
**UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING FOR THE REVIEW AND APPRAISAL
OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOLLOW-UP
AND REVIEW OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Population Division

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Secretariat

New York, 1-2 November 2018

**Fertility, reproductive health and population change
with particular reference to China**

Baochang Gu¹

Professor, Center for Population and Development Studies, Renmin University of China

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I Introduction

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt in 1994 was historical. China was an active participant of the Conference. As an advisor to China Delegation, I participated the month-long PrepCom in New York in April 1994 and the Conference in September in Cairo in September 1994. Since then tremendous changes, not only socioeconomically but also demographically, have been occurred in the world. So is the case in China. As time approaching the 25th anniversary of the ICPD, it is certainly significant to have a sound review and appraisal of the Program of Action generated from ICPD.

I am honored to have the opportunity to join the panel discussion on fertility, reproductive health, and population change at the UNPD-EGM. In the brief note, I will particularly focus on the arrival of low fertility, the reorientation of the family planning program, and migration dominance in population dynamics as illustrated in the case of China.

II The arrival of low fertility

China's fertility was at the level around 5 to 6 children per woman during the 1950s and 1960s. As a response to the rapid population growth of close to 3 percent per annum, the Chinese government launched a nationwide family planning program in the early 1970s. The decade of the 1970s witnessed a dramatic decline in China's fertility, from 5.79 in 1970 to 2.75 in 1979, a reduction of more than half in a period of less than a decade. Most of the reduction in fertility was due to presumably the aversion of the unwanted childbearing at high parities, particularly in urban areas.

Encouraged by the achievements of the fertility reduction while facing an economy at the edge of collapse, the government decided to tighten its fertility policy to call for one child per couple. While China's total fertility rate (TFR) stayed around 2.5 children per woman during the 1980s, an analysis of parity progression ratios revealed that reductions occurred particularly among the high parities both in urban and rural areas as well as in remote regions. By the early 1990s, China's fertility had further fallen to the level below the replacement.

Recent several Chinese censuses have repeatedly reported a very low TFR one after another, from 1.22 in 2000, 1.18 in 2010, and 1.05 in 2015, which triggered endless debates and questioning on quality of data. To take into account the possible statistical errors and underreporting, many studies have been carried out with various alternative data sources and applied various available methods, and the adjusted fertility tends to be 40 to 60 percent higher than the originally reported from the census, but still far below the replacement. Moreover, it still shows a downward trend of fertility in China. Evidence also suggests the weakening childbearing desire particularly among the younger generations. Given the situation, the government announced the partial relaxation to allow the couples with one spouse as a single child to have second child in November 2013, and further allowed all the couples to have two children in October 2015, which declared the official ending of the 35 years long one-child dominated policy in China.

A Decompositional analysis of changes in TFR with the census data suggests that over the period of 2000-2015, fertility rates among young age groups of the 20s show a downward trend indicating

postponement in childbearing, and fertility rates among older age groups of the 30s show some increase indicating recuperation, particularly since 2013 as effect of changes in fertility policy. Overall, the compositional analysis leads to the conclusion that strong postponement and weak recuperation in childbearing behavior of Chinese women since 2000 may inevitably affect China's total fertility rate at a level far below the replacement, and result China's fertility to go downward in the years to come.

III Reorientation of the family planning program

The Program of Action (PoA) adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 argues for addressing population issues from a broader concept of reproductive health and reproductive rights. It urges a client-centered, service-oriented, user-friendly, right-based and gender-sensitive approach to family planning programs. The ICPD serves as a milestone redefining linkages between population and sustainable development. Immediate after the ICPD, the government issued an official call for "Two Reorientations" of the family planning program in both guiding ideology and implementation approach, from an emphasis on demographic targets towards client-centered approaches, and from a narrow focus on contraceptive prevalence towards relevant integration with objectives on reproductive health and women's empowerment.

As a concrete measure in implementation of PoA/ICPD in China and the two reorientations in FPP, an experiment was initiated to introduce the quality of care approach into China's family planning program as demonstration of the feasibility of the innovation along the principles of ICPD, with the international assistance from the Ford Foundation, the UNFPA, the Population Council, the University of Michigan, and ICOMP. In the experiment areas, the concept of quality of care becomes gradually but widely accepted by the program managers and service providers. The six elements of quality of care are posted in many clinics as guidance for service provision. Birth quotas and targets are totally abandoned, the birth permit used to be required prior to pregnancy is removed, couples are able to decide on their own will the timing for childbearing. The parity-specific policy on contraceptive use is discontinued, instead introduced the informed choice of contraceptive methods. Many people involved in the experiment have regarded it as the most significant experience of their personal career with FPP. A collection of the personal stories has been recently assembled and will soon be published as "Efforts in Memory: Quality of Care Initiative in China's Family Planning Program".

