

**Demographic U Turn in China:
Xi Jinping's Vision 2035 and
the Three Child Policy**

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Abstract

China's Census 2020 has clearly revealed the demographic trend that has been noticed for the last few decades, that of an ageing population in China. For a vision that Xi Jinping has, of a country which is technologically advanced, and of a developed Chinese economy with industrialization, enhanced military capabilities, an eco- friendly way of life with declining carbon emissions by 2035 and a declining rural urban divide, it is of paramount importance that the workforce should be able, agile, productive and contribute to the 'dual economy'. The GDP is targeted to reach that of moderately developed countries; and reducing regional disparities, modernizing industrial supply chains and improving the infrastructure are some of the other considerations which are a part of the vision, including the dual circulation strategy, part of which relies on domestic consumption. Hence the demographics need to change and in order to give a boost to the numbers in the younger population, the 'Three-child policy' has been announced. It remains to be seen whether the incentives that are being offered are going to succeed in making this a successful policy, keeping in mind the increasing costs of bringing up children, of education, medical expenses, housing prices and the trend towards nuclear families and numerous other factors, including the negative overhang of the 'one child policy', and the career choices of women, the 'lying flat' generation and the changing global perspectives of the younger generation.

Keywords

Three child policy, Demographic trends, Ageing population, Dual circulation strategy, Domestic consumption, Fertility rate, Gender imbalance, Chinese tradition and culture

Introduction

The clouds that cover the landscapes of countries across the Himalayas move across the skies in different directions and disperse at points to precipitate and bring moisture to the soil. They bring home the point that in spite of differing political views and leanings, the problems across boundaries and borders are more or less the same. They remind us that change is inevitable and the world is in a constant state of flux. Through the pandemic, the state of our humanity has been a trajectory of low ebbs punctuated with small spikes of optimism. What is the future of our planet, with other issues such as climate change looming large, that is the question which we have been forced to ask ourselves. Is it a ray of hope that we see at the end of the tunnel, with the many issues which might get addressed after the catastrophic elements of this time? Or is it a declining state which will make us wake up to the fact that we are no longer the masters of the Universe. It remains to be seen whether our economies will pick up and the changes that we have seen over the last year or so are there to stay or whether we can crawl back to normalcy.

Xi Jinping has drawn out a vision for China 2035. This vision is of a leading nation in terms of technological advance, economic development, industrialization, military capabilities, an eco-friendly way of life with declining carbon emissions by 2035. Moreover, carbon neutrality has been set as the target for 2060. The GDP has been targeted to reach that of moderately developed countries. As World bank figures show, the per capita GDP of US was \$ 63,543 in 2020 whereas China's per capita GDP was US \$ 10, 500.¹

It is also envisioned that regional disparities will be reduced, thus improving the living standards of the people and also reducing the disparities between the different sectors of the economy.

Self-reliance, a boost in domestic consumption, innovation and strengthening human resources is seen to be of vital importance. Along with promotion of modern service industries, there are

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

plans to modernize the industrial supply chains and develop strategic new industries, increase infrastructure and improve the transport system as well as digital development. One of the key visions is the development and boosting of the domestic market.

“This is one half of the famous Dual-Circulation Strategy, one of President Xi’s signature initiatives that centre on expanding the domestic market and maintaining the export market. It also includes deepening supply-side structural reform as well.” “Plans include giving full play to the ‘decisive role of the market in the allocation of resources’ – including land, labour, technological knowledge, capital, and data – as well as improving government functions, such as establishing a modern fiscal, tax, and financial system.”²

Rural revitalization and the improvement and boosting of the rural urban partnership in which agriculture and industry complement each other is another goal of the 14th Five-year plan (2021-2025). Increasing the cultural soft power worldwide, improving resource use efficiency, improving the environment and increased low carbon development, all come under the purview of the plan.

Improving the livelihood of the people is another aim of the plan. The ageing population is of concern to the party state as the country is ageing faster than any other country in modern history. By the end of 2019, 12.6% of China’s population was 65 years and above. The population is expected to peak in 2029 and then hit a steady decline, which will undermine plans to spur domestic consumption. Thus, demographics is of vital importance and it is with this in mind that the three-child policy has been drafted and announced as a spur to lead China’s economy to the path of development and to furthering the improvement in the livelihood of the citizens.

Historically, the coastal cities and hubs have been much wealthier than the interior ones. Engaging in international trade and maritime routes has brought this about and as trade increased, they became wealthier.

² <https://www.basilinna.com/insights/chinas-fifth-plenum-the-14th-five-year-plan-and-vision-2035>

For all these visions, a robust population with an efficient working force which has high productivity is vital. The demographics thus become very important and the strategy of the one child policy announced in the late 70s and later the two-child policy announced in 2016 which were seen to be extremely important are now being realized as something which needs to be changed. The one child policy had further led to the divide as people in rural areas were not as strictly monitored as those in the urban areas. Therefore, the rural areas, although they had relatively higher birth rates, did not have as many job opportunities, whereas the urban areas had more job opportunities but had a significant amount of ageing population. People in rural areas would still feel that they benefitted from having more children as they needed productive assets for agriculture. However, in urban areas, it was considered that more children meant more expenses.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) officially recognizes 56 distinct ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Han, who constituted 91.51% of the total population in 2010 and according to the latest census figures, 91.11% in 2020. Ethnic minorities constituted 8.49% or 113.8 million of China's population in 2010 and 8.89% in 2020. During the past decades, ethnic minorities have experienced higher growth rates than the majority Han population, because they were not restricted by the one-child policy.

