

# *The study of fertility concept of women in school—Based on the perspective of social development*

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**Abstract:** In today's rapid economic development, young women's fertility concept has undergone great changes. Young female college students are the main fertility force in China's future, and their fertility desire and fertility behavior are directly related to China's future population structure and development. This paper takes young women in the postgraduate stage as the object of observation and interview, collects data through unstructured interviews, and explores the changing logic of their fertility intention from the perspective of social development. The study found that the lower fertility desire of young women in China, the delay of childbearing age, and the increase of fertility cost are the most important factors leading to the decline of their fertility desire, while the pressure of social competition and the inequality of gender rights and interests are the deeper factors leading to the decline of their fertility desire.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, in order to cope with the new situation of population development and change, the state has continuously adjusted the fertility policy, from the "separate two-child" policy in 2013 to the "universal two-child" in 2016, and then to the "encourage three-child" and corresponding safeguard measures in 2021, the fertility policy has been continuously relaxed. However, the seemingly relaxed fertility policy environment has not changed the status quo of the fertility downturn, and the fertility rate has continued to decline. The results of the seventh national census show that the total fertility rate of women of childbearing age in China is 1.3. Since the implementation of the universal two-child policy in 2016, the fertility rate has dropped from 13.57‰ to 8.52‰ in 2020. It can be seen that even with loose fertility policy support, the fertility rate is still in a state of decline.

The marriage and fertility status of highly educated young women will have a great impact on the quality of China's future population, so it is worth paying attention to. With the increase of age and grade, their fertility-related knowledge is more enriched and scientific, and their understanding of fertility issues is more mature, rational, and has a strong sense of responsibility. Female graduate students in school are exactly the most representative of this group. Therefore, this paper hopes to grasp the views of female graduate students on fertility issues through investigation, analyze the factors that produce them, and propose corresponding countermeasures. By studying the reasons and current situation of the decline in the fertility rate of female graduate students in school, we can

better reveal the current fertility intentions and fertility status of young people, recognize the problems and drawbacks of the current fertility system, and formulate appropriate fertility development strategies and goals for decision makers in practical work, so as to promote the rational growth of China 's population and realize the optimization of population structure.

## 2. Literature review

The research on the influencing factors and promotion path of fertility intention in China has always been the focus and focus of scholars ' attention and discussion. Since China's fertility policy is constantly being optimized and adjusted, some scholars have paid more attention to the policy. From family planning to the comprehensive two-child policy to the current comprehensive three-child policy, the introduction of these fertility policies has made domestic scholars more inclined to explain policies and analyze policy effects. Through the interpretation of the comprehensive three-child policy, it is concluded that the liberalization of fertility restrictions is not equal to the rise of fertility level. <sup>[[1]]</sup> Through the calculation of relevant fertility policies, Wang Guangzhou concluded that even if the fertility policy is cancelled, the total fertility rate will not rise significantly. <sup>[[2]]</sup> It can be seen that policy is not the root cause of fertility changes. Some scholars have paid attention to the impact of economic and social development on fertility. Scholars use the development effect to explain the long-term decline in the birth rate. The development effect refers to the long-term fertility decline caused by development factors such as income, health level, literacy rate, women 's status and urbanization. <sup>[[3]]</sup> Mu Guangzong and Chen Wei put forward the logic of social and economic development inducing the decline of fertility rate. With the continuous development of social economy, people's quality of life has improved, and traditional concepts have changed. People pay more attention to the realization of their own values, and attach importance to the quality of children rather than the quantity. <sup>[[4]]</sup> Li Jianmin believes that the decline in fertility rate since the 1990s clearly shows the important impact of China's social and economic development on people's fertility demand decline and individual fertility decision-making. <sup>[[5]]</sup>

