

Factors Influencing Fertility Intentions Among Chinese Women: Policy Changes, Feminist Values, and Considerations of Personal Benefit

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Abstract: This study aims to unravel the multifaceted factors shaping fertility intentions among Chinese women, especially in the light of (1) policy changes, (2) the reconceptualization of feminist values, as well as (3) the self-oriented perspective of the benefits of childbearing. Through a comprehensive literature review, the study examines how the shift from the one-child policy to the three-child policy has affected women's fertility preferences and decision-making, revealing that relaxation of fertility restrictions alone will not be enough to reverse the trend of low fertility. This research also calls on society and individuals to pay attention to the high degree of feminism of young women and to focus more on the individual's career, family and other aspects of life. In addition, the research analyzes the role of individual characteristics (education, employment, income, and the financial costs of child-rearing) on the fertility intention of women, emphasizing the need for both macro (economic) and micro (institutional) support to different social groups. The findings contribute to an in-depth understanding of the various influences on reproductive decision-making in the Chinese context and provide insights into the formulation of effective population policies and the creation of a more inclusive society for women's development.

Keywords: fertility intentions; personal benefits, policy changes; feminist values; Chinese women

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

China's fertility policies have seen extensive revisions. Initiated in the late 1970s with the one-child rule to control population growth, the country expanded to a two-child norm in 2016, and by 2021, promoted having up to three children. These stages were designed to manage demographic shifts and economic needs. Originally, the policies curbed the population increase, dramatically reducing the fertility rate from six children per woman in the 1970s to below replacement levels [1].

Facing an aging demographic and worker shortages, in 2013, some couples were permitted a second child, with a broader allowance by 2016. These amendments aimed to

counter the skewed population structure and rejuvenate the workforce. In 2021, in response to the further declining birth rates, China endorsed policies supporting three-child families, coupling this with additional incentives to boost fertility [2].

The evolution of these policies profoundly influences Chinese women's reproductive plans. Historical stringent regulations molded a preference for smaller families or having no children. Additionally, factors like delayed marriages and childbearing, higher education levels, and career pursuits further suppressed fertility ambitions. Despite recent pro-natalist policies, fertility desires among urban, well-educated women tend to be lower.

Research indicates that fertility policies shape women's reproductive desires and actions through the relative costs and benefits, the cultural context of childbearing, and impacts on personal reproductive choices [3, 4]. However, women's fertility intentions are also influenced by multiple factors such as their socioeconomic status, values, and opportunity costs. In general, the low-fertility culture caused by the one-child policy is deeply rooted, and coupled with the increasing costs and opportunity costs faced by modern women, the effect of encouraging fertility through policies is limited in the short term.

1.2. Research Purpose

Exploring the impact of policy information, feminist values, and personal cost-benefit considerations on Chinese women's fertility intentions has important theoretical and practical significance. Firstly, this issue involves multiple fields such as demography, sociology, and feminism. Relevant research helps deepen the understanding of the influencing factors of fertility behavior and provides empirical support for the development of related theories. Secondly, the low fertility rate poses severe challenges to China's future economic and social development, and there is an urgent need to formulate effective policies to reverse the current situation. Clarifying the impact mechanisms of various factors on women's fertility intentions can provide references for formulating targeted fertility support policies. Finally, this research directly concerns the rights and quality of life of a large number of women. Seeking a balance between fertility policies, social values, and personal development is a practical dilemma faced by

contemporary Chinese women. The research helps to increase understanding of this group and promote the creation of a more inclusive and supportive social environment for women's development.

Although previous studies have involved the impact of fertility policies, feminism, education, employment, and other factors on fertility intentions, there are still some deficiencies. First, most studies focus on analyzing the impact of a single factor while ignoring the interaction between multiple factors and the relative importance of different factors' influences. Second, there is relatively little research on the impact of feminist values on fertility intentions, especially the discussion on the relationship between the changes in feminist ideas and fertility intentions in the Chinese context [5].

