



The Transformation of Marriage and Childbearing Culture in Shandong Province and Its Impact on Birth Rates

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Abstract. Previous studies on marriage and childbearing culture have primarily focused on interpreting the concept of marriage and childbearing culture and identifying its influencing factors, while lacking comparative analysis of the process of marriage and childbearing culture transformation and its impact on birth rates. This paper employs a literature review method and synthesizes various theoretical perspectives to reveal the close relationship between the historical evolution of marriage and childbearing culture in Shandong Province and birth rates. In ancient times, marriage and childbearing culture emphasized the role of reproduction in lineage continuity, while the establishment of the socialist system after the founding of the People's Republic of China significantly promoted gender equality and freedom in love. However, the prevailing materialism today has become a major factor in lowering birth rates. This study contributes to governmental efforts in promoting a new type of marriage and childbearing culture, weakening the influence of materialism on marriage and childbearing concepts, and increasing birth rates to ensure the rationalization of Shandong Province's population age structure.

Keywords: Birth rate of marriage; childbearing culture; Shandong Province.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In recent years, the birth rate of the population has continued to decrease, the degree of aging in China has continued to deepen, and the total population of China has begun negative growth. According to the data of the seventh census, China's total fertility rate in 2020 has been as low as 1.3, becoming one of the lowest fertility levels in the world. A lower birth rate can lead to a series of social problems. Shandong is a populous province in China. Since ancient times, it has been deeply influenced by Confucian culture. After the central government introduced the two-child policy in 2015, the birth rate of Shandong Province in 2016 was 17.89, ranking first in the

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country, and the natural growth rate was 10.84, second only to 11.08 in Xinjiang Province. This data is also based on the large population base of more than 99 million in Shandong Province, which shows that Shandong people's enthusiasm for marriage and childbearing is very high (China Statistical Yearbook, 2017).

1.2 Research Methodology and Significance

This paper will analyze the changes of marriage and childbearing culture in Shandong Province under the influence of Confucian culture, the influence of modernization factors (including economic development, social public opinion environment, etc.) and the national fertility policy and the new marriage and childbearing culture advocated by the government on the birth rate through the literature method. The formation of marriage and childbearing culture is not achieved overnight, but a large number of individuals have formed a unique marriage and childbearing culture based on rational choice. Therefore, this article will take the individual's concept of marriage and childbearing in different times as the research object, and examine the historical changes of Shandong marriage and childbearing culture. And try to provide the reasons for the low birth rate from the perspective of marriage and childbearing culture, and answer the question of how the government's ' ' how to guide the age-appropriate population to establish a correct concept of marriage and childbearing ' by constructing a new type of marriage and childbearing culture. And through the correct promotion of new marriage and childbearing culture, to enhance China's fertility level, to ensure the relative rationality and stability of China's population structure. Provide sufficient human foundation for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.^[1]

2 Literature Review

Marriage and childbearing culture refers to the concept, value orientation and corresponding behavior norms and systems of marriage, family and fertility formed in a specific historical and cultural environment. ^[2]Its content includes marriage concept, fertility concept, family ethics and other aspects. The term ' culture ' has a complex meaning. Most scholars divide the word ' culture ' into two concepts: broad and narrow. In a broad sense, ' culture ' refers to the sum of material wealth and spiritual world created by human beings. Its composition includes three parts: material culture, institutional culture and spiritual culture. ^[3]In a broad sense, the culture of marriage and childbearing, on the material level, is the material basis of social and economic development related to population development, including food, shelter and all kinds of necessary materials related to population reproduction ; at the institutional level, it is manifested as the organizational form and institutional form of maintaining the realization of values on a certain material basis, such as : various government regulations on marriage and childbearing systems, formulated marriage laws, civil laws, etc. ; on the spiritual level, it is manifested in the values and value standards related to fertility formed on a certain material basis, such as the ancient concepts of ' more

children and more blessings, raising children for old age ' and now ' DINK ' . [4] In a narrow sense, the culture of marriage and childbearing refers to the ideology and corresponding normative system formed in marriage, childbearing and related activities, that is, the ideological theory, values, knowledge and ability, customs, ethics, and codes of conduct formed in the fields or activities of marriage, family, fertility, and birth control.[5]In the type of marriage and childbirth, domestic scholars have also been subdivided. Some scholars also divide the marriage and childbearing culture into the connotative marriage and childbearing culture with the content of concept, science and technology, norms, information, behavior and organization, and the extensional marriage and childbearing culture that can affect the marriage and childbearing concept of the social marriageable population.[6]

