility rate issue has also been forced to be linked with the road to women's equal rights, which has aroused heated discussions. The study confirms fundamental factors of the low fertility rate and emphasizes the significance of women's equal rights.

Keywords: Fertility; Women's equal rights; East Asia.

1. Introduction

According to the Asia-Pacific Statistical Yearbook, the population growth in the Asia-Pacific region is slowing down. Under this general environment, society has different public opinions between the new rise of feminist thought and social survival. The voice of "feminist equal rights" has attracted many Some people think that "female hegemony" has led to social regressive development, such as the continuous decline in the fertility rate. Some people think that the inequality between the sexes is an important factor for the low fertility rate. The value of power has certain restrictions on women's self-growth and personal development and the passive treatment of status. Authority does not have a clear management system or legislation for gender equality. "Feminism is a social aspect that cannot be ignored in the current society. Theoretical and political movement, its birth is inextricably linked with the vigorous Enlightenment Movement in the West, the French Revolution, and even the Industrial Revolution and other major changes in various fields. Since the second half of the 18th century, the feminist movement has experienced a total of There are three major waves, from the first wave pursuing equal rights, to the second wave attacking the patriarchal society, and then the third wave beginning to respect the differences between genders and women. In each wave, feminists strive to achieve in this process, feminism itself has also achieved considerable development, but in fact, the three waves of feminism itself have theoretical shackles and practical limitations that cannot be broken through [1]. Society The source of sexual problems is the inequality between the sexes and the potential exploitation of women, which is the culprit for the decline in the marriage and childbearing rate. Under the political, legal, and educational systems of China and South Korea, the low fertility rate is similar. Political factors and economic factors, marriage factors, social factors, etc. can reflect the fundamental reasons for the continuous decline in fertility.

2. Factors of Declining Fertility

It is a well-known fact that the fertility rate in the Asia-Pacific region, especially China and South Korea, has continued to decline since its development. In 2021, South Korea's total fertility rate fell to 0.81, the lowest ever recorded in a highly developed democracy. Of all 38 OECD countries, South

Korea is the only one with a TFR below 1 (global average of 2.4; OECD average of 1.61). Research suggests that the complex history of family planning as well as socioeconomic and political factors, including gender inequality, evolving family structures and norms (PDF), and extremely high levels of social competition, may have contributed to the decline in the birth rate in the South [2]. In recent years, China's total fertility rate has also continued to decline, which is closely related to the huge changes in the macro-birth environment in the new era, and the emergence of many new factors affecting fertility. The income level has increased significantly and rapidly, and the economic cost of childbearing has risen rapidly. The economic environment and the risks faced by labor and employment are on the rise, and the family and work conflicts brought about by the dilemma of gender equality are fierce [3].

The cost of childcare in China and South Korea has also become an important factor in people's refusal to have children. The direct and indirect costs of parenting are both sources of stress for young parents, which are mainly manifested in the father's time cost and negative mentality of career plateau, as well as the mother's work-family conflict and achievement motivation, and make the low willingness to have children show a trend from policy-constrained and cost-constrained to endogenous inertia. Based on this, the study recommends refining the supporting measures for childbirth for multi-child families, introducing a gender equality assessment mechanism in the top-level design, creating a social atmosphere of caring for women, and advocating a positive view of fertility [4]. From the perspective of both sexes, both husband and wife need to share the cost of childcare, whether it is maternal physical or career sacrifices, or the economic burden of the father's role in the traditional patriarchal family structure plus the cost of childcare time, which is quite stressful for urban working-class families. Second, the high-cost parenting phenomenon caused by the "involution" culture formed by the educational mechanisms in China and South Korea increases the potential survival pressure