An important feature of the study on demographics is the population of the ethnic minorities in China as compared to the Han population. This is a complicated issue. On the one hand, the ethnic minorities were persecuted and not treated well during the cultural revolution. However, subsequently, in the 1980s more favourable policies were implemented towards them and they were given certain privileges. The one child policy may have prompted some people to move to the ethnic minority group if they wanted to have more than one child. There were also intermarriages and thus the data on demographics may be fuzzy. Over time, some young people belonging to the ethnic minority groups have opted to be a part of the Han population. Hence, these issues created fluid boundaries between the Han and non-Han ethnicities. The change in ethnic minority populations has been influenced by dynamic interactions among demographic factors, ethnic identification as well as political, economic and policy changes. More research needs to be done on these issues.

The number of non-Han ethnic minorities as a whole tripled from 1953 to 2010. However, growth has differed among individual groups and in different time periods. The population of some groups has fluctuated while that of others has grown steadily, regardless of the size of the groups. While some sources claim that ethnic minorities have grown faster than the Han population, according to some other sources, since 2000 the growth rate of ethnic minorities has been lower than that of the Han Chinese, and the population of 13 of these groups has begun to decline.³

However, the proportion of ethnic minorities in China's mainland population has risen to 8.89 percent, according to data from the latest national census conducted in 2020. The proportion was up 0.4 percentage points from 2010, when China conducted its previous census, according to the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The population of ethnic minority groups increased 10.26 percent to 125.47 million from 2010, while that of Han Chinese grew 4.93 percent to 1.28631 billion, accounting for 91.11 percent of the total population, the NBS data showed.⁴

The last national Census held in 2020 is important because of many factors. Government investment in infrastructure and social welfare are closely related to demographics. For instance, the number of children or elderly determined by the census forms the basis for planning schools and retirement homes. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, China's population was 1.412 billion in 2020, rising from 1.4 billion in 2019. However, the annual growth rate of 0.53 % from 2010 to 2020 was the lowest in China since its first census in 1953. In 2020, 12 million babies were born, the rate falling 18 per cent each year, to the lowest level in nearly six decades. To maintain a stable population, the fertility rate would need to be 2.1 children per woman, as against the actual rate of 1.3 children per woman. These figures show that the working population is on the decline. There were 894.38 million people in the age

³ Six decades of ethnic minority population change in China
Jiaping Wu: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17441730.2019.1594657>

⁴ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/11/c_139938133.htm

group between 15 and 59, 63.35 per cent of the population, down 6.79 percentage points from the previous census.⁵

On the other hand, the percentage of senior citizens continues to expand. There were 264.02 million aged 60 and older, equivalent to 18.70 per cent of the population, 5.44 percentage points higher than in 2010. Among the group, there were 190.64 million people aged 65 or older, 13.50 per cent of the population. Clearly, as the fertility rate declines, this has implications on the demographics of China and points to the fact that there will be a paucity of working population, and an increase in the ageing population, implying that this will have an impact on the economic progress in China in the years to come. Long term productivity will also be affected. There are plans to increase the retirement age but this is not an easy solution. There will obviously be an increase in government pension funds, which is another aspect of the impact on the GDP.

On May 31, 2021, China's Communist Party Politburo meeting, chaired by President Xi Jinping, announced that it will allow each couple in the country to have up to three children.

"Birth policies will be further improved. A policy that allows a couple to have three children will be introduced with supporting measures," it said. "This will improve the population structure of China." The policy change, announced at the Politburo meeting, was aimed at "maintaining national security and social stability" and keeping "our country's advantages in human resource endowments," the powerful decision-making body said, according to state news agency Xinhua.

According to a South China Morning Post article of 3 June, 2021, an online survey which was conducted soon after the 'Three Child policy' was announced showed that 90 per cent of respondents made it clear that they "would not consider" having three children. State News Agency Xinhua in a poll, found that out of 31,000 people, only 1,443 were "ready" to have a third child. It was "on the agenda" for 213 respondents, while 828 were "hesitant". The poll results, though, disappeared not long after they were posted.

⁵ <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3132980/china-population-latest-census-confirms-increase-1412-billion>

As stated in the article, a report by demographers at Renmin University of China estimated that the policy would lead to an annual increase of 200,000 to 300,000 births in the next five years – a slight increase from the rate of 12 million births last year.

However, according to Hu Xingdou, an independent political economist in Beijing, young Chinese were unlikely to want to have bigger families.

“For China’s new ‘lying flat’ or *tangping* generation, the three-child policy may have little appeal, but for others, it may have some traction,” Hu said. “The government should work hard to relieve the burden of education, of housing among other things to improve people’s willingness [to have more children].” The lying flat generation relates to the young millennials, the working people who have realized that they want to opt out of being overworked and overstressed and struggling in the competitive workspaces of the times. Many young people have opted for dignity instead of being forced to work beyond their comfort levels, even opting for not so many luxuries and consumerism.

