

Title: Policy Responses of Gender Imbalance in China: The "Care for Girls" Campaign

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Short Abstract (200)

The sex ratio at birth in China has exceeded 107 for nearly 30 years. This paper reviews the policy responses to gender imbalance in China, which include China's strategic policies and actions on the governance of the male-skewed Sex Ratio at Birth (abbreviated as SRB). First, as its official position has evolved, the Chinese government has introduced a series of laws and regulations at both the national and provincial levels. Second, this paper analyzes a national government-oriented public policy system and strategic platform, the "Care for Girls" Campaign, including its history and latest progress. These policy responses and interventions have substantially enhanced women's social status and reduced the SRB. This paper highlights policy responses and their results using the latest Population Census data to assess changes in SRB during the decade from 2000 to 2010 in China.

Key Words. public governance, sex ratio at birth, "Care for Girls" campaign, gender imbalance

Extended Abstract(2-4)

The merits of the paper

In this paper, we analyze a collection of information about the governance and policies related to China's gender imbalance from 1986 to the present. This is the first comprehensive summary of policy responses to focus on the national and provincial levels. We record the history of the national "Care for Girls" campaign and its recent progress. Combined with a description of the latest Sixth Census Data in China, this paper assesses the relationship between policy responses and results as measured by the SRB.

Data and research methods

There are two kinds of data of this paper. First, the population data are mainly from the national census data of China and include (1) 1980-1987: "China Population Statistics Yearbook 1991"; (2) 1988: national fertility birth control sample surveys data; (3) 1989: China 1990 Population Census; 1990-1999, 2001-2004: "Chinese Demographic Yearbook" by year; 2000: China 2000 Population Census; (4) 2005: 1% Population Sample Survey in 2005; (5) 2006-2009: the "People's Republic of China Economic and Social Development Statistical Bulletin"; (6) 2010: China 2010 Population Census. Second, policy data, including family planning regulations and laws both at the national level and for the various provinces. The main approach is text analysis and descriptive statistics.

Main content

(1) Governance history (1986-2000)

Since 1986, the Chinese government has taken steps to address the rapid increase of SRB. A series of stringent policies have been introduced; the first was against gender prediction. The

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policy "*Any sex prediction of the foetus should not be done*" was unveiled in 1986, and "*should not be done*" became "*is forbidden*", a stronger policy in 1993. From 1994, in order to strengthen it even further, the Chinese government took "*Ban sex prediction of the foetus*" up to the level of national laws and regulations. To make the policy more binding and more rigorously implemented, the policy began to appear among the laws and regulations in the public sector from 2002. These policies were mainly designed to eliminate proximal causes of the rising SRB. However, a better objective would have been to eliminate the conditions for, and fundamental causes of, son-preference. It is now imperative for the Chinese government to take comprehensive and efficient measures against gender imbalance.

(2) History of "Care for Girls" Campaign

China's SRB continued to increase and has been very high since 2000. In reaction, the Chinese government began to promote the national "Care for Girls" campaign, which is a central government-led public policy system initiated by the National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPFPC). By protecting the basic rights and interests of survival, development, and participation for women and girls, it aims to improve girls' living environment, and ultimately to promote gender equality. Its intention is to promote fundamental change in people's fertility concept by weakening son-preference. The population directly affected by the "Care for Girls" policy is at least 100 million, making it a very important public management tool. The campaign has included three stages: (1) independent exploration, namely the "Chaohu Experimental Zone to Improve Girl-Child Survival"; (2) extending the "Care for Girls" campaign to 24 counties; (3) a national promotion stage: strategic platform of the "Care for Girls" campaign. In July 2006, the implementation outline for the "Care for Girls" campaign was promulgated with basic coverage in China's 31 provinces by 2007. From 2007, the "Care for Girls" campaign has become a specific policy regarding the governance of sex ratio at birth in China.