1.3. Research Questions

This study intends to explore the following three core questions through literature review and supplemented by in-depth interviews:

(1) How do changes in government fertility policies affect women's fertility intentions and values? China's decades-long family planning policy has largely shaped people's fertility concepts and formed the social norm of "fewer and better births." Existing evidence shows that the government has a significant impact on women's fertility intentions by influencing the cost of childbirth (such as fines or rewards), changing the orientation of public opinion, and affecting the accessibility of contraception [3, 6]. This study will systematically sort out the theoretical explanations of the relationship between policy changes and fertility intentions and compare and analyze the results of various empirical studies.

(2) In what aspects are the changes in Chinese women's feminist values reflected? How do these changes affect women's fertility intentions and decisions? With the improvement of education level and social status, Chinese women's awareness of gender equality has significantly increased, and the traditional role of "virtuous wife and good mother" has been challenged. Some studies have found that the awakening of feminist values makes women pay more attention to self-development, delay the age of marriage and childbearing, and reduce fertility intentions [5, 7]. On the other hand, the modernization of gender role concepts may also lead men to share more parenting responsibilities, thereby increasing fertility intentions. This study will combine literature and interview data to analyze the evolutionary characteristics of feminist ideas in the Chinese context and their relationship with fertility intentions.

(3) How do personal factors such as education, employment, income, and marriage affect women's fertility intentions? What role do the costs of raising children and opportunity costs play? A large number of studies have shown that women with higher education and higher income generally have lower fertility intentions, which may be related to the higher educational and employment opportunity costs they face [8]. Married women's fertility intentions are usually higher than those of unmarried women, but divorce has a negative impact

on fertility behavior. With socioeconomic development, the cost of children's education and upbringing continues to rise, which to a certain extent also reduces fertility intentions. Based on the literature, this study will further analyze the mechanisms by which various personal factors influence fertility intentions and the differences in their effects among different groups.

1.4. Research Methods

Literature review is the main method of this study. A systematic and comprehensive literature review helps to grasp the development context of the research topic, clarify the divergence of opinions and gaps in existing research, and lay the foundation for further in-depth research [9]. Literature reviews serve to pinpoint cutting-edge topics, compare diverse study findings, and hone theoretical perspectives. Nevertheless, they often depend heavily on research framework and data handling, and can be biased by selective literature choices. This study aims to mitigate these constraints through rigorous literature screening and comprehensive comparative analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Evolution and Impact of China's Fertility Policies

China's fertility policies have undergone several major adjustments. In 1979, to address issues such as overpopulation, unemployment, and poverty, China implemented a strict one-child policy. The policy stipulated that each couple was only allowed to have one child, which is estimated to have reduced the population by about 400 million. Entering the 21st century, faced with the challenges of declining fertility rates and an aging population, the government began allowing qualified couples to have a second child in 2013, and in 2016, the two-child policy was fully implemented [10]. However, the effect of increasing the fertility rate was not as expected. In 2021, the three-child policy was further introduced to encourage childbirth and alleviate the aging population. However, in reality, the proportion of those willing to have three children remains low [11]. It can be seen that the policy relaxation has not significantly increased the fertility level.

Fertility policies at different stages have had a complex impact on women's fertility intentions and decisions. Research has found that under the two-child policy, 16.2% of urban one-child families expressed their willingness to have a second child; while under the three-child policy, only 9.4% of two-child families were willing to have a third child, reflecting the limited incentive effect of the policy on having more children [12]. The impact on different groups varies. Factors such as urban-rural residence, income, education level, and medical insurance play important roles in the willingness to have a second child. A study targeting married women in Shanghai shows that women who are older, have an older first child, have a higher family income level, and face pressure from their children's education are more reluctant to have a second child. Those who have financial difficulties and face the pressure of raising children are more reluctant to have a third child [13]. It can be seen that personal

characteristics and family conditions significantly influence the effect of the policy. In general, despite the country's continuous adjustments to fertility policies, under the intertwined influence of multiple factors, low fertility intentions are difficult to reverse quickly in the short term, which remains a realistic challenge faced by the policy.

