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CHINA'S POPULATION POLICIES: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Structured Abstract

Objectives

This article mainly concludes the population policies (which contain both the demographic change policy (the family planning policy) and social change policy (the household registration policy)) and related social issues in China.

Methodology

Bibliographical method has been employed to trace their dynamics.

Conclusions

In fact, the fertility policy follows the process of "Period without family planning policy- Primary period for family planning policy- One-child policy- Period of fertility diversification"; while the household registration policy witnessed a process of "Administrative migration period- Reform and the opening-up period- Stable development period-Rapid development period". Even though these policies control the rapid development of the population and improve their living standards effectively, some social problems occurred: aging problem, gender imbalance and left-behind elders/children etc.

Originality

Analysing the evolution of population policies in China could help to understand their new characteristics so as to formulate a population adjustment plan. Meanwhile, the generated social problems are able to contribute to predicting the possible orientation of population policies and promote a long-term balanced population development.

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1. Introduction

Population policies can be customarily defined as purposeful measures aimed at affecting demographic processes, notably fertility, mortality, and migration (Demeny, 1975). They show different characteristics in different countries. Developed countries have completed their demographic transition process, and many of these countries must now deal with post-transitional imbalances (May, 2012). In fact, many developed countries do not have explicit population policies (e.g., the United States), despite actively influencing or seeking to change some of their population dynamics. Although some countries have designed and implemented policies to raise fertility, generally have failed to change fertility levels significantly. Immigration policies have been shaped by the specific economic and political context of receiving countries (May, 2012). There is an ongoing lively debate on immigration taking place in Australia, which must address the phenomenon of boat-people coming from Asia.

However, most developing countries continued to address high levels of mortality and especially fertility (May, 2012), governments suffered great burdens of the population and finally implemented family planning programs. India initiated a family planning program in 1952 aimed specifically at reducing population growth (Venning, 1973). Serious interest of Pakistan's population policy to reduce the national birth rate was displayed in February 1958 when the Director General of Health convened a special meeting to discuss plans submitted by the Family Planning Association and 500,000 rupees were authorized for family planning (Mauldin, 1963). The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in Korea proposed a Family Planning Policy which the Council approved in November 1961 to reduce the annual rate of natural increase in Korea (Nortman, 1964). Other countries with the Family Planning Association are Singapore, Ceylon, Puerto Rico, Barbados *et al.*

China's population policy has been frequently discussed (John, 1982; Bongaarts, 1994; Shen and Huang, 2003; Chang *et al.*, 2005; Rosenzweig and Zhang, 2009; Peng, 2011). China has started population control to reduce fertility rate since the 1960s, population reproduction witnessed changes from "high birth rate, low death rate and high growth" to "low birth rate, low death rate and low growth" (Ma and Sun, 2011). Despite the great success of controlling the population growth, there exist several issues: accelerating aging problem, gender imbalance, aging workforce structure and left-behind children/elders, etc. However, these policies changed accompanying with the socioeconomic development; population policies meet new challenges under new background. As a result, reviewing the historical development of China's population policies and generalizing the experiences from the policy-making and implementation could help for policy adjustment and attempt to direct the future development.

As we all know, population policies can be explained in two aspects (Yu and Xie, 2000; Ma and Sun, 2011). The demographic view relates to government measures intervening fertility rate, with the result of restricting both the quality and quantity of natural population changes, such as the birth and mortality policy, eugenics policy and so on. From the view of socioeconomic development, policies that could influence the whole process of population activities, not only the natural change, but also the social changes (for instance, population migration). Apparently, the latter can help us to understand the population policies comprehensively. *In this article, we principally attempt to make a comprehensive historical review of China's population policy and discuss some problems occurred, for example, aging problem, gender imbalance etc.* The social and economic development in the 21st century changed both the background and purpose of the family planning; this policy faces new opportunities and challenges.

In order to know these changes and development of the population policies in China, this article can be divided into three parts. The first part pursues the historical development of the population policy-- fertility policy and household registration system, then tries to prospect the future development. This is followed by the analysis of policy influences (such as aging problem, gender imbalance, and left-behind elders/children *et al.*). At the end, this article concludes population policies in China and attempts to give possible suggestions for future development.