(3) Policy on Behavioral Constraints

At the earliest stage, the government used behavioral constraints as the main approach. The purpose was to regulate ultrasound-B service agencies, medical institutions and service providers to prevent gender selection by child-bearing age groups. Cracking down on the "two illegalities"⁴ aims to forbid fetal gender identification for non-medical reasons and sex-selective pregnancy termination. The ultimate goal is to reduce the number of "two illegalities" cases. The three levels of governance activities in China are the following: national policy, specific policies, and provincial family planning policy. In November 2002, the Chinese government formulated the "*Stipulation on Implementing Prohibition of Non-medical Aimed Foetus Sex Identification and Sex-selective Abortion*", which specified the responsibilities of Population and Family Planning Ministry, the Ministry of Health and the Department of Drug Administration. Based on national-policies, 14 provinces issued special rules or regulations about the "two illegalities", including nine provinces with rules and five provinces with regulations. Among these, Hunan, Henan, Fujian, and Anhui had both regulations and rules. In addition to cracking down on the "two illegalities", "Family Planning Regulations" in 29 provinces (except Guangxi and Tibet) made a clearly defined "*Prohibition of non-medical justification of fetal sex identification and selective termination pregnancy*". This involved refinements and innovations in accordance with provincial socio-economic development. In addition to cracking down on the "two illegalities", the Chinese government has also launched a "full service" and "real-name registration of birth" system. These

⁴ "Two illegalities" means fetal sex determination and sex selection for non-medical needs.

aim to achieve governance objectives related to SRB.

(4) Policy Concerning Benefits

The Chinese government introduced family planning benefit-oriented policies via the three systems⁵ and achieved good results. During the period that benefits-oriented policies were introduced at the national level, China's local governments actively explored benefits-oriented policies aimed at influencing couples' desired number of children, and reducing son-preference. So far 16 provinces have introduced household-related family planning benefit-oriented policies.

(5) Organization and Assessment of the governance

Governance of gender imbalance is a significant component of the routine work of family planning. Governments of all provinces adhere to a stringent management system of objective responsibility. Party leaders and the government are responsible for this work. Each year the provincial governments sign documents of objective responsibility with their departments that are involved in the governance work of SRB. The most intense assessment is the implementation of "one vote veto". China's gender imbalance is a key issue in family planning work, and most provinces take it as one of the nine criteria for assessment, which include the management of the floating population, birth defects intervention, population aging, population control, and so on. The SRB issue accounts for 5%-20% of the population work. The assessment of specific SRB control consists of two parts, namely process indicators and outcome indicators. Process indicators represent the work-oriented process, including leadership, system, advocacy, formulation and implementation of interest-oriented policies. Outcome indicators include the SRB situation, the implementation rate of the policies, the quality of policy implementation and effectiveness of publicity.

Conclusion

China's governance practice after nearly 30 years has achieved initial success. Continuously rising SRB will be affected by the aforementioned public policies, which should certainly affect the present cultural foundation of son preference (Jiang, Li et al. 2011). While existing studies have acknowledged the importance of policy responses for the decline of sex ratio at birth, many issues remain unaddressed (Zhenming 2002). Most examine their linkage based on reasoning, rather than on empirical analysis. From 1996 to 2003, the State carried out the "Chaohu Experimental Zone Improving Girl-Child Survival" project. But the national SRB was rising. From 2003 to 2006, the government carried out the 24 pilot counties' "Care for Girls" campaign, after which the country's SRB began to decline. From 2006, the "Care for Girls" campaign spread all over the country and the national SRB started to decline. In 2009, and according to data from the 2010 census, the SRB of China has declined to 117.96, which means that an inflection point has appeared (See Figure 1).

⁵ Three systems are (1) Family incentive/rewards scheme for family planning/birth control in rural areas; (2) "*Fewer Births, More Wealth*" Project; (3) System that assists families in family planning.