3 The Process of Marriage and Fertility Culture Evolution in Shandong Province

3.1 Characteristics of Ancient Marriage and Fertility Culture

The formation of this marriage and fertility culture needs to be understood in conjunction with its historical context. In ancient societies, a country or region's grain production was the most significant indicator of its strength. Sufficient land and food resources could sustain a large population, which, according to Marxist theory, could participate in both the reproduction of material resources and population growth. The increase in population was not only a symbol of national strength for ancient rulers but also a crucial capital for waging wars and expanding territory.

During the Warring States period, due to continuous wars among feudal lords and relatively low levels of technology, life expectancy was short, and mortality rates were high. To cope with the high costs of warfare, rulers needed large amounts of resources and population as guarantees. Confucianism keenly captured the needs of the ruling class and proposed a marriage and fertility culture that tied the highest commendation of "filial piety" to the birth rate. The manifestation of "filial piety," firstly, was the production of "many offspring". Through various complex marriage, fertility, and family cultures such as educating the populace to produce more male heirs and the system of primogeniture, people were led to believe that reproduction was a noble "mission" and a task that must be fulfilled. However, in reality, this was an ideological system that aimed to maintain social stability and promote the benign operation of society from the perspective of the ruling class.

3.2 Characteristics of Marriage and Fertility Culture After the Founding of the People's Republic of China

The establishment of the socialist public ownership system greatly weakened the economic and ideological control of families and clans over the population. In traditional society, families not only had the function of nurturing and supporting, but also played an important role in organizing economic and production activities. Due to

limited transportation and difficulties in large-scale and frequent population migration, individuals who lost family support in their hometowns faced unimaginable consequences. However, the establishment of the public ownership system thoroughly improved this situation. Under the planned economy system, individuals received material resources allocated by their collective, eliminating the need to rely on family influence and social networks to obtain various resources.

Furthermore, the first basic law of China, the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, promulgated and implemented in 1950, clearly stipulated the implementation of marriage freedom, monogamy, gender equality, and the protection of the legitimate rights and interests of women and children. This completely ended the practices of arranged marriages by families and "child brides". "Free love" gradually replaced "parental arrangement" and became the new value orientation for marriage and fertility. This also restrained the historical disregard for women's rights and ingrained the concept of gender equality deeply into people's minds.

The family planning policy implemented since the 1970s has also changed the marriage and childbearing culture in Shandong. Several demographic conferences after the founding of the People's Republic of China pointed out that there may be a crisis of overpopulation in China in the future. Under the consideration of birth control and population quality improvement, the family planning policy was established as China's basic national policy in 1982. It is not enough to carry out the family planning policy on the more traditional and conservative land of Shandong by shouting slogans. Through the popularization of reproductive knowledge and the education of new marriage and childbearing culture, the Shandong provincial government has made the people understand the advantages of 'late marriage and late childbirth, eugenics', so that the people will spontaneously comply with the family planning policy and change the old concept of marriage and childbearing.

3.3 Characteristics of Contemporary Marriage and Fertility Culture

Under the influence of materialism, marriage and childbirth have become 'options' for life. Marriage and childbearing behavior has changed from the mission and task that a person must complete in ancient times to 'rational' behavior influenced by many factors such as economic level, social network, living habits, family relations, fertility desire and children's education mode. In urban areas, 'having a house' has become one of the necessary conditions for marriage. The house can not only provide a living place, a safe haven for a family, but also has a large number of financial attributes in today's Chinese economic environment, which is a symbol of wealth. There are many reasons why marriage needs a house to support it, such as stable accommodation, financial products, school district houses for future children, etc. Without exception, the above reasons are all from the perspective of maximizing the overall interests of the individual to think about marriage, rather than the marriage arranged by parents in ancient China or the choice of marriage objects based on the individual's emotional yearning for a better marriage life. At the same time, the concept of fertility has also changed with the influence of materialism in China. Women's fertility desires (including attitudes towards children, consideration of their own health, etc.), and vari-

ous economic and emotional expenditures for raising children. The new fertility considerations such as the way of children's education and whether raising children can 'prevent old age' are integrated into the concept of marriage and childbearing in line with modern society.