Secondly, educational factors are influenced by economic factors. With the high development of the economy, the people's living standards have reached a certain height, and their education level has also improved. Under the highly similar education system in China and South Korea, the allocation of educational resources has a higher impact on the marriage and childbearing rate, which is mainly reflected in the conflict between the improvement of women's education level and traditional parenting concepts. The marriage rate is a factor contributing to China's low fertility rate. In 2020, the number of marriage registrations fell for the seventh consecutive year, with only 8.1 million couples married, down 12% from the previous year and down sharply from 13.4 million in 2013. It is worth noting that, as China's latest statistical yearbook shows, the adult population in developed urbanized areas tends to marry less and have fewer children [5]. The educational advantages of developed cities far exceed those in non-developed areas, especially rural areas so more women in urban areas have higher education. It can be seen that education level profoundly affects the marriage and childbearing rate. Due to the historical and cultural similarities between China and South Korea, the cultural and psychological aspects of the ethnic communities of the two countries are similar. More and more women in Korea and China do not approve of marriage and childbirth as a necessary event, and even resist the sacrifices that come with childbearing.

Marriage squeezing lag caused by traditional gender discrimination in the past." China, South Korea, and northern India have similar family and marriage systems, and the resulting low status and discrimination against women. In 1920~1990, the relative resource constraints of the family: in the patrilineal family and the female-to-male marriage system, the family was only defined by the male, which led to a strong boy preference and discrimination against women. Under the "traditional" patrilineal family system, a daughter's marginality to her parents also affects how her marriage is arranged by the family. For families and families. Her brothers were the main members, so only married daughters had a proper place in the family [6]; However, women's human capital is an important factor affecting the intergenerational transmission of poverty, but the specific mechanism of its impact is not clear. The effective samples of the China Comprehensive Social Survey (CGSS) in 2017 were selected to establish a regression model of offspring income, family social status at the

age of 14, female human capital education stock and female human capital skill stock, and the influence mechanism of female human capital education stock and skill stock on intergenerational transmission of poverty was discussed. The results show that, on the whole, there is still the problem of intergenerational transmission of poverty in China, and the income elasticity coefficient of offspring is 0.075, that is, for every 1% increase in social status of offspring at the age of 14, the income value increases by 7.5%; Women's human capital plays an important role in alleviating the intergenerational transmission of poverty, and the impact of female skills stock on intergenerational transmission of poverty is greater, and the impact of education stock is small. Regionally, women's human capital has the greatest impact on the intergenerational transmission of poverty in the East, while it is relatively weak in the Midwest [7]. Therefore, in the past, the mainstream traditional patriarchal ideology caused by the birth gender imbalance, which led to the social phenomenon of marriage squeeze: The results of the calculation of the impact of birth gender imbalance on male marriage squeeze in China from 2000 to 2050 show that the current birth gender imbalance will create a large number of single men who cannot be married, which will have an extremely adverse impact on the future marriage market, family security, and social stability [8].

The social workplace also serves as a restriction on marriage and childbearing for contemporary people." According to the "Worker Daily" reported on February 27, at present, "hidden pregnancy" has become a last resort workplace survival strategy for women. Worrying about being demoted, or dismissed, affecting the probationary period, promotion, and salary increase are important reasons why many women in the workplace choose "hidden pregnancy". At the other end of the "hidden pregnancy" is the concern of some companies about the additional labor costs that female employees may bring during pregnancy and childbirth." With the popularization of the theory of "female independence", many women have been told that they have chosen to strive for their careers and families, resulting in a decline in marriage and childbearing rates. In addition, women are not treated equally with men in the workplace: Even as women's educational attainment and social status continue to rise, the number and proportion of female leaders are still low, and there are still many obstacles to women's leadership development. Through literature combing, it is found that the research focus on women's leadership development has undergone a shift from the perspective of individual difference factors to the perspective of intra-organizational factors and then to the perspective of diversified influencing factors, and the research paradigm has realized the transformation from the "homogeneous paradigm" of equal rights for men and women to the "interlaced paradigm" of multiple interactions. At present, the factors and obstacles affecting women's leadership development and promotion mainly involve five aspects: biological differences and physical limitations, contradictions between family responsibilities and career development, gender bias and stereotypes, binding normative barriers, personal wishes, and psychological factors [9].