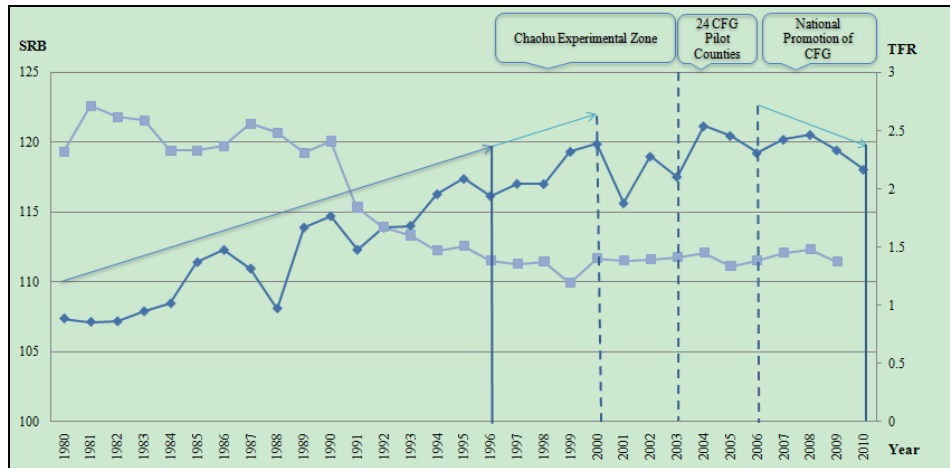


FIGURE 1. Sex Ratio at Birth and Total Fertility Rate in China (1980-2010)

Figure 2 shows SRB by province. In 2000, SRB was abnormally high in provinces with strong traditional cultures, such as Shaanxi, Henan, Anhui, and Guangdong. Compared with the SRB in 2000, the SRB of most provinces was higher in 2005. Noticeably, SRBs in the Western regions increased rapidly. The unbalanced SRB has also expanded geographically; SRBs of big cities in 2005 are all higher than those in 2000, including Beijing (increasing from 115 to 118), Tianjin (113 to 120) and Shanghai (116 to 120). Actually, except for Tibet, SRBs in all provinces have deviated from normal. From 2005 to 2010, the areas with SRB more than 130 have been significantly reduced. Except for Anhui province, SRBs in all provinces are lower than 130. Many provinces declined significantly, such as Shaanxi (from 132 down to 116) and Jiangxi (from 137 down to 128).

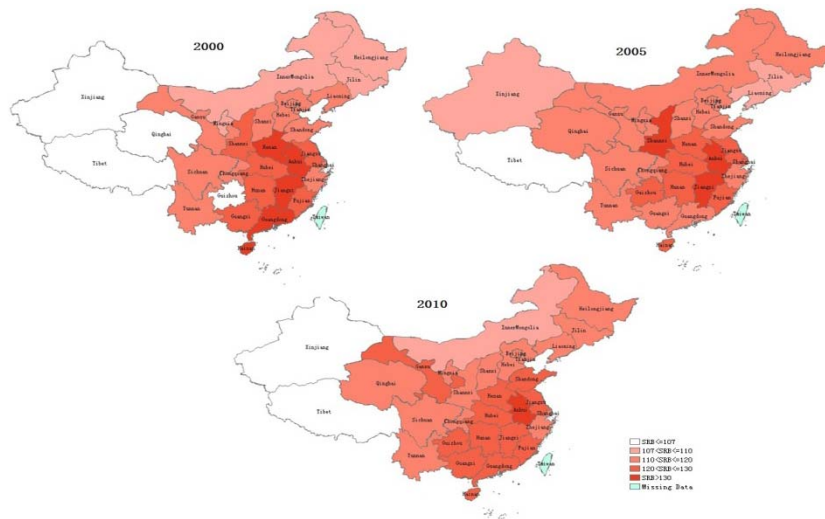


FIGURE 2. SRB by Province during 2000, 2005 and 2010 in China

The latest data show that it is possible for China to reduce its SRB. The governance of the high SRB and achievement of gender equality will contribute to sustainable social and economic development in China. There is also a clear objective in the "Second Five-Year" plan that SRB should fall to 115. Nevertheless, it will take a long time to change the traditional culture and to achieve gender equality, and the SRB will remain at a relatively high level for the near future. However, based on the national "Care for Girls" strategic platform, it is currently expected to eventually decline and reach a relatively normal level.