2.2. Feminist Values and Fertility Intentions

The development of Chinese feminist values has roughly gone through four stages. The first stage was the germination period in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. Influenced by Western feminist thoughts, Chinese intellectuals began to pay attention to women's rights, advocated gender equality, abandoned bad habits such as foot-binding and concubinage, and fought for the right to education [14]. The second stage was the socialist period. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, a series of women's liberation movements were carried out, establishing gender equality at the legislative level and significantly improving women's socioeconomic status, but at the same time, women's issues were used to consolidate the legitimacy of the regime [14, 15]. The third stage was since the reform and opening up. Influenced by the second wave of the Western feminist movement, Chinese women began to reflect on gender inequality and pursue self-development. Feminist research emerged in universities, covering topics such as employment, family, and sexuality, but overall, there was a clear tendency towards academic and elite orientations [14, 16]. The fourth stage is the Internet era, where young women actively participate in discussions on feminist issues and advocate for their rights through various social media platforms. The scope of concern has expanded, but there is a lack of organization and continuity, and challenges such as political control are also faced [17]. It can be seen that Chinese feminism has undergone an evolutionary process from enlightenment to development, and from official dominance to civilian awakening.

Feminist values have influenced women's views on childbirth, family, and career. In terms of childbirth, feminism emphasizes reproductive autonomy, opposes the simple view of women as "reproductive tools," advocates contraception and family planning, and the concept of small families is recognized among women. However, at the same time, motherhood is also a way for some women to realize their self-worth. With the development of assisted reproductive technology, some feminists also reflect on its control and alienation of women's bodies [18]. In terms of family, feminism criticizes the patriarchal concepts and gender division of labor in traditional families, advocates for equality between husband and wife, opposes confining women to family roles, advocates for the socialization of housework, and promotes the formulation of family policies [19]. In terms of career, feminism exposes gender discrimination and the "glass ceiling" in the workplace, fights for equal employment opportunities and equal pay for equal work for women, focuses on issues such as work-family balance, and

promotes the introduction of relevant laws and policies [20, 21]. The impact of these propositions varies among different groups. In general, highly educated and professional women are more likely to accept feminist ideas, delay childbirth, and pursue career development; while the fertility decisions of rural and less educated women are more influenced by traditional concepts. The gender equality awareness of the new generation of women is increasing, while the traditional concepts of the older generation are deeply rooted. At the same time, differences in the socio-cultural environment, such as urban-rural disparities and family planning policies, also affect the acceptance of feminist ideas [5, 22]. In summary, feminist values have promoted changes in women's concepts of childbirth and development, but they are significantly influenced by personal backgrounds and social environments.

2.3. Personal Interest Factors and Fertility Intentions

Personal factors such as women's education level, employment status, career development, and marital status influence fertility intentions through various mechanisms. Firstly, higher education provides women with more career opportunities and development space, but at the same time, it also increases the opportunity cost of childbirth and child-rearing. Therefore, highly educated women tend to delay childbearing and prefer fewer children. Education allows women to acquire more knowledge about reproductive health, improves their awareness and use of contraception, and thus better controls fertility [23]. Some studies estimate that for each additional year of education, women's fertility rates may decrease by 5%-10% [24, 25]. Secondly, employment status, especially full-time work, is often negatively correlated with fertility intentions. Professional women face the dual pressures of work and family, which may lead them to postpone childbearing. However, some studies have found that employment and increased income improve economic independence, thereby increasing the likelihood of childbearing among low-income women [26]. Furthermore, career pursuits and development plans are often considered important factors influencing fertility intentions. Women may deliberately delay childbearing during critical periods of their career development, and women in high positions may choose to have fewer children to maintain their competitiveness. Lastly, marital status is closely related to fertility. Marriage provides a material and spiritual foundation for childbearing, and the fertility intentions of married women are generally higher than those of unmarried women. However, the degree of support from partners, marital satisfaction, and the stability of the marital relationship also play important roles [27]. Generally, women grapple with the challenge of balancing fertility and career growth, with the significance of various factors depending on individual situations and settings.