From this point of view, the fundamental factor determining the sustained decline of the fertility rate is the decline in marriage and childbearing rate caused by the problems left by the social development after economic development, and behind women's reluctance to have children is the trade-off of life choices under the perfect value system, rather than the extreme idea under the value of "women's rights are tyranny".

3. Social Facts Beyond Female Individuality

As a social factor, the country's fertility measures do not fundamentally solve the fertility problem but may deepen women's reluctance to have children. In Asia, especially China, the fertility problem has been completely affected by the national policy level in recent years. First of all, China is a country with a large population, and the implementation of family planning is also a basic national policy of the country: the state adopts comprehensive measures to regulate the population, improve the quality of the population, promote the realization of a moderate fertility level, optimize the population structure, and promote the long-term balanced development of the population. At present, China mainly relies on publicity Education, scientific and technological progress, and the

establishment of incentive mechanisms to carry out population and fertility work. In the “People’s Republic of China Advocate age-appropriate marriage and childbearing, and prenatal and postnatal care. A couple can have three children. If they meet the conditions stipulated by laws and regulations, they can request to arrange to have another child. On the basis of macro-governance, the opinions of both spouses are respected. However, this does not take into account the difficulties women encounter in the social environment, so it does not fundamentally solve the problem of women’s reluctance to have children. The 2010 sampling data of the Intention and Fertility Behavior Study (JFIBS) was used as a comparison, and compared with the 2021 survey data of childbearing age women in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province, the data were analyzed by descriptive statistics, $\chi 2$ test, and binomial logistic regression analysis. Compared with the results in 2010, it is found that the current women of childbearing age are characterized by younger age, more unmarried people, higher education level, higher income, and more non-only children. Working status and marital status affect the childbearing intention of women of childbearing age, and women who are in the working state have childbearing willingness" 48.4% of those who are undecided, 75.6% of women who are off work have undecided childbearing intentions, and 18.7% of unemployed women have a higher childbearing willingness; women of childbearing age without a spouse have a higher childbearing willingness; relatively older women ideally have children, and the proportion of completed "second child" and "third child" is higher than that of the younger age group.

The reasons for having a second child are mainly affected by the childbearing policy, the loneliness of one child, and meeting the expectations of the elders. Conclusion Under the background of liberalizing the childbearing policy, the current childbearing age women's childbearing Willingness fluctuates as "to be determined", but the ideal number of children has increased, and the fertility potential can be released with the improvement of childbearing supporting policies in the future; women's work concerns, marriage and childbearing age, and other issues need to be resolved; women aged 26 to 45 are "fertile" Second-child and "three-child" voluntary action groups should pay attention to their childbearing concerns and needs [10]. In some areas, subsidy policies have even been implemented, but they can only satisfy and alleviate a group of The pressure from families who wish to have children cannot fundamentally solve the problem that the rights and interests of women have not yet been perfected in the society. As far as some women are eager to pursue personal values and have to give up childbearing, it is indeed related to the promotion of childbearing in the childbearing policy.

There is a conflict. That is, men can balance the family while pursuing personal careers and personal values, and women should also enjoy the same rights. However, many women are currently faced with making choices in marriage, childbirth, and career. If we want to fundamentally solve the problem of women's reluctance to have children, we can start by helping women realize their self-worth by providing safer and equal opportunities to compete in the workplace. By giving subsidies to encourage women to procreate, there is a risk of being misunderstood for "objectifying female tendencies": That is, Veblen treats women as objects in "The Theory of the Leisure Class", and believes that after the emergence of the leisure class, the degree of objectification of women deepens. Based on Baudrillard's symbolic exposition of things, women became a means for men to accumulate wealth and a symbol to prove their class attributes. Although women have different symbolic meanings in different periods, the limitations of symbolic meanings in a particular period have gradually solidified the role of women in society. In modern times, spiritual and material liberation laid the symbolic foundation for women's independence and consumption. In the process of female symbolization, there are problems such as female symbols being amplified to intensify contradictions, being covered up by other symbols, and the presence of symbols and the absence of themselves [11]. This is not conducive to increasing the desire to have children for women who are reluctant to have children due to non-material deprivation but may deepen some women's distrust of society.

