

# Influencing Factors on Premarital Fertility Intentions Among Urban Women in China and In the United States—A Comparative Study

Yayi Zhang \*

Shanghai Weiyu High School, Shanghai 200031, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: 1812211130@mail.sit.edu.cn

**Abstract.** This comparative study investigates the determinants that impact the decision-making process of metropolitan women in the United States and China with regard to having children before getting married. Due to the widespread impact of globalization and resulting changes in society structures, there is an increasing worldwide importance placed on variations in fertility intentions. The question is highly relevant in the extensive economic domains of both the United States and China. Despite significant economic, cultural, and historical differences, both countries face complex difficulties caused by decreasing birth rates. The issues outlined above mostly arise from deeply ingrained cultural attitudes and the presence of enabling infrastructures. Several notable advancements and events have significantly influenced people's inclination to have children in the preceding decade. The confluence of policy adaptations enacted in reaction to swift economic growth changes in demographic makeup, and cultural integration and engagement has exerted a significant impact. The intricate interaction of several elements has greatly impacted the reproductive desires of women living in metropolitan areas of both nations. Therefore, it is necessary to have a more comprehensive comprehension of the fundamental reasons and possible consequences of these dynamics.

**Keywords:** Influencing factors; premarital fertility intention; urban women; China; the United States.

## 1. Introduction

As a result of the intensification of globalization and the restructuring of societal structures, alterations in fertility intentions have assumed a universally recognized and consequential importance [1]. This subject is of specific significance within the expansive economic spheres of China and the United States. Notwithstanding the divergences in their economic, cultural, and historical contexts, both countries are unable to evade the fundamental elements at play in the struggle against declining fertility intentions: entrenched attitudes and supportive systems [2]. Crucial occurrences and developments intertwined with fertility intentions emerged over the course of the previous decade. Diverse policy recalibrations, rapid economic development, and cultural assimilation have all significantly influenced societal perspectives and choices regarding childbirth. This prompts us to inquire: In what ways do contemporary ideologies and support systems influence and direct fertility intentions?

Before proceeding with this discussion, we shall provide a precise definition of the phrase "fertility intentions." It extends beyond the basic quantitative goal of progeny, incorporating thorough reflections on future family structures, the gender of the offspring, the timing of childbearing, and underlying motivations. Often, these decisions are accompanied by profound cultural ideologies and an intricate social support system. The United States and China, as two preeminent global economic powers, hold divergent ideologies and support systems with regard to fecundity. The primary aim of this research endeavor is to examine the tangible consequences and interplay that exist between two pivotal variables—support and ideologies—and urban women's fertility intentions in China and the United States. By employing comparative analysis, we seek to elucidate the manners in which these factors impact the fertility choices of women in these nations, as well as the potential enduring repercussions that may ensue from such choices.

## 2. Methodology

Premarital fertility objectives among women have garnered considerable attention in contemporary society. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the various factors that impact the reproductive aspirations of urban women in the United States and China, our research utilizes an all-encompassing approach. Initially, a comprehensive examination of scholarly articles and studies was undertaken, yielding a profound comprehension of data concerning fertility intentions, cultural perspectives, economic aid, and sociocultural milieus in both nations. By acquiring essential background information and a solid theoretical foundation through the review process, we were better able to comprehend and value our study environment and objectives. Subsequently, a comparative analysis encompassing various nations was undertaken. A thorough examination was undertaken of numerous variables that could potentially affect reproductive objectives, with the intention of discerning the tangible consequences of these determinants. In conclusion, we compiled all the gathered information and insights into a comprehensive study that reveals the diverse factors that influence metropolitan Chinese and American women's desire to have children prior to marriage. This study endeavors to provide researchers, policymakers, and the general public in relevant fields with profound insights and understandings regarding the premarital fertility intentions of urban women in China and the United States by employing a rigorous research methodology.

## 3. Ideologies and Their Influence on Premarital Fertility Intentions

### 3.1. Ideological Factors

Fertility, a complex phenomenon influenced by personal volition, societal norms, and sociocultural customs, continues to be a primary subject of scholarly discussion [3]. This phenomenon is intricately interwoven with biological, psychological, and sociological aspects, constituting a fundamental aspect of human existence [4]. The significance of this topic has prompted extensive research, which examines the various elements that influence both individual and societal perspectives on childbirth [5]. The rapid paradigm shifts that define the global zeitgeist highlight the cultural nuances associated with fertility decisions. This segment explores the ideological nuances that impact decisions regarding fecundity in greater detail, drawing comparisons between the cultural environments of China and the United States.