The social economy continues to develop and affects people's fertility desire and fertility behavior through a series of mediating variables. Through empirical analysis, Wang Yifan and Luo Chun found that the improvement of women's education level will inhibit fertility desire by increasing labor income, enhancing personal career development preference and delaying the age of first marriage. <sup>[[6]]</sup> In addition, with the development of society, the modernization of gender roles has an important impact on fertility desire. Through research, Jiang Chunyun found that the modernization of gender roles has a significant inhibitory effect on the fertility desire of people of childbearing age, and this inhibitory effect will exist stably, thus continuously affecting the fertility concept of people of childbearing age in China, thus affecting the improvement of fertility rate. <sup>[[7]]</sup> Studies have shown that high unemployment and precarious work reduce the fertility rate of young women. For example, in Scandinavia, the fertility rate of women aged 25-34 has been greatly improved by providing job stability and generous reproductive benefits. <sup>[[8]]</sup>

By combing the literature, it can be seen that social and economic development has an important impact on the change of fertility rate, and has an impact on fertility intention through a series of mediating variables. Based on the existing research, this paper focuses on the group of female graduate students, discusses how social and economic development affects their fertility concept, and what factors affect the formation of their fertility concept.

## 3. Research method

This paper uses purposive sampling in a university in Shandong Province to conduct in-depth interviews with 10 female students at the postgraduate level, so as to obtain more comprehensive

and in-depth content related to the research topic, understand the characteristics of the group 's fertility concept and the factors affecting its fertility concept. Interviewees are introduced through intermediaries and interviewed with their consent, including as many sample types as possible.

#### **4. Keeping pace with the times: the modernization of the concept of fertility among young women**

Fertility intention is the most intuitive reflection of fertility concept and fertility culture. It reflects the attitude and view of society on fertility. Scholars divide fertility intention into three aspects: the number of children they want to have, the gender they want to have, and the time they want to have children. <sup>[9]</sup> With the rapid development of society and the prosperity of network culture, the cultural level of young women has been generally improved, and the degree of personalization has also been improved. They have a more enlightened and enlightened mentality, and are less affected by the traditional fertility concept and culture, resulting in a more modern fertility concept.

##### **4.1 Personalization of fertility motivation**

Modern young women's fertility motivation is different from the traditional concept of fertility, and more of the individual's emotional needs and natural instincts as the main motivation. The traditional family-centered concept of fertility regards the birth of children as the succession of generations in order to realize the social value of the family. Influenced by the traditional fertility thought in China, women's reproductive rights have been greatly restricted. In modern society, more and more people begin to break the shackles of traditional concepts on reproductive behavior. They no longer use fertility as a means to achieve personal value and social status, but to have children as a means to achieve self-worth and pursue a happy life.

##### **4.2 Rationalization of the number of births**

According to the results of the survey, ' just one child ' is the most common answer to the question of the ideal number of children. In general, respondents pay more attention to the overall development of children, rather than the number of children. They determine their own fertility concept according to their own judgment and their own actual situation. Even if the policy and economic conditions allow, the number of graduate students who are willing to have a second child is still a very small part. They feel that the quality of children is more important than the quantity. It can be seen that the concept of ' fewer births and eugenics ' is constantly taking root in people 's hearts, and the young generation of fertility subjects pay more attention to the education and growth of their children.

##### **4.3 The delay of fertility time**

According to the interview data, the vast majority of female graduate students choose to marry and give birth after their work is stable. Ms. Wang, the interviewee, said: ' I don't have any plans to have children now, because I think pregnancy is too far away for me. I 'm still young. The reason why I chose to go to graduate school is also because I don't want to marry and have children as soon as I graduate from college. I don't think I 'm ready to be a parent. It can be seen that the childbearing time of female graduate students is constantly delayed.

## 5. The changing factors of young women's fertility concept

Fertility is not only a problem involving individuals and families, but also a problem involving the whole society. The concept of fertility is not fixed, and its emergence, development and evolution are the result of the joint action of various factors.