Nevertheless, for long time in China and in many developing countries, the backbone of the family planning program is still more or less with demographic concern as family planning program serves as a means to reduce the fertility so to slow down the population growth and facilitate the economic development. With fertility at the level far below the replacement for so long, and the ending of one-child policy, should the family planning program be terminated or what is the mission for family planning program under the low fertility? For many it has been to identify the family planning program as equivalent to birth restriction or even one-child policy, they see the family planning program no longer needed. For others, it should be seen as the opportunity for a more comprehensive implementation of the family planning program in terms of reproductive health and reproductive rights as in the PoA/ICPD as well as SDGs, and to make the program more truly client-centered, service-oriented, user-friendly, right-based and gender-sensitive.

One point in the case is abortion. Abortion is harmful to women physiologically and psychologically, and should be prevented and reduced by all means. With relaxation of the fertility policy to allow for two children, abortions due to policy restriction or sex selection become less the case but in fact increased by one third from 6 millions during 2000-2013 to 9 millions during 2014-2016 according to the government statistics. One explanation is it might be due to the merging of the two statistics systems between MCH and FPP, but it still considers enormous given declining female population in childbearing ages and the reduced number of births. While the abortions are still in huge number, the causes of abortion may have shifted from due to out of policy pregnancies to unprepared sex among the adolescents and contraceptive failure among the married. All urge the family planning program not be abandoned but strengthened to direct itself entirely to provide good quality services to meet the diversified needs of people in reproductive health and family planning.

IV Migration dominated population dynamics

Population change is the result of the interplay between mortality, fertility, and migration. Along with both mortality and fertility decline to a low level, they become less influential, instead population migration tends to come the center of the demographic stage to play a pivotal role in determine the population situation.

This new situation inevitably poses huge challenges to the traditional perception on demographic dynamics. For long period, we have built up a mindset that the population situation is primarily determined by fertility, and first and foremost is the understanding of the fertility situation in order to know the overall demographic situation. But it is no longer true with the changing situation in China. Fertility has been less and less influential to the overall situation while population movement has become the decisive factor dominating the overall demographic trends, and exerts its influence to other demographic issues. In fact, without proper understanding of the trends in population migration and population movement we can hardly exercise any critical examination of the other relevant demographic issues such as population growth, fertility trend, childbearing behavior, labor force change, population aging, gender discrimination, etc.

Why have there been so many occurrences of “negative population growth” in China between 2000 and 2010, especially in some of the middle and west provinces such as Sichuan, Guizhou, Hubei? Why does Shanghai, a city with negative growth of its *de jure* population since 1993, show its *de facto* population even becoming younger, while Chongqing, a city located in the southwest inner China turns to be the highest in the proportion of the elderly among all the provinces in China? It is because of the great in-flow of young people which “diluted” the degree of population aging and pushed upward the growth rate of the population in Shanghai. Shanghai has increased its population by 6.61 million over the decade, among them 5.71 million were in-migrants, i.e. 86.4 percent of its growth was due to population in-flow. Meanwhile, it is the out-flow of the large number of young people which aggravated the aging situation in the western regions such as Chongqing.

Another case is Guangdong province. Why has Guangdong its population rapidly increased to more than 100 million (104.32 million) and become the province with the largest population over the country? In fact, nearly half (46.6 percent) of the inter-censal population growth was because of

tremendous in-flow of people from outside rather than the addition of local births.

The concern of population aging tends to be mostly on the urban elderly since it is always perceived that rural fertility is likely to be higher and aging is not so serious an issue in rural areas as in urban areas. Should we see the floating population largely the young people leaving the villages to the cities, the rural families not only have less children due to family planning but are with their children running away to urban areas. The thousand years' mechanism of old age support by next generation is no longer maintainable, and the rural elderly care issue is in a dilemma, relying on neither own children nor social security. The aging situation in rural areas is in fact more acute than in urban areas but received less attention as it deserves.

There are more than 220 million Chinese on move according to the census, which can reasonably be expected to further increase along with socioeconomic development though not necessarily to move to the largest cities. Moreover, the One Belt One Road Initiative may imply more international migration to occur in China. Yiwu, a small city in the center of Zhejiang province, is regarded by the United Nations and World Bank as the world largest consumer goods market. About 500,000 foreign businessmen do trade in Yiwu every year. Over 13,000 foreigners from more than 100 countries and regions all over the world live in Yiwu. They usually come to Yiwu for profitable trade but then many of them demand not only to reside in Yiwu but also bring in their families and have their own communities, which all pose huge challenges in terms of administration and infrastructure to the local government and society.

All in all, it clearly demonstrates that China has entered a period in which demographic dynamics becomes dominated by migration rather than mortality or fertility.

The above brief discussion as illustrated in the case of China may strongly suggest that while great success has been made in terms of declining the fertility and slowing down the population growth with the collaboration of the international society, it remains necessary, and even crucial to maintain relevance and importance of population issues in the policy agenda in the context of sustainable development.