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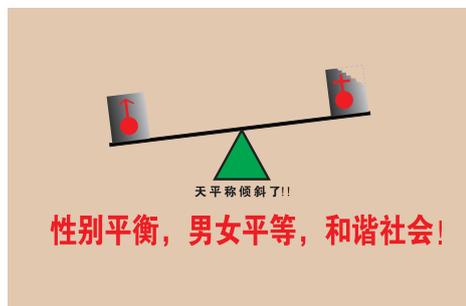
Addressing the imbalanced sex ratio at birth and realizing gender equality requires collective and persistent efforts from governments, international organizations, civil society and people from a variety of fields. The OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO joint interagency statement (2011) provides a series of recommendations for effective action that can be adopted based on China's unique context, including:

Legislation and Policy

-  Analyse the impact of laws and policies on gender equality
-  Formulate and implement policies and agreements (including village rules and regulations) targeting son preference, to ensure gender equality in inheritance, dowry, marriage and settlement systems, land distribution, pensions, individual safety, education and the determination of family name.
-  Strengthen policies to provide safe abortion services to the full extent of the law, and to ensure that both health-care providers and the general public know the legal status of abortion in the country, and how women can access safe and legal services.

Supportive Measures for Girls and Women

-  Improve girls and women's equal access to information, health care services and employment opportunities; ensure their personal security and raise their awareness of self-determination.
-  Ensure that high birth order girls (i.e., those born second, third or fourth in a family) have equal access to education and health services.
-  Short-term measures, such as providing incentives for families with daughters only, may help to increase the perceived value of girls, while longer-term efforts to change deep-rooted thinking and attitudes take effect.
-  Implement capacity development measures for women to encourage their participation in economic development.



Gender balance



Painting drawn by villagers: against prenatal sex identification

More Reliable Data and Monitoring and Evaluation

- ♀ The magnitude of gender-biased sex selection data from a variety of sources needs to be analysed in order to develop a more complete and consistent picture of the situation, that is, understand the scope of cases of fetal sex identification and sex-selective abortion for non-medical reasons. Micro-level or sub-national sex ratio at birth data should also be analysed, alongside an analysis of its interplay with socio-economic variables to help understand the factors that could lead to improvements.
- ♀ All the determinants and consequences of skewed sex ratio at birth must be addressed using different types of research, including qualitative studies that explore the contextual realities that underlie sex-selection motivations and practices, and their effects on different age and population groups.
- ♀ Monitor and evaluate interventions, and develop and use indicators for tracking change and the impact of interventions. Indicators should include not only the sex ratio at birth but also other markers of gender discrimination or gender inequality. Documenting and analyzing the reasons for the success and failure of specific and collective interventions must be part of this process.

Proper Use of Technology

- ♀ Promote proper technical management of fetal sex identification and sex selection services. Work with professional associations to develop guidelines that proscribe the use of technologies by unqualified people. The use of such technologies by unauthorized providers can be limited by requiring the licensing of practitioners and by prohibiting the advertising of sex-selection services.
- ♀ In addition to countering fetal sex identification and sex-selective abortion, avoid reinforcing gender discrimination. For example, eliminate regulations that women should only be able to access health care with spousal authorization. Also, avoid reinforcing inequality, for example, efforts to limit sex selection should not limit access to technology for health reasons by individuals due to their economic, social and/or geographical circumstances.
- ♀ Ensure women's access to safe abortion and other services. Efforts to manage or limit sex selection should not hamper or limit access to safe abortion services. This should be part of broader efforts to protect the right of women to have access to legitimate sexual and reproductive health technologies and services.

Advocacy, Communication and Community Mobilization

- ♀ Use all available media, particularly television and radio, to conduct advocacy and communication activities, to bring about greater consensus on the concepts of the equal value of girls and boys.
- ♀ Encourage the broadest possible participation from civil society to ensure appropriate activities; conduct systematic and rigorous assessments of the behavior-change impact of existing campaigns; governments, non-governmental organisations and other groups must ensure that media and other campaigns against sex selection do not jeopardize knowledge of – or access to – safe abortion services.
- ♀ Complement national-level activities with mutually reinforcing activities at the local level in order to fully engage communities. Particular attention should also be given to engaging health care professionals to ensure that they are fully aware of the issues around sex selection, and are in a position to act responsibly and in accordance with guidelines.