Economic and opportunity costs of child-rearing significantly influence fertility decisions. For many families, particularly in a competitive educational climate, children's educational expenses represent a substantial

financial strain. A U.S.-based study indicated that high costs for childcare and education notably decrease fertility rates [28]. Likewise, escalating housing prices add to the financial load, as adequate living spaces for growing families become more costly. Increased female earnings may discourage fertility by escalating costs for education and housing. Conversely, strong child welfare and public services can mitigate these costs. Childbirth and childcare can disrupt women's career progress and limit advancement and earnings potential. This is particularly noticeable among highly educated and professional women [25]. The lack of supportive workplace policies, such as parental leave and flexible working hours, intensifies this issue. The effects vary across different income and occupational groups; low-income families often face higher direct costs for education, while high-income professional women may focus on career opportunities. Hence, economic support policies can lower the fertility-related expenses for low-income families, and provisions like maternity leave and childcare services can address the challenges encountered by professional women [29, 30]. In summary, the cost-benefit balance is an important consideration in fertility decisions, and economic and institutional support targeted at different groups can help realize fertility intentions.

2.4. Differences in Fertility Intentions among Women from Different Social Strata and Backgrounds

Socioeconomic status, such as income, occupation, and education level, influences fertility intentions through various channels. The general trend is that the higher the status, the lower the fertility intentions and number of children. Higher education and income strata face greater opportunity costs and thus tend to delay childbearing and have fewer children, focusing more on the "quality" of children. In contrast, groups with lower education and income are less constrained by career development, have relatively lower fertility costs, and thus have stronger fertility intentions [31]. Higher male socioeconomic status, like increased income, is linked with more children, highlighting gender differences. Women with elevated status have more economic and social resources, allowing access to reproductive technologies [32].

Fertility intentions are influenced by cultural factors such as urban or rural living, ethnicity, and religion, shaping fertility norms and behaviors. Studies indicate urban women generally want and have fewer children compared to rural women, due to differences in beliefs, education, and career opportunities. Rural parenting costs are typically lower, with children often providing more labor and security [33]. Ethnic backgrounds also significantly influence fertility perspectives, with unique traditional practices, family structures, and gender roles. Ethnic minorities often have higher fertility rates. Research on second-generation immigrant women in the U.S. shows that those with high-fertility heritage also tend to have more children, underscoring the role of cultural heritage in fertility. Religious beliefs also have a significant impact on fertility attitudes. Devout religious believers often hold pronatalist attitudes, oppose

contraception, emphasize the sanctity of childbearing, and thus have higher fertility intentions. A study targeting American college students found that the higher the level of religious devotion, the greater the ideal number of children, and the less influence from education and employment factors [34]. However, with social changes, the influence of religion is weakening. In addition, specific lifestyles, such as occupation type, working hours, and social circles, also influence perceptions of fertility risks and decision-making [35]. In summary, culture shapes the social context of fertility, causing women from different backgrounds to face specific fertility decision-making ecologies.

An overview of the existing literature reveals that the factors influencing Chinese women's fertility intentions are multi-level and dynamically changing. The interplay of fertility policies, feminist ideas, personal development demands, and socio-cultural environments creates specific fertility decision-making contexts for women of different periods and groups. Highly educated and professional women pursue self-development, have higher requirements for gender equality and family relationships, and face more challenges in balancing career and family. In contrast, the life pressures and traditional concepts of rural and less-educated women make their responses to fertility policies more complex. Intergenerational differences are growing, and the rise of gender consciousness in the new generation of women is diversifying fertility choices.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Literature Review

A vital part of research is a thorough search and review of literature around the study area. At its onset, the researcher should establish clear research questions and the right keywords [36]. Factors such as urban-rural backgrounds, ethnic diversity, and religious beliefs impacting women fertility intentions should be considered [37]. The primary databases to use to find and select information include Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ACM Digital Library, and IEEE Xplore.

When reviewing literature: it is necessary to pay attention to several points [38-41]: to the theoretical frameworks on the basis of which the scope and focus of the research was determined; to the research methods that would ensure that the findings are reliable and valid; to the features of the research sample, including its size, composition, and selection criteria; to the process of organizing and analyzing findings to detect the patterns and trends that would allow understanding the current state and future directions in the research area of the students. When judging the quality and contributions of a study, turn to the literature that provides strict methods and clear reporting and make the research more reliable and repeatable. Pay close attention to how thoroughly and effectively the theories and methods were used and what contribution they made to answering the research question. It is important to find studies that provided new insights or filled in the gaps or possibly revolutionized existing theories and practices. Also, it is important to evaluate

how well the authors reflected on the limitations of the latter and on possible directions for future research.