### 5.1 The increasing cost of fertility

#### 5.1.1 Female fertility costs

Although fertility is not only about women, women, as the direct subject of fertility, often need to bear greater costs. The damage and impact of childbirth on women's bodies are irreversible. Through the interview information of Ms. Wang, I learned that: ' Nowadays, information is developing rapidly. I often see some news and videos related to women 's childbirth on the network platforms such as someone 's voice and someone 's hand, some bloggers ' personal experience sharing, and some people 's reactions after using the childbirth experience machine. These learned information make me feel terrible about giving birth to children, and I do not intend to consider marriage and childbirth before the age of 30. In addition to bearing the pain of childbirth, women also need to bear a series of physical changes caused by childbirth, such as obesity, increased disease, and decreased physical resistance. Ms. Liu, an interviewee who has been married and has given birth to a child, said: ' For women, fertility is too damaging to the body. The pain caused by fertility is not instantaneous, including a series of treatments to be carried out by the doctor after production and the process of wound recovery during cultivation. Painful, and after giving birth to a child, their body is not as big as before, becoming more prone to fatigue and illness. In the short term, they will not consider having a second child, and the body needs a period of time to recover. '

Driven by the concept of gender equality, the reproductive cost of modern women has been widely recognized. In the traditional villages of our country, it is regarded as a matter of course for women to have children after marriage, while ignoring the harm caused by childbirth to women's body and mind, so the cost of childbirth has hidden characteristics. Ms. Li, a married interviewee, said: ' Both myself and the object are rural. After graduating from my undergraduate course, I chose to go to work and marry my boyfriend who had been together for many years during my work. However, I was not satisfied with the overall work during the work process, so I chose to resign to graduate school. However, after marriage, the parents of both parties have been giving birth, saying that they should give birth to children as soon as possible after marriage. Now it is the right age to give birth to children. I refuse this request on the grounds that it is inconvenient to read and give birth to children, but the family members agree that this age should give birth to children as soon as possible, without considering the possible impact on my study and body. Through the interview information of the above respondents, it is learned that the impact and loss of fertility on women are only large, so that women's fertility desire continues to decline.

#### 5.1.2 Family parenting costs

With the continuous development of social economy and the improvement of economic conditions, the cost of raising children shows a rising trend. Contemporary youth parenting shows the characteristics of refinement and high standardization. Correspondingly, in order to achieve higher goals, more time and money will be invested. Interviewee Ms. Zhang said : ' I from birth all the way to graduate students clearly realize how much time, money and energy it takes to raise a good child in the family, now raising a child is not like before only the pursuit of food and clothing can be warm, but also in all aspects of quality to keep up. Since I was a child, I studied piano,

writing and other hobbies. In middle school, my parents have paid me many times to make up lessons, and meet my requirements in all aspects as much as possible. Therefore, I am very aware that the time and effort spent on raising children can not be measured, and I am not very confident that I can provide comparable living conditions for my children. Fierce social competition has forced parents to invest more in education. Every family invests in their children's education to the best of its ability, tries its best to provide a better educational environment for their children, and does not want their children to lose at the starting line. The proportion of education costs in family parenting costs is getting higher and higher.

## **5.2 The pressure of social competition is great**

With the increasing pressure of social competition in China, women's concerns about reproductive behavior are increasing. Today, with the increasing prosperity of material life, people's life pressure is increasing, and the society's requirements for women are getting higher and higher, which will lead young women to take a more cautious and conservative attitude towards fertility. Taking employment as an example, many industries are now saturated with labor force, and highly educated young people are also showing signs of increasing. Therefore, it is very difficult to find a job now. Many young people will choose to continue their studies in order to be able to get a satisfactory job. After graduation, they are 25 or 16 years old, but their career has just begun. There is an old saying in China: 'establish a business first and then start a family'. It is difficult to establish a family and difficult to give birth. Therefore, for them, high competition and high pressure are also important factors to inhibit fertility desire.