2. China's migration policy: past, present and future

2.1 Fertility policy in China

China's one-child policy was criticized as the world's most stringent effort to slow a country's population growth. However, under the circumstance of excessive population growth in the 1970s, it was necessary to make population policies to control the high increase rate. Besides, Hegel believes that "Freedom is the recognition of necessity" (Hardin, 1968). Of course, population policies would result in some social issues (Bongaarts and Greenhalgh, 1985; Chen, 2010; Bulte *et al.*, 2011; Liao, 2013; Martin *et al.*, 2015), but the beneficial part, reducing the birth rate to promote socioeconomic development and living standard, is worthy of recognition. For instance, from 1963 to 2003, China's total fertility rate had dropped from 7.5 (Dudley and Chengrong, 2000) to 1.7 (Zhang and Goza, 2006). According to the dynamic changes of the family planning policy, we can divide it into four periods.

- Period without family planning policy (1949-1962)

Although the government has different guidance on fertility in different periods, China didn't issue any formal policies on family planning before 1962. For example, the government has taken a *laissez-faire* attitude towards fertility and population growth and has introduced policies to limit contraception and abortion, encouraging people to give birth more babies from 1949 to 1953 (Ma and Sun, 2011). In other words, China strictly limited birth control and financially subsidized large families. During this period, China's traditional concept of fertility (more children, more happiness) and people's preference of a large family, as well as the birth-encouraging policy of the Soviet Union can all promote a population increase (Wang, 2012).

Nevertheless, the great conflicts between the far larger population and limited resources and national development finally had resulted in fertility control (Ma and Sun, 2011). As shown in the first population census in 1953, the total population in China reached 0.6 billion, which was 60 million more than that in 1949. Hereafter, the government began to realize the harm of rapid population growth and the importance of birth control. At the same time, scholars like Shao Lizi and Ma Yinchu and the public media contributed to the widespread of the fertility population policy (Wang, 2006).

In 1958, the idea that "Many hands make light work"(or "There is strength in numbers", in Chinese "人多力量大"), again occupied some leaders' mind during the Great Leap Forward campaign, which aimed to use China's vast population to rapidly transform the country from an agrarian economy into a modern communist society (John, 1982). The *National Statistics Bureau* (National bureau of statistics of China, 2005) announced that each family had around five to six children during the 1950s and 1960s (Gu, 2016). When Ma Yinchu, an economist who advocates restricting population growth, was criticized, the moderation policy was strangled (Ma and Sun, 2011). Furthermore, birth control was rarely discussed during the great famine (1959-

1961)⁴, which had led to a dramatic decline in fertility rate in 1961 (Yang, 2004; Wang, 2012).

- *Primary period for family planning policy (1962-1979)*

Reflections on the Failure of the Great Leap Forward and the pressure from the population growth after the great Chinese famine revived the population control, the Chinese government launched a nationwide family planning program in the early 1970s (Gu, 2016). In 1962, the Central Committee and the State Council officially implement the family planning policy, confirming the population growth, late marriage and the establishment of family planning institutions *et al.*, it is the milestone of China's fertility population policy (Wang, 2012).

Hereafter, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) downturn the economy, unrested the society, and negatively shocked the function of family planning institutions and the implementation of the fertility population policy (Wang, 2013). Meanwhile, contraceptive pills were actively researched and developed (Yang, 2004). Nevertheless, considering the great contradiction between population and economy, the state reemphasized the importance of fertility policy in 1971 and signified that "the leadership and in-depth publicity of the family planning should be strengthened, so that late marriage and family planning could become one kind of conscious behavior" (Sun, 1990).

The strategy of "*wan*" (late marriage and childbearing), "*shao*" (fewer children in life) and "*xi*" (longer birth spacing) has become more nationally uniform after the "first national report on family planning" in 1973. The program also incorporated a strategy along with the free provision of modern contraceptives to all citizens (Gu, 2016). Then the policy, reconfirmed in 1978, announced: "the number of children for one couple is 'best one, up to two'". What's more, the policy enforcement was greatly strengthened (Wang, 2012), the government would charge certain penalties to avoid too many births (Yang, 2004).

- *One-child policy (1980-1991)*

Because of the population growth after the great famine, one-child per couple policy was quite necessary to control the total population below 1.2 billion at the end of the 20th century. Consequently, it was propagandized intensively in 1980, the amended Constitution in 1982 listed more details (Wang, 2013). For example, rural Han people could have the second child conditionally. One child per family seemed a kind of family planning policy particular for Han but varied in other 55 ethnic minorities in more relaxed forms. For instance, the urban minority couple could have two children while the rural minority family could have three or more (Yang and Chen, 2004). In 1988, the Central Political Bureau passed the "Outline of family planning work report", to advocate "late marriage and fewer and healthier children" and encourage each family to have only one child (Ma and Sun, 2011).