The ‘one child policy’ which was announced in the late 70s but came into force in 1980 was strictly enforced by the National Health and Family Planning Commission, and the horrifying punishments included forced abortions and sterilizations, along with heavy fines for those who violated these norms. The logic of restricting the number of children born to couples was that a lower population would support the economic boom of the country. Chinese authorities have claimed the policy as a success. Apparently, it helped the country avert severe food and water shortages by preventing up to 400 million people from being born.

In fact, many government employees and civil servants as well as those employed in government affiliated organizations and universities were threatened that they would lose their jobs if they had more than one child. This has been criticized as violating human rights and as having repercussions on the poorer Chinese citizen who could not afford fines, as opposed to the well to do.

If parents did not pay a fine, second children could not be registered in the national household system, or hukou, meaning they did not exist legally and so would not have access to social services like health care and education.⁶

The one-child policy was generally accepted to mean one birth per family, so if women gave birth to two or more children at the same time, they would not be penalized. According to reports in Chinese and international media, this led to women using fertility drugs to have multiple babies.⁷

He Yafu, an independent expert on China's demographics, expects the population to start to fall in 2022 as the number of births drops to nearly 10 million and the number of deaths surpasses 10 million. Beijing, which has a population of around 21 million, suffered a 24.3 per cent decline in its birth rate in 2020 compared with a year earlier, according to official data.

When exploring the reasons behind the reluctance of Chinese couples to have more than one child, there are many which are of concern to the current generation. The cost of educating a child, bringing her or him up given the current concerns such as working women finding it difficult to give up their careers for the sake of bringing up children, the maternity leave concerns and the fact that now there are more nuclear families which do not have the support of their parents or parents-in-law, many were and some still are dependent on grandmothers and grandfathers looking after the children, now find it difficult to carry the burden on their own. *Ayis* or maids are very expensive in Chinese cities, which is another reason that families are finding it difficult to bring up children. The majority of young couples rely on their parents to look after the children. In 2019, China's female labour rate was about 61 per cent, higher than the United States on 57 per cent, Japan on 54 per cent or 21 per cent in India, according to the World Bank.

Statistics show that China currently has nearly 18 million elderly migrants who have joined their adult children in cities, accounting for 7.2 per cent of the country's estimated 247 million internal migrants. Some 43 per cent of them have moved to take care of grandchildren.

⁶ SCMP 5 June, 2021

⁷ <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3135510/chinas-one-child-policy-what-was-it-and-what-impact-did-it>

A 2017 study of about 3,600 households in six major cities, including Beijing and Guangzhou, found almost 80 per cent had at least one grandparent acting as a caregiver before children began primary school, according to the Chinese Society of Education.⁸

Enforced by Deng Xiaoping in 1980, the one child policy had remained in place until 2016, but subsequently, the estimates of a rapidly ageing population undermining economic growth prompted the Communist Party to allow two children per married couple. While this did seem to have helped in combatting the problem to a certain extent it was clearly insufficient in averting a demographic crisis.

The Three Child Policy will have to be complemented with numerous strategies such as financial incentives to women to help balance their careers and costs associated with rearing children if it has to be successful.⁹

Yong Cai, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who studies China's birth policies said that the new three-child rule "is unlikely to have major demographic effect," he said. "China should have abandoned its birth planning altogether."

Without giving specifics, the Politburo has said that it would reduce the costs of education, improve maternity care and insurance and provide other support to families on housing and taxes. The almost entirely male political body said it would "protect the legitimate rights and interests" of working women. Officials also said they would gradually raise the country's retirement age, which is 60 for men and 55 for women.

China's efforts to encourage its citizens to marry and reproduce have prompted fears that the government will push its citizens to have more children in the same way that it limited them: through coercion. The Politburo on Monday promised to "strengthen the education and guidance" of young married couples, as well as "control bad social customs."

⁸ <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3136092/chinas-three-child-policy->

⁹ SCMP Global Impact: China Gets Older: 2020 Census to Drive Beijing policy Decisions for Years to Come. John Carter June 5, 2021

“The law should respect and protect the people’s reproductive rights and freedom, and let citizens decide for themselves whether to have children or not, and how many,” said Liu Ruishuang, deputy director of the Department of Medical Ethics and Health Law at Peking University.

The news about the change in birth policy got more than 660 million views on Weibo, and people responded to the change in policy with cynicism. One user on the microblog wrote, “Whether you change the policy to five children or eight children, housing prices are still the best sterilization tool.”

In an article in the Washington Post, one blogger said, “What is this? Producing pigs?” Another wrote, “There’s nothing wrong with changing the policy, I just hope they don’t force it.”¹⁰

“What can be said is that China’s policy produced a lot of one-child families - today the country has about 150 million of them — and perhaps tens of millions of abortions and sterilizations, many of them involuntary,” noted the Economist in 2019. “Corrupt and brutal family-planning officials demolished the homes of some who resisted. Women had their menstrual cycles recorded on blackboards, for all to see. As birth quotas bit, gender ratios became more skewed by infanticide and sex-selective abortions of girls.”