Educational level is a multifaceted concept. At its essence, it represents the scholastic accomplishments and credentials of an individual. Nevertheless, it goes beyond mere accreditation and encompasses an individual's broadening exposure to various ideologies, worldviews, and paradigms of critical thinking [6]. The educational path of an individual therefore influences not only their vocational ambitions but also their personal life decisions, with fertility being a particularly significant one.

The ideology of fecundity is an intricate concept. It is a synthesis of cultural narratives, societal expectations, and inherent human instincts [7]. This ideology transcends personal preferences and embodies the wider societal ethos that surrounds the subject of labor. It comprises the perspectives, anticipations, and attitudes held by individuals or social collectives, serving as a compass for decisions regarding reproduction.

In conclusion, a deep comprehension of human behavior requires an awareness of the value system. This complex system, which is customized to suit the specific needs of each person, establishes a structure by which numerous decisions in life are resolved [8]. It signifies the ethical, moral, and philosophical framework through which individuals navigate their lives, exerting an impact on a wide range of decisions including professional pursuits, familial responsibilities, and reproductive decisions.

### **3.2. Impacts of Ideological Factors on Chinese Women**

The intricate historical heritage of China, encompassing centuries of philosophical discourse, cultural development, and socio-political transformations, offers a favourable environment for the examination of fecundity ideologies [9]. In recent decades, China has experienced significant seismic shifts in its socio-economic landscape. Significantly more educational opportunities have become available to women as a result of the country's economic liberalization and integration with global paradigms. The proliferation of global perspectives brought about by this increase in educational attainment has perpetually reshaped and challenged traditional Chinese ideologies, including those concerning fertility.

The dynamic expansion of prospects introduces additional intricacies to fertility choices for contemporary Chinese women. The conflict that exists between individual ambitions, professional goals, and societal norms becomes increasingly conspicuous as one attains higher levels of education. The opportunity costs associated with delivery, which encompass personal aspirations and career advancement, are subjects of considerable attention from both internal and external stakeholders.

Contemporary aspirations and traditional Chinese cultural narratives, which are replete with virtues that emphasize familial continuity, frequently clash. Although traditional beliefs continue to be influenced by urbanization, globalization, and changing societal standards, the proverbs that highlight the benefits of having many children continue to hold relevance.

### **3.3. Impacts of Ideological Factors on Women in America**

By utilizing the kaleidoscopic lens of the United States, which is a melting pot of diverse cultures, traditions, and ideologies, fertility ideologies can be examined [10]. American women, influenced by a cultural ethos that places a premium on autonomy and individualism, often approach the topic of fertility with a distinctive combination of personal aspirations and societal pressures.

American women, similar to their Chinese counterparts, confront the complex relationship between fertility decisions, career ambitions, and educational attainment. The American educational system, renowned for its inclusivity and breadth of opportunity, concurrently presents intricacies concerning fertility considerations. The profound diversity that defines American society gives rise to an array of fertility ideologies. Although certain segments of the population continue to conform to conventional familial archetypes, an increasing number of individuals embrace and commemorate varied family configurations that are shaped by distinct cultural, religious, and philosophical paradigms [11].

### **3.4. Effects of Ideologies in General**

Ideological constructs are perpetually evolving due to the inherent dynamism they possess, which is influenced by societal transformations, technological progress, and global engagements [12]. As a result of their distinct cultural and historical development, both China and the United States are observing changes in fertility ideologies. Although these changes originate from personal experiences, they serve as symbols of more extensive societal transformations. Although the advent of globalization may imply that fertility ideologies are converging, historical, cultural, and societal diversity guarantees that there are still discernible differences. This comparative study illuminates the complex interrelation of variables that influence decisions regarding fertility, thereby laying the groundwork for subsequent scholarly investigations and societal discussions.

## **4. Support and Its Implications on Premarital Fertility Intentions**

Support, an essential factor influencing fertility intentions, comprises an extensive array of components, including but not limited to familial support, economic incentives, and governmental policies [7]. Although these supportive mechanisms provide women with an abundance of options and opportunities, their impact frequently diminishes when compared to profoundly ingrained conceptual ideologies [3].

#### **4.1. A Brief Synopsis of Support Mechanisms**

As an emblematic institutional apparatus, the reproductive policies landscape casts a decisive shadow over the fertility behaviors of the populace. Numerous developing nations have experienced a significant decrease in fertility rates over the course of several decades, highlighting the intricate relationship between numerous structural determinants [13]. Significantly, economic factors, which encompass both macroeconomic trends at a micro-economic level and the dynamics of personal income, have had a lasting impact on fertility intentions.