- *Period of fertility diversification (1991-present)*

However, more enforced birth control policies have been issued since 1991 (Family Planning Commission, 1992). The family planning law of China in 2001 reconfirmed that the state encouraged late marriage and late childbearing, and a one child per family, only those who fulfill

⁴ Lasting more than 3 years, it resulted in about 30 million additional deaths and 33 million lost or postponed births (Basil *et al.*, 1984). The existing literature on the causes of the Great Famine has formed a consensus that a fall in aggregate food production in 1959 followed by high government procurement from rural areas were key contributors to the famine (Meng *et al.*, 2015).

special laws and regulations can have the second child⁵. Based on different regional development, rural-urban structure, and geographical features, each province (municipality) had their specific birth control policies. For instance, Han couple in all the urban areas and rural areas in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing, Jiangsu, and Sichuan can only have one child; except the mentioned six provinces (municipalities), families in other five provinces (Guangxi, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Ningxia) can have the second children. While in the rest 19 provinces, one couple can have their second kid after few years of the interval if the first child is a girl (this is called as “one-child-and-half policy”). Meanwhile, one family can have two kids if they come from the single-children family in 29 provinces (cities or districts). In seven among 29 provinces, the rural family can have the second child if either of them is the only kid in their previous family. Besides, there were also special rules for two or more children for different ethnic minority, disabled persons, people who remarried or worked in special occupations etc. (Guo, 2002).

Hereafter, with the aging growing and social development, China has adjusted the family planning policy. In general, the government has fully liberalized its two-child policy for families in which one parent, rather than both, is an only child in 2011, while in 2013 the government permitted couples to have a second child if either member is an only child (Xie, 2016). Furthermore, on October 29, 2015, the Communist Party of China reported the change in the existing law to a two-child policy; where Chinese couples to have two children was proposed in order to help address the aging issue and population development in China.

2. *Population migration*

For more than half a century, the Hukou (household registration) system in China has segregated the rural and urban populations (Chan, 2009), initially in geographical terms, but more fundamentally in social, economic, and political terms. It is the foundation of China's divisive dualistic socioeconomic structure and the country's two classes of citizenship. China's *Hukou* (the household registration) system has imposed strict limits on ordinary Chinese citizens changing their permanent place of residence since it was instituted in the 1950s. Beginning with the reform period in the late 1970s, and accelerating during the late 1990s, national and local authorities have relaxed restrictions on obtaining urban residence permits. In fact, the Hukou system in China has witnessed several periods of changes and development. During these periods, the controls and limits have differed greatly.

- Administrative migration period (1949-1978)

From the early liberation of China to 1958, a large amount of the population flowed from rural to urban areas, from peripheries to centers in particular. Yet before 1958, due to being controlled by the strict household registration system, rural residents were forbidden to move to urban regions, therefore we saw less migration. Then, influenced by the Third Front Movement and the Cultural Revolution, population movement was almost stagnant for a time.

Large-scale urban and industrial construction after the foundation of new China (in 1949) resulted in some peasants going to cities for work. For example, the construction of cotton mills in the north of China attracted various farmers and women to the area, and at the same time, a large proportion of population moved to provide support to the heavy industrial development

⁵ <http://www.moh.gov.cn/zwgkzt/pfl/200804/32342.shtml>

occurring in the northeast. As many universities were located in the capital city, Beijing became one of the most attractive centers for students, celebrities, and services. Additionally, some went to the south in order to join the army or volunteer, while others went to support the construction of Xinjiang. Even though the population migration during this period was still intervened by the legacy of the planned economy, in general, they were positive and natural flows.

Since 1958, the Chinese population has begun to lose freedom with regard to migration as part of a gradual process. During the Three Years of the Great Chinese Famine (1959-1961), the population migration was limited to urban idle populations being decentralized to rural areas, the streamlining of organizations and institutions, or forced migration to the edges (undeveloped places) of the “rightists” or “the problematic people”. The Third Front Movement in the 1960s mainly led to administrative enterprise relocation and a considerable number of new factories and industries moving from coastal regions to the so-called “big Third Front” or “small Third Front” (the former located principally in Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan etc., the latter lying in south of Anhui province). While the coastal region couldn’t develop industries, therefore populations were forbidden to move to the coast. Together with the strict household registration system, it was almost impossible for the population to migrate easily.

However, the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, which triggered large-scale population migration. On the one hand, the government continued to streamline and sent some of its population from Shanghai to Xinjiang; while on the other hand, the Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement sent approximately 17 million young people from the medium-sized cities to the rural areas of Heilongjiang, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia etc.