“A comprehensive policy package ranging from tax incentives, education and housing subsidies, more generous maternity leave, universal provision of child care” is needed for the three-child policy to be effective, Liu Li-Gang, managing director and chief China economist at Citigroup, told Bloomberg News.¹¹

China’s Politburo indicated it will prioritize addressing some of these mounting social needs, though it offered few specifics on its plans. As Kuo reported, myriad commenters on Chinese

¹⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-three-child-policy-demographic/2021/05/31/95a086e2-c1e8-11eb-89a4-b7ae22aa193e_story.html

¹¹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-31/china-to-allow-couples-to-have-three-children-to-boost-births>

social media speculated over the shift in official policy and whether the central government would move toward punishing those *not* procreating.¹²

As quoted in the Time Magazine of December 2, 2013. “Writing in the Population and Development Review, a peer-reviewed journal published by the Population Council in New York City, three top Chinese demographers predicted that “the one-child policy will be added to the other deadly errors in recent Chinese history,” alongside the turbulent 1966–76 Cultural Revolution and a devastating man-made famine in 1959–61. “While those grave mistakes both cost tens of millions of lives, the harms done were relatively short-lived and were corrected quickly afterwards. The one-child policy, in contrast, will surpass them in impact.” That leaves a single child potentially responsible for six old people—one set of parents and two sets of grandparents—a trend in China that is called “4-2-1.” Providing for the elderly is even harder, now that hundreds of millions of Chinese are mobile, leaving the farms where the elderly live to work in cities where the jobs are.”¹³

China’s competitive advantage came from its large workforce. Today, this stands challenged, as the labour pool is shrinking, with the ageing population increasing steadily.

However, coming back to its Vision 2035, the modernization of China's system and capacity for greater modernization and an innovative governance is another vision that the Party State is aiming for. The people's rights to participate and to develop as equals will be adequately protected. According to the Party state, the rule of law for the country, the government, and society will be basically in place.

As countries become more developed, birth rates tend to fall due to education or other priorities such as careers. Starting from the one child policy with forced sterilizations and abortions to the two-child policy where women were encouraged to have two children, the path to the three-child policy may be seen by the Chinese to be a strategy to encourage the young population to take over as opposed to the ageing population. The concerns are based on expenses on bringing up and educating children, resources such as time spent and effort taken to bring up children

¹² Facing a demographic crisis, China to allow three children per family, May 31, 2021 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-three-child-policy-demographic/2021/05/31/95a086e2-c1e8-11eb-89a4-b7ae22aa193e_story.html

¹³ <https://time.com/4092497/why-china-needs-more-children/>

and on women's career development. The incentives that are being offered to women may not be enough to encourage them to have more children. The fact that the government is pushing women to have more children is stated to be not a sign of reproductive freedom but a population engineering experiment. The Human rights Organization, Amnesty International said the policy, like its predecessors, was still a violation of sexual and reproductive rights.

“Governments have no business regulating how many children people have. Rather than ‘optimizing’ its birth policy, China should instead respect people’s life choices and end any invasive and punitive controls over people’s family planning decisions,” said the group’s China team head, Joshua Rosenzweig.¹⁴

But experts say China's situation could be uniquely exacerbated given the number of men who are finding it difficult to find a wife in the first place, let alone think of starting a family.

China is faced with a huge gender imbalance, with the male population exceeding the female population by more than 30 million, according to data from China's National Bureau of Statistics. However, the gender imbalance in China's population has improved in recent years, with the gap narrowing from a record high 40.08 million in 2006 to 30.49 million in 2019.¹⁵

Census data obtained in 2000 revealed that 119 boys were born for every 100 girls, and among China's “floating population” the ratio was as high as 128:100. These situations led the government in July 2004 to ban selective abortions of female foetuses. It is estimated that this imbalance will rise until 2025-2030 to reach 20% then slowly decrease.

Especially during the one-child policy era, many families opted to abort female foetuses in preference for males. Abortion is legal in China, although sex-selective abortion is not. In 2019, the gender ratio in China was 114 males for every 100 females born.¹⁶

As quoted in the BBC (online) on 1June 2021, ‘Everyone has become data’.

¹⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/china-three-child-policy-still-a-violation/>

¹⁵ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1209713.shtml>

¹⁶ Statista. [China: gender ratio by age group](#) Accessed Dec. 19, 2020

“One person on China’s microblogging service Weibo claimed his mother was forced to get an IUD after giving birth to him as he was a second child, adding that to this day she still gets infections from it.

Another person known as Jia Shuai wrote that as an illegal child growing up in the countryside, he remembered having to jump into ponds to hide from family planning officials.

“If you could not pay the fines, some officials would clear your house and take your animals away. What a bizarre memory,” he wrote.

Yet another user claimed her younger sister was still alive only because a compassionate doctor had let their mother escape from the hospital, after she was called in to have an abortion while eight months pregnant.

Meanwhile celebrated filmmaker Zhang Yimou and his wife - who were fined a hefty \$1.2m (£842,850) in 2014 for violating the country's one-child policy - also commented on the new announcement.