#### **4.2. Mechanisms of Support That Impact Chinese Women**

The trajectory of China's fertility policy spanning from 1950 to 2022 presents a dynamic interplay of shifting governmental positions in light of evolving demographic challenges. During the initial years, there was a significant surge in fertility rates, which then declined dramatically, particularly after the implementation of the one-child policy. The zenith of China's trajectory was achieved in 1980, when the "one-child policy" was formally proclaimed, following the adoption of family planning measures in the early 1970s. Nevertheless, in response to the nation's growing demographic concerns, subsequent policy leniencies were implemented. 2013 marked the inception of the "single-child policy," which was subsequently succeeded by the "two-child policy" in 2015, and a three-child standard was ultimately approved in 2021. The aforementioned changes mirrored China's transition into a period of negative population growth in 2022, which served as an indication of a persistent decrease in fertility rates.

In recent decades, China's exponential economic growth has profoundly altered the fertility landscape. Concurrent with the nation's swift economic advancement, a noticeable decline in fertility rates has been observed. Based on empirical observations, it has been found that areas experiencing significant economic development tend to have lower fertility intentions. In addition, as household revenues rise, families are progressively more inclined to allocate greater resources towards child-rearing, taking into consideration the perceived advantages and opportunity costs.

The influence of China's socio-cultural fabric on the nuclear family is substantial, as it shapes the ideologies and behaviors of individuals. An important observation to be made is the tendency for progeny to imitate the familial structures that existed in their original households. The fertility aspirations of progeny are notably impacted by the fertility patterns of their parents, which are in turn influenced by socio-cultural and economic factors. This can result in either inter-generational continuity or a divergence in reproductive behaviors.

#### **4.3. Mechanisms of Support That Impact Women in the United States**

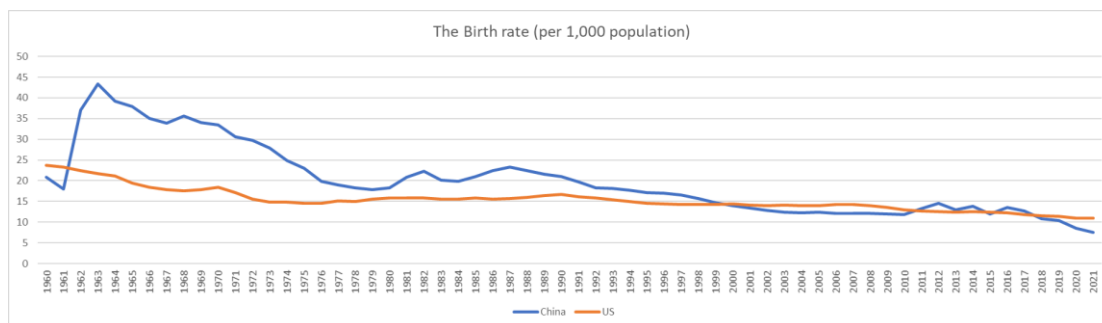
Notwithstanding the absence of customized fertility-specific policies, the United States possesses a resilient social security infrastructure. This comprehensive system prioritizes underserved populations, such as single-parent households, the disabled, and indigent individuals. Although these support mechanisms do not have a specific focus on fertility, they do foster an atmosphere that is favorable to well-informed choices regarding reproduction.

The welfare paradigm in the United States, known for its broad reach, offers numerous childbirth subsidies to economically disadvantaged groups, such as single-parent households and the disabled. These financial foundations enhance their economic resilience, allowing them to effectively manage the financial challenges associated with raising children. In addition, the extensive accessibility of state-funded preschool programs and relevant educational initiatives provides supplementary levels of assistance, guaranteeing comprehensive child growth.

#### **4.4. Implications for Comparisons of Support Mechanisms**

Fertility rates, which represent the quantity of children produced per one thousand women during a specified period, can be considered an indicator of the demographic trend and potential population composition of a region. Throughout the preceding decades, the United States and China, two

preeminent economic powers, have presented fecundity paradigms that are both divergent and similar, as is shown in figure 1 [14].



**Fig. 1** The comparison of birth rate between China and the U.S. (1950-2021)

Source: World Bank Database

The implementation of family planning measures on an institutional level in China during the 1960s precipitated a precipitous decline in fertility rates. During the decade between the 1970s and the 1990s, as a result of the stringent implementation of these policies, rates dropped from over 20 to under 15 percent. Despite the implementation of more liberal policies in the early 21st century, there was an ongoing decline that was further aggravated by a variety of economic and sociocultural factors. As of 2021, China's fertility rate had significantly declined to a meager 7.52, which is an abject contrast to its peak in the 1960s.