- Reform and the opening-up period (1978-1990)

After the reforms and the opening up policy, in the 1980s, provinces tried their best to attract the floating populations for the demographic dividend, and the large-scale surplus labor forces transferred from rural to urban regions. However, labor-intensive industries were developed and began to cluster in eastern China, they attracted a huge percentage of the rural population from the mainland. Intra-province migration and the distinctive migration rate between provinces were the principle migration features.

China was in a restorative stage of urbanization in the 1980s, with the youth and decentralized cadres began to return to the cities which led to a migration wave from the rural to urban areas. At the same time, the Chinese government decided to implement specific policies for Guangdong and Fujian provinces, opened the coastal economic zone, port cities, and economic areas to form a coastal strip from south to north. The population represented more activities for migration, for instance, China had about 6.26 million net provincial in-migrants and 1.07 million net out-migrants between 1979 and 1981.

When the government had to relax the controls on population migration after 1984, peasants were able to settle down in small towns. Further, the rapid development of Township and Village Enterprises promoted the transformation of the rural surplus workforce to towns and cities. Meanwhile, the progressive opening up from the south to the north led to northward investment movement, even with some interior enterprises beginning to relocate to coastal areas. Thus, coastal cities or part of the coastal rural areas were very attractive for these rural surplus laborers, which meant that Guangdong became the top destination for migrant workers. Simultaneously, there was population migration from the western and central areas, as well as

from the northeast. What's more, the political relocations of Third Front enterprises that were moved from the inland to the coastal areas also contributed to these migration trends (Wei and Bai, 2009). During this period, Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangdong etc. demonstrated their importance in terms attracting migrants, and these migrants were mainly from Sichuan, Zhejiang, Heilongjiang and other provinces in the Middle Eastern region of China. From 1978 to 2000, with the establishment of the market mechanism and the agglomeration of FDI in China, as well as the accelerated integration of the global economic system and various kinds of industries emerging, this led to large-scale migration and the increased flow of workers from the central and western regions to the coast.

- Stable development period (1990-2000)

Deng Xiaoping's speech in southern China in 1992 led to a surge in terms of market economic reform, which resulted in population migration witnessing rapid development. Compared with those in the 1980s, this migration represented new characteristics: Hukou migration and floating population all rose rapidly. Whilst, with the development of the electronic and automotive industries and growing foreign direct investments, labor migration flows demonstrated a close link to significant disparities in terms of wages among the urban and rural areas, as well as between all regions in China (Cai, 2000; Fan, 2005). "Moving for business" thus replaced "job transfer" and "moving with family members" became the main reason behind migration.

During this time, the concentration of population migration in the east was strengthened, therefore the proportion of migration in the east continued to increase, while the central and west had high net out-migration. The central region continued to lose its population at a higher rate than the west. Important provinces in the central and west were always the origins of migration, and the destination normally located in the economically developed large central cities and the eastern developed provinces (for example, the three migration regions in the coast: Guangdong province (the Pearl River Delta), Shanghai (the Yangtze River Delta) and Beijing (Jing-Jin-Ji metropolitan)). Additionally, administrative enterprise relocation was also active (Wei and Bai, 2009). In 1995, the "westward shift of eastern ingot" policy moved cotton yarn production from Shanghai to Xinjiang, thus, together with its unique geographic location and the national policies (such as the west development policy), another "smaller" migration center in the west—Xinjiang Province—attracted large numbers of workers from inland China (mainly from the west of China and Henan etc.)^{18F}.

- Rapid development period (after 2000)

Population migration appeared sharp growth during the 21st century. Nevertheless, government policies, such as the western development policy, the rise of central China plan and the Northeast area revitalization plan couldn't alter the dominance of the east in attracting migrants. Whilst, frequent intra-regional migration also existed, which accounted for more than 70% of overall migration. The central and west continued to be the main out-migrated regions with all the provinces in the central area having a net out-migration of 87%, where most of them move to the east. Like the coastal region, some provinces in the west also had their attractions in terms of enticing in-migrants, such as Ningxia, Qinghai, Tibet, and Xinjiang etc.