“The policy is just a cold notice - it doesn't look at the kind of distress it has caused people. Everyone has become reduced to data, rather than people who deserve to be respected and seen,” he wrote on Weibo under the pseudonym Chillsyrup.

Many also recalled the story of Feng Jiamei who was made to undergo a forced abortion in the seventh month of her pregnancy as she could not pay the fine for having a second child.¹⁷

The other problem is that because of the one child policy, and the traditional preference for a male child, many marriages broke up and men married a second or third time in order to have a male child. This left the gender balance skewed and now it has become difficult for men to find women who will become their wives. A man has to attract a potential wife by offering millions of yuan, an attractive apartment and various other things. The traditional ways of meeting a potential life partner are changing from social meetings at festivals and the Chinese New Year to online dating and connecting on WeChat etc.

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57312741>

As stated on the BBC website, many men are consulting psychologists and stylists to make themselves more appealing. The problems for men in finding a partner are most acute in poorer rural areas, made worse by long-held traditions that the husband must be able to offer a decent level of financial security before he can secure a wife.

Hong Yang, who is now married and in her 30s, describes this as China's "mother-in-law economics". "If men want to get married, the future mother-in-law will request that he first buys a house before discussing the next step. It's one reason why house prices have been so strong in recent years," she says.¹⁸

Also, because of the financial burden men are facing for their marriage, they postpone marriage till later, so a lot of young women find it very difficult to find partners. Women look for financial security in their husbands to be and men look for attractive and good-looking women. Li Peng was very happy that her son had found a nice young woman and the preparations were on to get them married in a few months' time. A few months later, when asked whether the date had been fixed, she burst into tears, saying that the young woman had expected her son to invest a lot of money in buying a luxurious home in Beijing. There are many such cases where the marriage doesn't work in the end.

It doesn't take rocket science to ponder over the new demographic structure of China if the three-child policy does work and the growth rate of the population increases. Once the number of younger people increases, the thinking might change to a more global view of politics, governance and the so-called socialism with Chinese characteristics, as also Marxism-Leninism. As younger people dominate the economy and the world view changes, it might well augur a colour revolution in case it has already not taken place by then.

On the other hand, the Party state might well make inroads into the lives of the younger generation and the future of the young entrepreneurs and workers could well be intertwined with the success of the party and the Chinese economy. The younger generation will subsequently, as it moves to other countries, to study in foreign universities and take on jobs abroad, spread the so-called soft power all over the world, which might well help China in creating a successful hub where trade and supply chains benefit it.

According to the Constitution of the Communist party of China,

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20170213-why-millions-of-chinese-men-are-staying-single>

“The Party must commit to a people centred philosophy of development and pursue the vision of innovative, coordinated, green, and open development that is for everyone. The general starting point and criteria for judging each item of the Party’s work are that it must benefit the development of the socialist productive forces, be conducive to increasing socialist China’s overall strength, and help to improve the people’s living standards. The Party must respect labour, knowledge, talent, and creativity and ensure that development is for the people and relies on the people, and that its fruits are shared among the people”.

“Only through reform and opening up can we develop China, develop socialism, and develop Marxism. The Party must comprehensively deepen reform, improve and develop the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and modernize China’s system and capacity for governance. The Party must fundamentally reform the economic structure that constrains the development of the productive forces and uphold and improve the socialist market economy; and incongruence with this it must undertake political structural reform and reform in other fields. The Party must uphold the fundamental national policy of making China open to the world and embrace and learn from all achievements of human society. In carrying out reform and opening up, the Party should be boldly explorative and brave in breaking new ground; the Party should improve the scientific nature of reform related decision making in a more systematic, holistic, and coordinated way, and pioneer new approaches through practice.

Membership Article1:

Any forward-thinking Chinese worker, farmer, member of the armed forces, intellectual, or person from any other social strata who has reached the age of eighteen and who accepts the Party’s program and Constitution and is willing to join and work actively in one of the Party’s organizations, carry out the Party’s resolutions, and pay regular membership dues may apply for membership to the Communist Party of China.

Upon completion of the probationary period of a probationary member, the Party branch should promptly discuss whether he or she may be accepted as a full member. A probationary member who conscientiously performs his or her obligations and meets the criteria for full membership shall have their status changed to full member at the end of the probationary period; in the event that continued observation and education are deemed necessary, the probationary period may be extended, but by no more than one year; in the event that a probationary member has

failed to perform his or her obligations or to meet the criteria for full membership, his or her probationary membership shall be revoked. Any decision to grant a probationary member full membership, extend a probationary period, or revoke a probationary membership must be discussed and passed at a general meeting of the Party branch and approved by the Party organization at the next level up.

The Party attaches great importance to the training and promotion of female officials and ethnic minority officials.

Relationship between the Party and the Communist Youth League of China

Article 51: The Communist Youth League of China is a people's group organization of forward-thinking young people under the leadership of the Communist Party of China; it is a school for vast numbers of young people to learn through practice about socialism with Chinese characteristics and about communism; it is an aide to and reserve force of the Party. The Central Committee of the Communist Youth League functions under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party. Local chapters of the Communist Youth League come under the leadership of the relevant Party committee at the corresponding level and of the higher-level organization of the League itself.