4. The meaning of women's equal rights

First, men and women are biologically different, which means that there is controversy in the measurement of equal value and so-called equality between men and women. However, the "equality" that women are seeking here means equal treatment with men and the most basic respect between people. Patriarchal values are widely recognized in society, not because of their own truth, but because of inertia. Whether in the workplace or at home, the mainstream position is still to adhere to traditional patriarchal values as a yardstick or standard for judging women. This brings the suppression of women's subjective initiative, and conflicts arise in the pursuit of their individual values, thus resisting the "personal kidnapping" brought about by childbirth. The awakening of female consciousness is not the trigger for the decline in fertility, nor is it that women give up their biological instinct to reproduce in order to pursue themselves. Instead, under the irreversible conditions given by society and the environment, the pursuit of self-happiness signals and the conflict between risk and pressure are generated, so as to get rid of the "appendages" under the traditional inherent patriarchal value system. Whether online or in real life, when the impact of patriarchal values on women has exceeded the scope of their comfort, it is a kind of "inequality" and disrespect for human rights. Due to the value of "women as fertility tools" left by the traditional concept in the Asia-Pacific region, the public habitually blurs the cost of women's fertility, including physiological costs (objective factors such as aging, hair loss, hemorrhoids) and social costs (after childbirth, most workplaces are not recognized as productive and productive); However, the traditional view of male gene parenting is not involved in parenting. After entering the agricultural era, men engaged in productive labor due to their physical advantages. From the perspective of the inherent traditional parenting process, men are engaged in physical strength and women are responsible for childcare, which seems to be a matter with a clear division of labor, but it is actually a forcible kidnapping of women's values. Men prefer to have responsibilities due to the advantages of physiological structure, and subconsciously, women are not entitled to enjoy the output of personal value and the opportunity to choose personal value. Back to the current social environment, many men have gradually become involved in parenting and even this behavior has gradually become a trend, but women after marriage and childbearing do not fully enjoy equal opportunities to pursue personal value.

The patriarchal value system's restrictions on women's existence and personal pursuits have had negative effects, such as declining fertility. However, declining fertility exacerbates gender inequality, creating a vicious circle;

Gender equality can improve economic efficiency and promote economic development in many ways; Women and men have the same dual status as material producers and social producers, and their economic development is closely related to education and childbirth. Problems in either sex will affect the steady progress of society.

Women's equal rights are representative of the awakening of women's consciousness and the progress of spiritual civilization. Today, with the full development of material civilization, the construction of spiritual civilization has received wider attention. The topic of women's self-realization has also been continuously mentioned along with the satisfaction of material needs. Self, also known as self-awareness. Higgins's self-discrepancy theory (Self-discrepancy Theory) believes that the self includes the ideal self, the should self, and the actual self. Self-realization is to make the actual self-close to the should self and the actual self through adjustment. ideal self [12]. Feminism "provides good external conditions for women's self-realization because it advocates women's equal rights, pays attention to women's suffering and changes in women's social roles [13]. In the process of women's self-actualization, it is extremely important for women to clarify what aspects of self-awareness, how the external environment affects self-realization, and what challenges and pressures they face. Women's self-actualization is important not only for individuals, but also for others, society, and the country [14]. Female individuals can meet their own development needs and get the greatest potential development. Second, self-actualized women can provide other groups of women with successful experiences that improve their self-efficacy [15].

5. Conclusion

From various factors, the fertility problem in East Asia can be traced back to various complex factors. Therefore, in order to solve the problem of low fertility and improve economic development, we need to improve from different angles, rather than limiting women's equal rights. Women's equal rights are of great significance to the development of all mankind, and women's equal rights activities can be carried out normally under the condition of increasing the fertility rate. Behind the continuous decline in the fertility rate, there is a new understanding and view of life and society, and authorities can address the different needs of men and women from the root cause of related problems, thereby increasing fertility.

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