The "millions of businesses go to the west" project in 2006 and the "promoting the west development" policy of 2007 encouraged the central and western regions to undertake coastal industrial and trade transfer, so as to promote the westward movement of coastal enterprises,

as well as economic and technological zones (Wei and Bai, 2009). The eastern coastal areas accelerated their industrial upgrade and diffusion, raising the labor capital, with some enterprises originally located in the coastal regions beginning to relocate to the central or western regions of China in order to take advantage of cheap land, better resources, and workers. Due to the updating of the transportation system and the transfer of the industrial gravity center, the migration centers changed. Hence, Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Tianjin, Fujian, and Jiangsu became the new in-migration centers, while the attraction of Beijing, Zhejiang, and Guangdong was decreasing. In the big cities, with the increasing extension of city centers, the speed of urban industries moving out of city centers was growing.

With the transfer of manufacturing enterprises from the eastern region to the central and western regions, some workers who registered themselves in the central and western regions actually worked in the east, thus presenting a “backflow” tendency. When they flew back, these people would not only find similar jobs but also save on some of the fees they spent on transportation and daily life. Consequently, the central, and even the western areas, where most manufacturing industries had gathered, became the new “core” area. When large amounts of low-level, resource-oriented enterprises emigrated from the eastern coastal areas, the east focused on high-new-tech industries and advanced services instead, which consequently led to a gradual decrease in the number of laborers.

3. Influence and evaluation of China’s population policies

All mentioned population policies have great impacts on China’s social and economic development, which can not only control the rapid development of the population but also promote economic develop and improve the living standards. Meanwhile, they offer the chances for the gender equality and education popularization.

There is no doubt that the family planning policy successfully controlled the rapid development of the population, the fertility rate was reduced dramatically, and the day for 1.3 billion population was delayed for four years, which effectively release the contradiction between population, land, and resources to promote the sustainable development (Family planning commission, 2000). Besides, the family planning policy also helps to improve the youth education and women’s social status. Limited numbers of children offer the opportunity for each kid to get more education (Yang, 2010), especially those female children who, as a result, could accept better education, acquire rich skills and participate in social activities (Family planning commission, 2000). Migration policy helps laborers find the job, meanwhile, it is a good way for regional population balance and resource allocation. However, some issues existed in the implementation of the population policies: the aging problem, gender imbalance, left behind elders/children and so on.

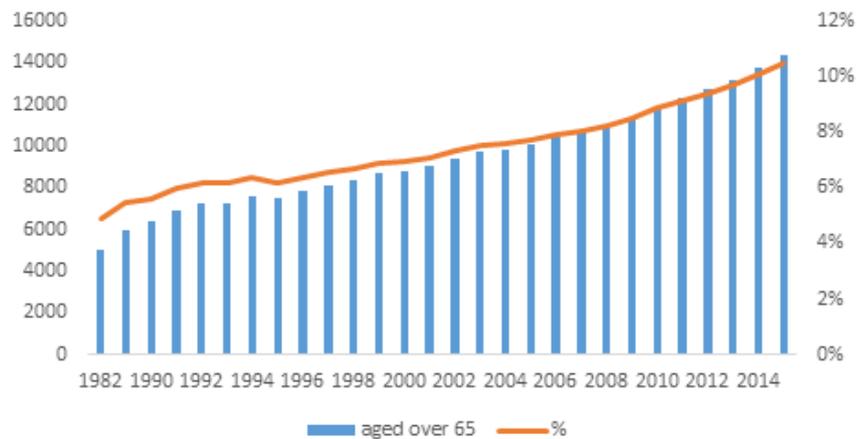
3. *Aging problems*

Like many countries, population aging has become one of the most controversial issues in China. Since 1999, when China entered the aging society⁶ (Peng, 2011), it has become the country with the most aging population (60 years old and over) in the world. Population aged 65 and above reached 1.44 million which accounted for 10% of the total population in 2015 (Figure 1). Meanwhile, the aging process has progressed rapidly as the population from the first fertility

⁶ Society where, population aged 60 and above account for more than 10% (of the total population), or people aged 65 and over account for more than 7%, is considered as aging society.

peak in the 1950s has reached the retirement age (Dong, 2016), the aging problem was further exacerbated. In fact, China’s society is facing “getting old before getting rich”(in Chinese “未富先老”). Although China achieved the "growth miracle" (became the world's second-largest economy) due to the market-oriented reforms and opening-up, its per capita GDP only ranked 69th in 2017 which is much lower than most developed countries. As demographic dividends gradually disappear (Cai, 2014), China would slowdown in economic growth, the GDP growth rate decreased from 14.2% in 1992 to 6.7% in 2016 (World Bank, 2017). The low economic level, undoubtedly, increased the difficulty of solving the aging problem.