Article 52: "Party committees at every level must strengthen their leadership over Communist Youth League organizations and pay attention to the selection and training of League officials. The Party must give firm support to the Communist Youth League as it carries out its work in a vibrant and creative way which suits the characteristics and needs of young people, and give full play to the League's spearhead role and its role as a bridge linking the Party with younger generations."

The point being seen is that the Party will welcome younger generations to join and become part of the roller coaster ride.

There are, however, many issues which will have to be taken into consideration once the population increases. One of them is the medical system in China. As of now, the system has many flaws which need to be addressed. The wealthy have access to the best doctors but for the others, they have to visit overcrowded hospitals and in the rural areas, to village clinics; or the other option is travelling hundreds of miles to find a suitable doctor at a hospital. The primary

care system needs to be ramped up as its inadequacies are very obvious. And this problem will be exacerbated as the population increases.

As stated in an article in the New York Times, ‘China has one general practitioner for every 6,666 people, compared with the international standard of one for every 1,500 to 2,000 people, according to the World Health Organization. As stated by the above article, instead of going to a doctor’s office or a community clinic, people rush to the hospitals to see specialists, even for fevers and headaches. In the winter of 2018, flu-stricken patients camped out overnight with blankets in the corridors of several Beijing hospitals, according to state media. Hospitals were understaffed and overwhelmed. Specialists are overworked, seeing as many as 200 patients a day. In 2016, Mr. Xi unveiled the country’s first long-term blueprint to improve health care since the nation’s founding in 1949. Called Healthy China 2030, it pledged to bolster health innovation and make access to medical care more equal.¹⁹

To help change the culture, China is pushing each household to sign a contract with a family doctor by 2020 and subsidizing patients’ visits. General practitioners will also have the authority to make appointments directly with top specialists, rather than leaving patients to make their own at hospitals. Such measures would make it easier for patients to transfer to top hospitals without a wait, while potentially giving them more personalized care from a doctor who knows their history. It could also cut down on costs, since it is cheaper under government insurance to see a family doctor.²⁰ Although this article was written in 2018, the medical system is going through similar problems even now.

There are many incidents of people becoming violent with medical staff and doctors because of the frustration. This is “*yi nao*” or medical disturbance. Hence it is quite obvious that the medical facilities will have to be expanded and organized in a way that can meet the requirements of the increased population if the three-child policy works.

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/30/business/china-health-care-doctors.html>

²⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/30/business/china-health-care-doctors.html>

As per a March 2021 survey of 1,938 millennials by *China Youth Daily's* Social Survey Center, 67.3 percent of young people cited the inability to find domestic help as the primary reason for which they were unwilling to have a second child.²¹

There is congestion, overpopulation, pollution and an overload in terms of infrastructure in most Chinese cities. Hence expenses are going up and even in the rural areas, where labour-intensive industries are gradually being replaced by manufacturing industries, having three children is no longer an advantage.

As of now, it seems that the three-child policy may not offer enough incentives that will make it work substantially. However, this is an ongoing issue and a set of policy measures may be offered which may evolve into substantial incentives. Various other countries have offered incentives which seem to have worked. Singapore, has a number of incentives as have many other countries.

“Singapore spends over \$1.3 billion on policies to encourage having more children; it also provides tax breaks and extended maternity leave. A video commercial for a breath mint, which tried to do its bit to further the cause, went viral on YouTube in 2012. “I’m a patriotic husband, you’re my patriotic wife, let’s do our civic duty and manufacture life!” went one of the lines in the video. Japan saw its fertility rate rise marginally to 1.46 in 2015, the highest in over two decades. (The rate should be 2.1 for the population to remain stable.) While two years of economic growth may have contributed to it, many attribute the rise also to perks by the local administration. While residents of one of Tokyo’s wards receive a one-time payment of \$1,700 per birth, another gives \$940 for the first kid and 10 times as much for the fourth baby.

Also, some other incentives that Singapore offers are child relief and medical subsidies, the prioritization of families with more than two children in public housing queues, and granting of tax rebates to young mothers.

In Turkey, in 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged women to have at least three children. In his controversial remarks, he said, ‘A woman who abstains from motherhood saying ‘I am working’ means she is in fact rejecting motherhood.’ In 2015, he announced a

²¹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/02/with-three-child-policy-china-is-missing-the-point/>

slew of incentives for couples, including gold coins for first-time mothers and the flexibility for mothers to work part-time which the government paid for.”²²

If we explore the potential three-child policy, it is fundamentally important and relevant to examine the role of women in the economy.

When we look at the proportion of women occupying the senior posts in Chinese corporations, we find a decline since 1990. The liberalization and opening up brought in many factors which neoliberal and patriarchal economies are associated with. As of 2019, fewer than 10 percent of board directors at listed companies were female. Men were preferred as employees because of the child producing factor in women. As women face similar issues in many other countries, they have to make a choice between careers and bringing up children. In a competitive environment, where income is of paramount importance, with rising prices and resources becoming more precious, many choose the former.

More fundamentally, as the scholar Yunxiang Yan argues, Chinese society—especially women and youth—is increasingly individualistic, with a heightened emphasis on individual choice. More than previous generations, millennial and Generation Z Chinese women have defied traditionalist expectations that they marry, bear children, and quit their jobs.