3.2. In-depth Interviews

When putting together interviews, it is very important to include key questions that match the research goals and insights learned from looking at the literature [42]. These questions should directly connect with the research aims to make sure data collection is focused. Also, any gaps or theoretical models found in the literature should be shown in the interview questions to help address current research problems. Using open-ended questions lets interviewees share their experiences and views, which helps to better understand the topic [43]. Although the interview framework should be organized, researchers must be ready to change questions based on how the interview goes and any feedback they get. It is also very important to think about how sensitive the questions are and how they will affect participants to maintain ethical standards [44].

The approach to organizing, coding and analyzing the interview data under qualitative research are central to obtain a deep insight into the research question. 'To look deeply into the patterns and themes from the literature', a researcher has to 'dive deeply into the results, developing concepts, acknowledge discrepancies, and use core inquiry techniques such as comparative analysis and sequence scanning' [45]. In conjunction with integrating the findings and re-analyzing the existing theories and themes from previous reviews, one can achieve a broad comprehension of the research inquiry. This approach also allows examining and filling the gaps and obtaining a new perspective for theoretical advancement.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Impact of Policy Changes on Women's Fertility Intentions

The literature and interview data suggest that changes in fertility policies lead to complex effects on women's reproductive goals and decisions. For example, moving from a one-child policy to encouraging larger families partly meets some women's reproductive wishes. However, these changes in reproductive policy do not entirely meet many women's reproductive wishes. An example would be how the shift from a one child policy to high fertility works to partly meet women's preferences. However, Zhu et al. found that these relaxed policies did not make significant improvements in fertility preferences and actual behaviors [46]. Its effects are not uniform across all categories, for example, between urban and rural women, at different levels of income and education. They are some hard to reverse factors, despite looser fertility rules.

The reasons that account for how the changes in fertility policy work to meet women's reproductive preferences are complex. They also operate through various channels. First, a feminist view would argue that more permissive fertility policies enable women's aspirations in other outcomes, such as personal and career growth, influencing their fertility desire. Second, other factors such as change

in work and sociocultural environment, including job opportunities and support for childbearing, and supportive policies such as parental leave and childcare provision, can alternatively operate [29, 30, 47]. The latter relieves women of work-family conflict and influences their fertility desire. Therefore, fertility policies work to satisfy women reproductive preferences through multiple pathways about their aspirations and the support environment.

4.2. The Influence of Feminist Values on Fertility Decisions

First of all, changes in feminist values have a significant impact on women's law and choices in terms of fertility, family, and career. Feminism supports women's autonomy of the organization of the reproductive process, advocates for access to contraception and family planning, and propagates small families – all of which make women consider their children a volitional rather than a forced choice [18]. Secondly, on the question of family structure, feminism is based on a critique of the sex-based division of labor, the idea of equality between partners, and provides a theoretical basis for women to free themselves from the limitations of the housekeeping and develop in any direction [19]. In addition, in the workplace, feminist efforts such as supporting equal pay and opposing gender discrimination have contributed to a fairer work environment for women [20, 21]. However, these influences vary at different life stages and social backgrounds. For example, highly educated and professional women are more likely to accept feminist ideas, delay childbearing, and pursue careers; while the fertility decisions of rural and less-educated women are more influenced by traditional concepts. The gender equality awareness of women from different generations also differs [22].

There is a complex interaction between feminist values and fertility decisions. On the one hand, the liberation of feminist ideas provides women with more possibilities for fertility choices; on the other hand, these choices are constrained by real-life conditions, such as the employment environment and family responsibilities [48]. In the tension between pursuing self-development and meeting social expectations, women often face dilemmas. For example, even if women have a strong career orientation, in the absence of sufficient fertility support, they may have to make the choice to sacrifice fertility [47]. Therefore, at the individual level, women need to seek a balance between fertility, family, and career pursuits; while at the social level, it is necessary to create an environment that is conducive to women's autonomous choices, encourages men to share household responsibilities, and provides necessary institutional guarantees for childbearing women. Only in this way can feminist values truly empower women's fertility decisions.