Figure 1. Population aged over 65 and its proportion



Source: Data comes from the China Statistic Yearbook 2016, <<http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2016/indexch.htm>>

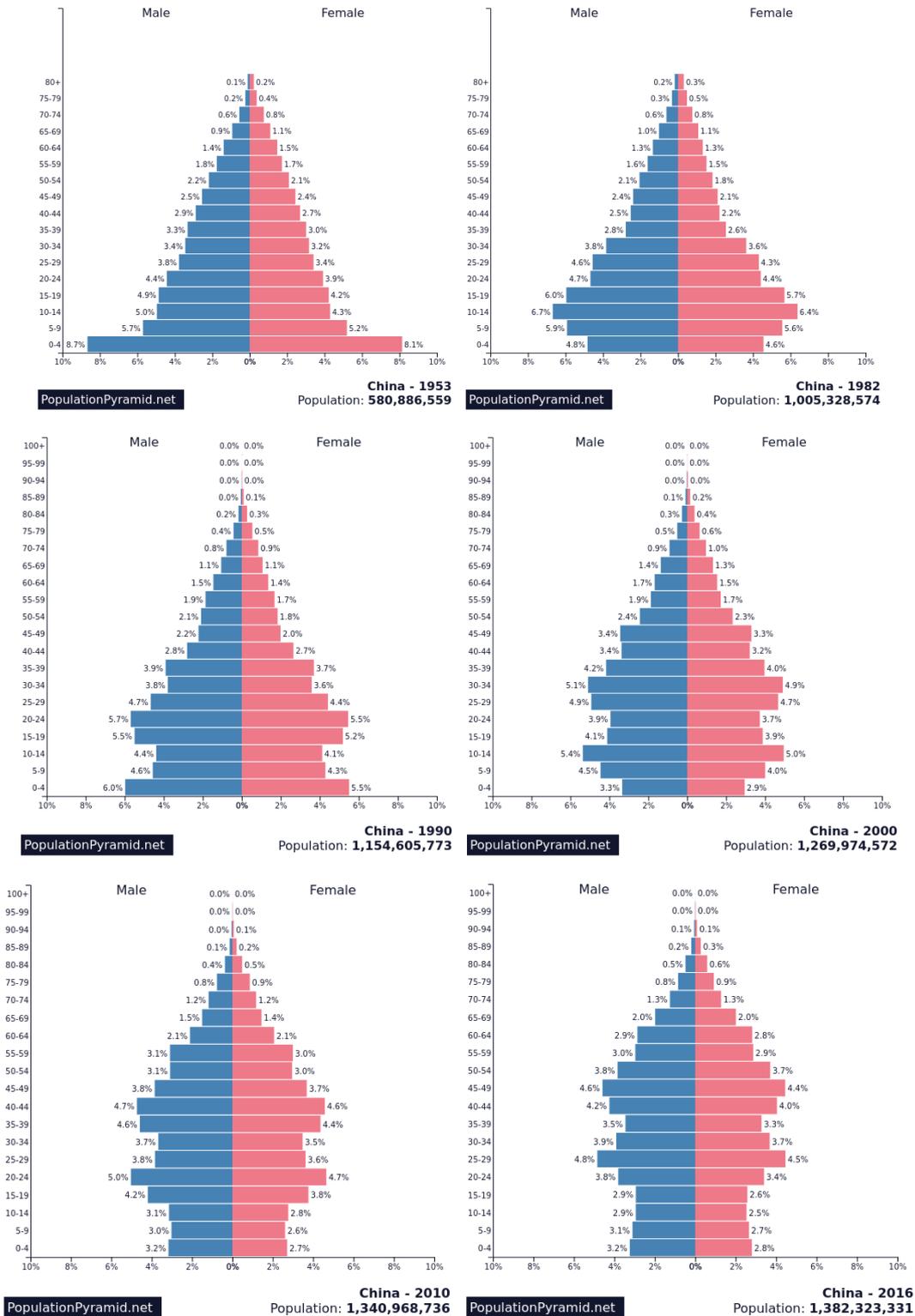
The population pyramids below show the evolution of the population structure since 1953. It is clear to see that the protruding part of the age pyramid, caused by the laying death decrease, moved upward with the time goes. The declining birth rate and increasing per capita life expectancy resulted in more elders. Compared with the underage population structure, China has been entering the aging society. In 2015 the proportion of population aged between 15 and 64 accounted for 73%, which is a little bit lower than this in 2010, but 2.9% higher than this in 2000. While the people aged above 65 increased from 7% to 10.5% in fifteen years. Meanwhile, the increasing growth rate (the ration of the population above 65) after 2005 also demonstrated the accelerating aging process, the growth rate from 2010 to 2015 reached 18%.