In contrast, fertility rates in the United States have exhibited a semblance of stability during comparable time periods. In the absence of explicit fertility directives, these rates have been supported by the nation's robust social security system. During the decades spanning from the 1970s to the 1990s, the fertility rate in the United States fluctuated between 15 and 16. The following years of the twenty-first century witnessed a slight decrease, but rates remained comparatively strong, owing to the nation's comprehensive welfare system and targeted policy interventions aimed at particular demographic cohorts.

An examination of these insights derived from data highlights the complex interaction between sociocultural, economic, and policy factors that influence fertility rates. Although to varying degrees and mechanisms, premarital fertility intentions are invariably strengthened in both countries through support mechanisms. China's strategy is predominately predicated on iterative policy adjustments, whereas the United States heavily relies on its complex welfare apparatus. In summary, although both countries recognize the critical importance of assistance in promoting fertility, their approaches to strategy and implementation methods are notably dissimilar. With the escalating forces of globalization and the deepening of cultural and economic exchanges, fertility rates are poised to be impacted by an increasing array of factors. The formidable task for policymakers is to effectively manage an abundance of economic, sociocultural, and other factors in order to develop practical and effective fertility policies.

## 5. Comparative Analysis

In the contemporary era, a comprehensive comparative analysis is required to comprehend the reproductive decisions of women in key global powers such as the United States and China. A multitude of socioeconomic, policy-related, and cultural elements intricately intertwine to shape the reproductive behaviors observed in these nations.

There are numerous instances in the histories of China and the United States where cultural beliefs and societal norms influenced the reproductive decisions of women. Despite having divergent historical paths, both countries have societies that place importance on familial bonds, although in different ways. The historical emphasis in China has been on legacy and continuity, whereas in the United States, individual choice and personal fulfillment have frequently been prioritized.

The presence or absence of economic prosperity is a critical determinant. In the modern era, economic factors transcend the concept of basic sustenance. Reproductive decisions are inevitably influenced by economic factors in both China and the United States. Reductions in fertility rates are frequently observed in urbanized regions of China and significant metropolitan areas of the United States, where a more prosperous economy is prevalent.

The advent of globalization has introduced a collection of values that are universally applicable. Trends that have been observed in both nations include the empowerment of women, the reshaping of gender roles, and personal aspirations. Undoubtedly, these trends have exerted an impact on reproductive behaviors, as women frequently choose to postpone childbirth in order to pursue their personal and professional aspirations.

Nevertheless, significant disparities in reproductive decisions can be observed among these countries due to their distinct policy frameworks and societal structures.

The history of China's encounters with population control policies is extensive. Policy interventions, which have ranged from the strict 'One-Child' policy implemented in the late 20th century to subsequent leniencies, have been of critical importance. On the contrary, the United States, known for its commitment to safeguarding individual liberties, has predominantly avoided direct policy interventions in favor of implementing support systems that assist marginalized communities.

The welfare system in the United States is extensive, accommodating the requirements of various demographic groups. As well as other marginalized groups, single mothers and economically disadvantaged households frequently utilize a variety of support mechanisms. China, although known for its historically strict policies, has exhibited a reactive approach by adapting its strategies in response to demographic challenges.

The social landscapes of the United States and China are notably dissimilar. The collectivist ethos of China places significant emphasis on the welfare of both families and society as a whole. The United States, due to its proclivity towards individualism, highly regards personal liberties and decisions. As a consequence of this divergence, reproductive behaviours in these nations are distinct.

## 6. Conclusion

An examination of reproductive behaviours in both China and the United States provides a microcosmic perspective on more extensive societal patterns. The reproductive landscape in these countries is influenced by a convergence of various factors, including economic conditions, policy frameworks, and cultural imperatives.

Although each country possesses its unique historical and cultural characteristics, global trends always impact and intertwine with local narratives. The perpetuation of conventional gender norms, the growing acknowledgement of individual aspirations, and the liberation of women are repeating motifs that surpass geographical borders. The interplay of these currents, together with shifts in policy and economic landscapes, influence the narratives pertaining to reproduction in different countries.

The two nations are presently undergoing demographic shifts, and the knowledge acquired from their individual experiences is invaluable. It is crucial for decision-makers and influential members of society to understand these processes. It offers not just direction for policy development but also illuminates broader societal transformations that characterize our day.

The intricate interaction of factors that impact reproductive choices in China and the United States essentially produces a captivating narrative. This narrative emphasizes the intricate relationship between reproductive habits and the interactions among economy, society, and history. Through the process of conducting a comparative study, we improve our understanding and provide the groundwork for future policy directions.

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