The three-child policy thus mistakes a demand-side issue (whether women want to have children) for a supply-side issue (whether families are given the opportunity to have children). Hence, Beijing would have to substantially reduce the costs associated with child care, the burdens imposed on full-time female workers also loaded up with mortgages and insurance, as well as offer cultural and social norm sensitivity training that pushes for a more egalitarian division of domestic labour. Women colloquially ‘hold up half the sky—but the reality is that they end up bearing most of the brunt of raising a child’.²³

²² https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/child-policies-across-the-world-from-those-imposing-restrictions-to-others-offering-incentives-to-have-more-kids/articleshow/58199912.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

²³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/02/with-three-child-policy-china-is-missing-the-point/>

The other question is what the government ought to do with children and families that defy government policies. Of the thousands of children that have been born in spite of the one child policy their existence was illegal under the Chinese law which meant that they were not registered with the government and denied access to education, health care and basic rights. These *heihai zi*, as they are called, need to have their rights recognized, and the injustices done to them acknowledged, by the state. Reparation is a moral necessity, as argued by many whose parents were heavily penalized when their *heihai zi* children were discovered by the state.

Demographic shifts have implications for the economic development of China. The labour pool is shrinking and the costs are rising, creating shortages and wage increases and thus increasing cost of production in factories. What is needed is technological advance and a young working force which has a higher rate of productivity. A lot will also have to be invested in elder care and healthcare of older people. Looking at the potential impact on household size shrinking from 4.4 in 1982 to what looks like 2.5 over the next 30 years, there might be a huge problem in looking after elderly people, especially in rural areas as the younger generation will move to urban hubs. The development of rural areas will need to find new resources to continue to grow and thrive.

Another aspect of the increasing ageing population is a surge in demand of certain products and services in the manufacturing sector. This would include robotics, AI and the use of information technology for diagnostics. Assisted living for seniors, leisure goods and luxury cars, telemedicine, pharmaceuticals, skincare products and medical device manufacturers will also be in demand.

According to BBC News, 25 December 2018, 'More than a decade ago Ye Tingfang, a member of China's top political advisory body, the CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) argued that it is against nature to intervene in the reproduction process. He tabled a motion at the 2007 People's Congress session, calling for an end to the one-child policy as soon as possible.

The State Family Planning Committee told him the country would not change the one-child policy. His follow-up petition met with silence.

Other dissenting voices include a book in 2012 entitled "Are there too many Chinese?" written by James Liang and Jianxin Li, two professors from Peking University.

They argued that China's birth rate had become too low, and if the trend continued, the country would age too fast, the economy would suffer and society would become unstable. They urged adjustment to family planning policy as well.'

What does Chinese culture and religion have to say about having children? This is an interesting and relevant question and needs to be addressed in the context of the societal evolution in China. Historically, many Chinese, not only Buddhists but also Confucians, believed that deliberately terminating pregnancy and destroying a human life which starts far earlier than at birth is unethical. The current and what has been the official line on the subject since the last few decades does not necessarily go along with historical Chinese values and practices. As far as Daoism is concerned, nature and its way is the way to go, so the yin and yang, balances the universe.

As far as Buddhist beliefs are concerned, the Buddha is the epitome of enlightenment and thus the Bodhisattvas in the world cannot be created unless women give birth to children. Celibacy, on the one hand is a belief which Buddhists follow but if one looks into the numerous aspects of life, suffering, enlightenment and nirvana, the beliefs when looked at from the prism of duality and everyday life imply that is necessary to have mothers and female deities which care for the world. One such deity is Kuanyin, the Goddess of Mercy who has been a symbol of caring.

On a trip to Beijing in November 2019, I visited one of the most well-known Buddhist temples, a temple which I have been visiting regularly for the past ten years. But this time, I noticed a different statue of Kuanyin in the chamber. The Kuanyin who normally has a willow branch in one hand, and the elixir of life in a small vessel in the other, actually had a baby in her arms. This was extremely significant because it implied that the Kuanyin has become a symbol of fertility in China. Therefore, a baby in her arms appeared to be a very significant symbol of the pressure and the encouragement that Beijing is expressing to the Chinese citizens to have more children.

Gender disparities may be a part of the Chinese culture but the role of women as mothers is by no means less significant. Not only in Confucian philosophy where filial piety and family life is most important and which is ultimately the foundation of the community, but also Buddhist beliefs are clear about women playing an important role in life.

“In short, women in Chinese domestic groups are both divisive and unifying forces. As mothers and sisters, Chinese women act to soften the competition for authority between brothers and to mediate between authoritarian fathers and occasionally rebellious sons. As daughters-in-law and wives, Chinese women tend to exacerbate domestic tensions, often agitating for early division of extended families. Seen in light of this bifurcation of women's roles in domestic groups, the sharp contrast between idealized feminine characteristics embodied in female deities, on the one hand, and beliefs about female pollution, on the other, becomes more intelligible. It is their unifying role, particularly their role as mother, that corresponds to the symbolic significance of female deities. As mothers, the Eternal Mother, Kuan Yin, and Ma Tsu may all be seen as unifying symbols. The sociological correlates of this unity vary but can always be interpreted as a metaphoric transformation of the relation between a mother and her children. This relation seems to have at least three salient dimensions-inclusivity, mediation, and alliance.