The current decline in fertility in Shandong is closely related to the formation of this marriage culture. The following new situations lead to the marriageable people 'dare not give birth and do not want to give birth'.

Firstly, marriage and fertility may decrease life satisfaction. Pursuing material life inevitably weakens one's ability to consume to a certain extent and can greatly affect one's material life. This leads individuals to hesitate or abandon the investment in intimate relationships and partnership, instead focusing their time, energy, and money on improving their own lives. Secondly, postponing the age of marriage and child-birth is also influenced by multiple factors. Materialism requires that marriage and fertility must be based on sufficient material wealth, making it difficult for young people in their twenties to enter into marriage life due to a lack of social wealth. Additionally, with the increase in urbanization and the continuous influence of modernity factors, social risks have increased exponentially.^[7]

Secondly, the delay of marriage and childbearing age. The delay of marriage and childbearing age is also affected by many factors. Materialism requires that marriage and childbearing must be based on sufficient material wealth, which makes it difficult for young married people in their twenties to have enough social wealth to enter marriage. In addition, with the increase of urbanization and the continuous influence of modern factors, social risks increase exponentially. At the same time, with the society's emphasis on gender equality, the concept of marriage and fertility in Shandong has gradually become equal. The status of women in the family and the workplace has increased, making the marriage relationship more equal, and the reproductive responsibility is more shared by the husband and wife. The marriage and childbearing model that binds oneself and others in the rest of life is difficult to match the fast pace and high risk of modern life. It also leads to many young people's late marriage and late childbirth, and they choose to 'wait and see' at the best time. This is also one of the reasons why the total fertility rate of our country has been decreasing in recent years.

Lastly, there still exist differences in marriage and fertility culture between urban and rural areas. Due to the combined influence of economic development, policy treatment, historical factors, and other factors, significant differences in marriage and fertility culture persist between urban and rural areas. Many rural areas in Shandong still maintain the characteristics of old-fashioned marriage and fertility cultures such as "early marriage and early childbirth" and "more children bring more blessings." However, more developed coastal cities like Qingdao have adopted modern lifestyles earlier, viewing marriage and fertility culture as auxiliary products of economic activities.^[8] These differences in marriage and fertility culture between urban and rural areas inadvertently narrow the marriage circles for suitable marriage-age individuals and exacerbate the situation of "matching doors and households," making it difficult for them to find like-minded partners outside their local areas.

4 Conclusions

Shandong 's marriage and childbearing culture has experienced a long historical evolution, which is deeply influenced by policy changes, economic development and social changes. By comparing the local marriage and childbearing culture in Shandong in the long river of history, it will be found that the marriage and childbearing culture under different productivity development levels and social systems is very different. In the feudal society, marriage and childbearing are the tasks that individuals must complete. It is the way for the family to continue the blood and master the local social resources. The social atmosphere guided by the value of ' filial piety ' is also conducive to the ancient rulers to maintain social stability and reduce social mobility. After the founding of the People 's Republic of China, the implementation and promulgation of the public ownership system, the planned economy and the marriage law made ' free marriage ' the only choice protected by law. At the same time, the promulgation of marriage law and women 's rights and interests protection law has greatly protected women 's rights from the legal level. The policy of late marriage and late childbearing during the family planning period is of great significance to reduce the population pressure in Shandong Province. For the rapid growth of the birth population in Shandong Province stepped on the brake. Nowadays, in the face of the new population situation of declining birth rate. It is necessary to weaken the influence of materialism on marriage and fertility culture, so that marriage and fertility can return to the mode dominated by personal emotional will. Cultivate a new type of marriage and childbearing culture led by the government by formulating favorable marriage and childbearing policies and carrying out marriage and childbearing publicity. Let the marriageable groups regain confidence in marriage life.

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