## **5.3 Inequality in gender rights**

In today's digital world, we have learned about the inequality between men and women through the Internet, which makes women worried about the protection of the rights and interests of related births in society. During the interview, because some graduate students have had the experience of interviewing candidates, the interviewee Ms. Ma said: 'Because I have had previous work experience, experienced the employer's interview, although the relevant laws and regulations of the labor law require employers not to deny women on the basis of gender, not to over-inquire or investigate the marriage and childbearing of female job seekers, but the interviewer still asked me about my marriage and birth plan, which made me feel that I did not get the respect I deserved. After the interview, I asked other male job seekers in the same group, and they said that no examiner knew about their marital status. According to the '2023 China Women's Workplace Status Survey Report', 61.1% of women are asked about their marriage and childbearing status in the job search process. In contrast, only 21.5% of men are asked about their marriage and childbearing status. In addition to the employers will ask about the marriage and childbearing status of female job seekers, and even some employers directly limit the intention of female employees to marry and give birth within a few years, there are serious equity issues in gender rights and interests. As a group to be employed, in the face of such social reality, graduate students will be cautious about their own marriage and childbearing plans during the rise of their careers, and avoid being out of touch with society until they are eliminated by society.

## **6. Conclusion and Discussion**

According to the research results, this paper attempts to put forward the following suggestions:

First, we should practice the concept of equal gender. It is necessary to further strengthen publicity and guidance in promoting the concept of gender equality. In today's society, advocating



the concept of equal gender roles has become an important social responsibility. This concept encourages us to abandon the traditional gender stereotypes and realize that everyone can freely choose their own career path and lifestyle according to their own abilities and interests. By practicing this concept, we can promote a more inclusive and equitable social environment, so that all individuals can enjoy full opportunities and respect. At the same time, we should pay attention to the influence of media platforms on the concept of gender roles in the public society, convey real and credible information, avoid exaggerated false publicity, avoid the formation of extreme social gender concepts, and guide the public to make rational judgments on fertility issues.

Second, the government should improve the relevant fertility policies. In modern society, people of childbearing age need to play a dual role in family and work, which makes them face severe time conflicts and contradictions. Therefore, it is necessary for the state to further improve China's fertility policy and provide more fertility support measures, such as tax relief, childcare allowance and family welfare, so as to encourage couples of the right age to actively participate in fertility. At the same time, it is also necessary to strengthen the construction of public service system and provide all-round medical and educational resources for pregnant women and infants, so as to improve the quality and convenience of raising children in families. In addition, the maternity insurance system should be optimized to ensure that pregnant women can get reasonable medical security during pregnancy and postpartum. Through these comprehensive measures, it can effectively promote the recovery of fertility rate and enhance the vitality and development potential of society.

Fertility is the main way of population growth, which is essential for maintaining the labor market and promoting economic development, and helps to maintain social stability and social structure balance. In this paper, the results of unstructured interviews on the fertility desire of some female graduate students show that the fertility desire of female graduate students is generally low. Female graduate students have a high level of education and career aspirations. It takes a lot of time and energy to pursue career development, so it may make them delay childbearing or choose not to have children. At the same time, the fiercely competitive workplace environment and invisible gender discrimination also bring greater occupational stress and uncertainty to women. Because individuals pay more attention to personal achievement and self-realization, fertility may have a negative impact on the realization of personal goals. In fact, this change also reflects the change of women's reproductive values in the process of modernization, paying more and more attention to the current personalized life experience, and seeking a balance and freedom of choice between multiple purposes. Fertility activities gradually get rid of the shackles of traditional ethical concepts, and more pursuit of quality of life. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the overall change in the system of women's reproductive values and the fact that women are sensitive to the increasing cost of childbearing. Through relevant policy support, reducing the cost of family rearing, alleviating the pressure of family rearing, especially reducing women's employment and individual development, sharing the cost of family rearing in an appropriate way and stimulating the motivation of fertility are the main countermeasures to encourage young women to dare to live and be willing to have more children.

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