“Kuan Yin, for example, is generally described as a mother who hears the sufferings of her children, regardless of their earthly station. The Eternal Mother is similarly responsive to all who acknowledge her, and Ma Tsu, in her selfless concern for those imperilled at sea, manifests a merciful and indiscriminating personality much like Kuan Yin's and the Eternal Mother's. Moreover, in uniting groups of people who may have no other reason for solidarity, female deities are like mothers who do their best to ameliorate fraternal competition in an effort to preserve family unity.

The role of Chinese mothers as mediators is well developed in descriptions of Chinese family life.”²⁴

²⁴ Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the "Eternal Mother" P. Steven Sangren. <http://newdoc.nccu.edu.tw/teasyllabus/113644156857/Sangren1983Guanyin.pdf> Signs, Vol. 9, No. 1, Women and Religion (Autumn, 1983), pp. 4-25 Published by: The University of Chicago Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173660> Accessed: 08/06/2010 02:01

Hence, the importance given to women as they rear children, should be acknowledged and it should be understood that incentives and opportunities to women are important, nonetheless, while framing demographic policies and that they are not machines to be used for ruthless strategies.

As stated in the Foreign Affairs article of August 10, 2021, “The CCP’s failure to take such steps reflects the sexism that persists in the party and, arguably, in Chinese society more broadly. At the very least, the CCP suffers from a massive blind spot when it comes to women, who are grossly underrepresented in the party leadership. Women hold just 8.4 percent of leadership positions at the central and provincial levels. Among the young party leaders who will take the reins in the coming decades, only 11 percent are women. If the CCP wants to solve China’s demographic puzzle, it should start by listening to and empowering women—especially middle-class and upwardly mobile ones, whose preferences and choices it desperately needs to change. Doing so will help address China’s looming demographic catastrophe and would also shore up the CCP’s legitimacy among a constituency that will become ever more important in the coming decades.”²⁵

The three-child policy is an ongoing issue and will in the future, as time goes on, appear in the government’s policy framing. Central Committee and State Council’s document (Xinhua English report) which appeared in the People’s Daily’s July 21, 2021, on promoting long-term and balanced population development, as stated before, talks about the three-child policy.

As quoted by Manoj Kewalramani, according to the document the population and family planning law of the Peoples Republic of China will be amended and all the fees and fines which were imposed on couples who had violated the family planning law will be cancelled. The number of children in a family will no longer be a reference for registering in schools or applying for a job. The medical care for mothers as well as children will also be improved. Assisted reproductive technology and research for improving fertility will be encouraged and public services relating to elderly care, the upbringing of children, enhancing of demographic surveillance will be improved. There will also be set up institutions for child care services which will be affordable and convenient and so that employers can make them accessible for

²⁵The Sexism Behind China’s Population Crisis How the CCP Fails Working Women

their employees. Also, maternity leave and insurance would be improved. Income tax deductions will be made for personal income tax of those parents whose children are below 3 years of age and who are incurring care expenses. Similarly, leasing and house purchase rules would also be amended for parents depending on their needs and preferences. Equal employment opportunity for women will be encouraged and the reward and assistance system and preferential policies for families with only one child and rural families with only two daughters born before the two-child policy will be continued.

On 27 July, 2021, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang called for easing the burdens of maternity, parenting and education to facilitate the implementation of the third-child policy.

Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in an instruction to a video conference on improving birth policies in Beijing. He said that the population issues are of fundamental, holistic, and strategic importance that concern the development of the Chinese nation and implementing the third-child policy and its supporting measures is a significant decision made by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council to promote long-term and balanced population development. Therefore, the relevant economic and social policies and supporting measures should be coordinated to ease the burdens that giving birth, raising children, and providing education place on parents, and he urged governments and authorities at all levels to formulate detailed plans and supporting measures to ensure the implementation of the policy. When addressing the conference, Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, urged joint efforts on medical, educational, housing, and fiscal areas to achieve the strategic goal of population development, including speeding up revision of relevant laws and regulations.²⁶

China is, like Japan, engaging in advanced technology to boost its economy with the current demographic position in view. It is looking at automation, artificial intelligence and robotics. The PLA is being downsized and modernized, with better qualified officers and soldiers, precision and autonomous weapons, automated command tools for decision-making, and amalgamation of forces for integrated joint operations.²⁷

²⁶ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-07/27/c_1310090251.htm

²⁷ <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/chinas-demography-and-its-implications/2243549/>

With the demographic path that China is leading to, there can be either a boost in the younger population and thus a reliance on its own young talent pool, or a certain shift in the migration policy wherein people from other countries are allowed and encouraged to enter and supplement the pool. However, China is charting a course of reducing dependence on the rest of the world for innovation and human resources. A smaller pool of talent in the workforce would slow down innovation and growth of the economy. It remains to be seen how effective the three-child policy will be for the Vision that Xi Jinping has for China and whether the younger generation ratifies the CPC's working style or whether their days or rather, years are numbered.

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