4.3. The Role of Personal Interest Factors and Cost Considerations in Fertility Choices

Personal interest factors such as education, employment, and income have a significant impact on

women's fertility choices through economic costs and opportunity costs. Firstly, higher education significantly increases women's career opportunities and income levels, but at the same time, it also increases the opportunity cost of childbearing and child-rearing. Women with higher levels of education tend to delay childbearing and have fewer children to balance career and family [24, 25]. Secondly, employment status, especially full-time work, is often negatively correlated with fertility intentions. Professional women experience the dual challenges of career and family, which may prompt them to delay having children [26]. Moreover, women focused on career advancement might choose to limit their fertility to progress further professionally. Generally, the importance of opportunity costs is more obvious among highly educated and professional women.

At the same time, the discussion above demonstrates that personal interests and cost determinants vary from social group to social group and from one cultural setting to another. The out-of-pocket costs, such as money on education or living space, matter a great deal for low-income families, while opportunity costs make their difference for high-income families [49]. Regarding academic studies, Riederer and Buber-Ennser [33] indicate that urban women have lower childbearing desire compared to rural due to educational and labor opportunities. Besides, women sometimes do not drop the fertility rate manifested in their ethnic backgrounds. In immigrant populations, women often simply maintain fertility rates from their home countries [50]. Different views on religion also have a clear impact on fertility attitudes [34, 51]. Altogether, personal interests and cost determinants are multi-faceted given varied socio-cultural contexts. Income differences, urban-rural gaps and ethnic aspects jointly affect women's fertility behaviors.

4.4. Differences in Fertility Intentions among Women from Different Social Strata and Backgrounds and the Reasons

The synthesis allows for combining previous findings on the issue of fertility and new data gathered from interviews to determine that women from various social layers exhibit differentiation fertility-wise. More specifically, a study of professional and non-professional Chinese women showed that the participation of professional women in the labor market leads to decreased rearing of the second child, which may hint at a limitation in fertility due to the heavy professional engagement [8]. At the same time, the study of Chinese mothers with one child discovered that the points of view of the mother, her husband, and their first child are of critical importance when choosing to raise another child, which means that the family dynamics may promote or limit fertility [52].

It is possible to consider these differences from different angles. On the one hand, economic factors of social disparity, such as income, job type, and level of education, directly influence women's activities from the perspective of cost-benefit analysis. Indeed, higher levels of education and income create greater opportunity costs that may influence women to postpone or prohibit fertility.

Cultural factors, such as the differences between urban and rural populations, minority customs and religion, social media, influence women indirectly by creating norms and values of reproduction. For example, the division of work and educational opportunities between urban and rural populations influences the fertility plans directly [33]. The same principle may be applied to the transmission of ethnic identity from one generation to the next that may influence various women in replicating the same fertility pattern [50]. Trust in society and the perception it provides is yet another crucial factor that impacts on how new media might decrease fertility by lowering the societal opinion [7]. Ultimately, the diversity in fertility intentions and activities among women could be determined by the combination of economic, cultural, and social factors.

4.5. Potential Coding Indicators and Themes

The themes identified from the interview data are major factors in fertility decisions, impact of the three-children policy, fertility difficulties, gender roles, and women emancipation. Factors affecting fertility decisions include changes in women's career paths, the impact of having children on family dynamics, and its effects on women's physical health, all of which discourage the desire to have three children. Notably, the most significant is the factor of career growth. As for the three-child policy's influence, economic considerations, peer opinions on childbearing, and pressure from elders prominently shape the fertility desires of those of childbearing age [46]. In terms of fertility challenges, factors such as women's age, the situation of existing children, and the costs of childbearing and education are closely related to the willingness to have a second and third child [12, 47]. In terms of gender roles and expectations, women with high gender equality place more emphasis on stable employment for both parties and require more institutional and policy support to balance work and childbearing [53]. Regarding women's empowerment, research has found that empowered women have relatively fewer ideal numbers of children, but the relationship between women's empowerment and fertility intentions is complex and multidimensional [54, 55].