Table 1. Aging structure and ratios

Year	Ratio of population aged 0-14	Ratio of population aged 15-64	Ratio of population aged above 65	Ratio of the youths and the elders (%)
1953	36.3	59.3	4.4	12.2
1964	40.7	55.7	3.6	8.8
1982	33.6	61.5	4.9	14.6
1990	27.7	66.7	5.6	20.1
1995	26.6	67.2	6.2	23.3
2000	22.9	70.1	7.0	30.6
2005	20.3	72.0	7.7	37.9
2010	16.6	74.5	8.9	53.6
2015	16.5	73.0	10.5	63.6

Sources: China Statistical Yearbook (2005, 2016)

Figure 2. Evolution of China's population pyramid



Source: <https://www.populationpyramid.net/china/>

Furthermore, the rapid population aging will create significant social and economic challenges. Firstly, the pension issues would become more serious when parents of large amounts of single children get old. Actually, it is interesting to note that in eastern China and the major urban centers, the aging process has slowed because of the immigration of many young laborers from the countryside. Besides, aging population in urban regions normally have the public pension, but they also need to face life problems. However, rural areas (especially rural areas in the center and west of China) face a more serious aging challenge. The single child would stand heavy burden for the household pension, which is not good for both the family development and improvement of the elder's life quality. Simultaneously, low fertility rate and aging problems can also influence the labor market: reduce the number of labors, change the age structure of the labor forces, affect the labor participation, and, impact on the labor demands (Ma and Sun, 2011). As we have seen the pressure and future trend of the aging problem, the transition from the strict fertility control would be a better way. In addition, smaller family size, health, and security of single child are also related to China's family planning policy (Ma and Sun, 2011).

3.2 *Gender imbalance*

China has avoided a massive population explosion, but there have been huge social and economic costs. The abnormal masculine sex ratio at birth is one such example. Historically, China is a country with great male preference, especially in some provinces (or municipalities) "one-child-and-half policy" treats the gender of the first child as the requirement for the reproduction. Family planning policy can affect the gender imbalance by controlling the number of birth and circumstance. Although it's not the main reason for this imbalance, it makes this situation worse (Peng, 2011). Strong son preference and widely available pre-birth sex identification and sex-selective abortion are the main causes of this gender imbalance at birth. The National Health and Family Planning Commission announced that "Our country has the most serious gender imbalance that is most prolonged and affecting the most people"⁷.

Since the mid-1980s, with the declining fertility and continuous low fertility level, China's sex ratio at birth⁸ has deviated from the normal level (Ma and Sun, 2011). The sex ratio at birth increased from 1.07 (107 boys per 100 girls) in 1960 to 1.16 in 2015 with an average annual growth rate of 0.91%. The word data Atlas reveals that in 2015, for every 100 newborn girls there were 116 boys (Table below). This ratio of 1.16 is slightly lower than the table reported, 1.17 in 2010 (Table 3), although policies and measures have been introduced to address the issue in the past decade (Peng, 2011).

Due to the gender imbalance, rural men from poor households increasingly have great difficulty finding wives. The following divorce and remarriage increased the social instability. However, the "care for girls" action from the national population and family planning system was not able to curb the high sex ratio at birth, it is necessary to adjust the fertility policy. Son preference is motivated by a concern to ensure the care of parents in later life because no universal old-age

⁷ Available in: <<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-onechild/china-says-its-gender-imbalance-most-serious-in-the-world-idUKKBNOKU0V720150121>>

⁸ Sex ratio at birth (SRB) shows the number of boy infants compared to girl infants who are born within a given period, usually represented by the number of boys per 100 girl infants. A ratio standing between 103 and 107 is considered normal. When SRB deviates from the normal range, it indicates a preference of male (or female) infants and the neglect of the other gender in society. <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTOPGENDER/Resources/Gender-Gaps-Figures&Facts.pdf>>

pension or social security system exists. The slogan saying "raising a son for your old age" (养儿防老) expresses the awareness that girls generally leave the family home at marriage (Attane, 2002).

Table 2. Sex ratio at birth and changes

Year	Sex Ratio at Birth	Change%
1960	1,07	
1965	1,07	0,00%
1970	1,07	0,00%
1975	1,07	0,00%
1980	1,07	0,00%
1985	1,07	0,00%
1990	1,08	0,93%
1995	1,12	3,70%
2000	1,14	1,79%
2005	1,16	1,75%
2010	1,17	0,86%
2015	1,16	-0,85%

Source: <https://knoema.com/atlas/China/topics/Demographics/Fertility/Sex-ratio-at-birth>

3.3 Left-behind children/elders

China's rapid development and urbanization have induced large numbers of rural residents to migrate from their homes to urban areas in search of better job opportunities (Zhou *et al.*, 2015). Migration within developing countries is often temporary, circular, and/or flexible in which only some household members participate, resulting in divided households and family members being left-behind (Whitehead and Hashim, 2005).