These themes and coding indicators largely echo and complement the results of the literature review. The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the knowledge system in specific research fields, while through in-depth analysis of the interview data, subtle differences and potential connections in these fields can be further explored. For example, systematically sorting out the narratives of women's career development, changes in family status, and the impact of childbearing on women's physiology helps reveal the intricate personal and social motivations behind women's fertility intentions. Examining the relationship between gender role attitudes and fertility intentions in different socio-cultural contexts highlights the importance of adopting diverse perspectives and interdisciplinary methods in conducting research [53]. Moreover, enhancing women's empowerment is seen as a potential pathway to increase fertility intentions, but the

complexity of its mechanism also suggests that the relationship between women's empowerment and fertility should be viewed with caution [55]. In general, the themes and indicators presented by the interview data, on the one hand, confirm the theoretical insights of existing research, and on the other hand, provide directions and entry points for further exploration in subsequent research.

4.6. Research Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study only uses the literature review method, which may have some limitations. Firstly, although efforts are made to cover the core literature on the research topic, due to the limitations of search strategies and inclusion criteria, some important research results may inevitably be missed. Secondly, most of the reviewed literature consists of empirical studies, lacking a systematic review and thoughtful discussion of relevant theoretical frameworks. Methodological issues, particularly referring to conceptual definitions, measurement, sources of data, limit the effectiveness of comparison and synthesis. Therefore, the scope and thoroughness of future literature reviews could be improved while various theoretical insights and methods are incorporated. Both quantitative and qualitative review methodologies and those which permitted comparability, like meta-analysis would be feasible [9, 56].

Conclusively, it is very important and possible to add in-depth interviews to further study the problem. Whereas surveys represent a general portrait and do not fully disclose specific experiences and change processes. In-depth interviews would help to understand complex socio-cultural factors that influence fertility intentions. It would be also necessary to include in the study people of different social status, professional work, and stage of the life plan so that the data was comprehensive and representative. The research framework should resemble the one used in a literature review but being less structured to allow interviewees to communicate as much information as possible. Analysis of the interview data will involve techniques such as qualitative thematic coding and discourse and narrative analysis, as well as quantitative descriptive statistics which would be used to build validity and credibility of the findings. Finally, research reliability and validity include review and verification of the data, description of the research methodology on publications and peer review [57]. Interviews should confirm and expand assumptions made in the literary review. Thus, provides a strong push to theoretical development and practical interventions.

5. Conclusion

This research is on policy changes, feminist values, and personal cost-benefit thinking of Chinese women in terms of fertility intentions. However, even with the shift in policy from a one-child to a three-child policy, fertility rates, especially among urban, educated women, suggest that policy relaxation is not enough to produce substantial changes in reproductive behaviour. The evolution of feminist values has clearly influenced women's attitudes towards reproduction, family and career. For one,

increased gender equality and women and men wanting to pursue personal and professional growth means that marriages often happen later and couples want fewer, if any, children. The findings underscore the importance of supportive practices, including programmes for work-life balance and increased involvement of men in child-rearing. Individual factors such as education, employment and income have a significant impact on fertility intentions. High opportunity costs associated with higher education and professional careers impede fertility. Therefore, targeted economic and institutional support, such as affordable childcare and parental leave policies, are imperative in order to reduce these obstacles.

These results reinforce the necessity of adopting holistic approaches to be adapted in population policymaking. Policies that prove effective indefinitely will help prioritize economic, social and institutional support that can evoke differentiated avenues shaping these many needs and their consequent effects on fertility levels. This will foster a nurturing culture to aid women's development and improve fertility rates as well. Finally, this research contributes to an improved understanding of the multi-faceted determinants of fertility intentions in China and has implications for comprehensive population policies. Based on the results, future studies are advised to investigate these dynamics further, and employing more diverse methodologies and sampling across a wider demographic would be beneficial.

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