This has geographically separated many adult children from their aging parents and poses significant challenges to traditional patterns of familial support for rural older people. Actually, the left-behind family members contain those children and elders, who face different problems.

Compared with the 20 million left-behind children in 2000 (All-China Women's Federation, 2013), this number grew to 61 million until the sixth population census, which accounted for 37.7% of the total children in rural areas and 21.88% of the total children in China.

They normally separate with their parents for a long time, more than 60% of them don't know what their parents do, and only 30% of them can meet their parents once or twice per year. Safety problem and mental-health are the most concerning issues for left-behind children. People nowadays generally treated left-behind children as the problematic group of children.

Figure 3. Left-behind children and elders



Source: <http://zuowen1.info/%E7%95%99%E5%AE%88%E8%80%81%E4%BA%BA%E4%B8%8E%E5%84%BF%E7%AB%A5%E5%9B%BE%E7%89%87/>

Because of migration, the lived experiences of growing older in rural China are rapidly changing with villages being mainly populated by older people and children with a smaller number of adult children living in the villages. According to the research of “China’s rural left-behind elderly” from China Agricultural University, there were almost 20 million left-behind elderly aged more than 65 years in 2013, but more than 80.9% of were self-supported by engaging in agricultural production or other self-labor income, some even cannot self-support. Meanwhile, they need to take care of their left-behind grandchildren when they get the retirement age. However, they seldom get financial support from their children. In addition, they suffered great health and mental problems. Rural residents have long been deprived various entitlements and welfare provisions that are only available to urban residents⁹ due to the household registration system. The mental problem comes from the loneliness of staying alone and the feeling that they are the burden of the whole family.

4. Conclusion

It is not hard to see China’s family planning policy has controlled the remarkable population growth in China, but based on huge social and economic costs, talking about the reflections of this policy is quite necessary and useful for population development and making socioeconomic rules. In fact, China is enjoying a kind of diversified family planning policy; it is different in urban, rural and ethnic regions. Since the 1960s, China has witnessed continuous policy adjustment

⁹ <https://cpianalysis.org/2017/08/01/population-ageing-in-china/amp/>

and improvement: from “encouraged one-child policy” to “strictly controlled one-child policy”, then to “two-child policy where the parent is the unique child in their own family”, and finally totally release the “two-child policy”. It follows the current background and environment of China and achieves great success in controlling the rapid growth of the population. As mentioned, this policy also results in some social problems like the aging problem and gender imbalance at birth.

The low fertility rate is becoming a global phenomenon, and the fertility decrease would finally result in serious aging problem all around the world. In the near future there will be negative population growth in China; however, the two-child policy is quite helpful for retarding the negative growth trend, balancing the population growth and economic development. Meanwhile, it contributes to the significant growth of the labor supply, despite that the low proportion of the working-age population would increase the burden of social support temporary. The last and most important, it would slow down the population aging process in China effectively because of the big base population.

The traditional household registration system was a product under specific historical background. No doubt, it divides the nation into urban and rural populations, conditioning life chances and producing widespread inequity (Smith, 2014). It blocks the free movement of the labors in the market and increases the migration costs. There are labor shortages in some regions, but some people feel hard to find a job in other regions. The social disharmony caused by household registration can be manifested in the rural areas; the left-behind child/elder has received more attention both in academic research and to policymakers. Besides, the rural migrations can hard to be treated like the urban citizens; they fail to enjoy the public medical and infrastructure. With the continuous change of institutional environment, the domestic calls for the reform of the traditional household registration policy. As a result, in 2014 the Chinese government published “Opinions on Further Promoting the Reform of the Household Registration System”¹⁰ to start a new era of household registration. It considers adjusting the Hukou policy, unifying the registration system of urban and rural areas, building a population database, expanding the coverage of basic public services and ensuring the legal rights of agricultural migrants and other residents as the main plans. Facts proved that the new household registration is beneficial in safeguarding citizens' rights, promoting the free flow and management of population and urbanization. Further development of this policy should concentrate on unifying registration system for urban and rural areas to match the “all-round well-off society”.

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¹⁰ http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-07/30/content_8944.htm

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