Wedding of matrilineal marriage

Yichang city in Hubei Province: Matrilineal Marriage and Diverse Marriage and Settlement ¹⁴

Background

Yichang city is located in Hubei province, which is among the provinces with the most imbalanced SRB in China. However, Yichang city itself is one of the few prefectures in Hubei province that has a normal SRB, and has remained stable and normal for more than 20 years.

Key strategies

Promoting diverse models of marriage and settlement, and exemplifying matrilineal marriage as the entry point of the new marriage style, to establish a marriage and reproduction culture in favor of gender equality.

Reinforcing the value that 'sons and daughters are equal': equal opportunities of employment and job promotion for men married into matrilineal families.

In practice, relevant government agencies guaranteed an equal land allocation policy to matrilineal families and patrilocal families based on the household registration system and land allocation procedures; married daughters who are registered in local households enjoy equal land rights as other permanent residents.

Results

As a result of years of interventions, traditional culture that once discriminated against husbands in matrilineal families has transformed to the common belief that sons and sons-in-law are equal, and that a harmonious family is very important. The SRB in Yichang has remained stable and normal for more than 20 years.



Amended village regulations

Dengfeng in Henan Province: Amending Village Regulations from a Gender Perspective ¹⁵

Background

Dengfeng is under the administration of Zhengzhou in Henan province. The imbalanced SRB in Dengfeng is a long-standing problem. In Dengfeng, 99 percent of villages adhered to patrilocal marriage customs to address resource distribution issues. These customs viewed men as permanent villagers, entitling them to many benefits such as housing land, farming land, farming subsidies and collective benefits; women, on the other hand, were regarded as temporary villagers with many limitations imposed on them. In March 2009, with the support of an expert team from the Women Studies Centre of the Central Party School, Zhoushan village in Daye township in Dengfeng launched the village regulation amendment pilot.

Key strategies

Terminating gender-biased provisions in the original village regulations, to ensure that male and female villagers (including vulnerable groups such as married-out women, divorced women, married-in husbands, etc.) enjoy equal rights to other villagers in terms of resource distribution issues;

Promoting acceptance of different marriage and settlement patterns; encouraging matrilineal



Happy moment



Poster of 'Care for Girls' action



marriage and other options in addition to the partilocal marriage model;

Encouraging women to participate in the management of village affairs; ensuring that women occupy a certain proportion of positions among village officials and villagers' representatives.

Results

More than 85 percent of villagers adhered to the revised regulations. Most villagers supported the new custom of matrilocal marriage. Women became motivated to participate in village affairs and their well-being has been improved. These changes have created favorable conditions for adult daughters taking care of their ageing parents, so that rural elders have more options apart from relying on sons to care for them during old age. Thus, in pilot villages, traditional concepts, customs and lifestyles in villages have undergone changes; new customs that promote men and women sharing housework, and new concepts on reproductive choice have changed as well. These practices in Dengfeng are now being scaled up to the whole country.

Chaohu City in Anhui Province: Improving the Survival Environment for Girls¹⁶

Background

Chaohu in Anhui province is located by the Yangzi River. Its economic development ranks medium in the country, but is below average in rural areas. Its economy relies on the manual labor force. These factors, together with the traditional patrilineal system and Confucian culture, have placed girls in unfavorable living conditions. In order to combat discrimination against female children, with the technical support of the expert team from Xi'an Jiaotong University, Chaohu launched the 'Experimental Zone for Improving Girl Child Survival Environment' project.

Key strategies

Conducting village-based antenatal follow-up visits for women and female infants to ensure the safety and health of female infants.

Making favorable policies for girls in education, healthcare and resource distribution.

Reforming and introducing innovations to the rural elderly support and provision model that promote the senior people's care by society and by family members such as daughters and son-in-law to lighten the burden for families who would otherwise rely on adult sons to take care of their elderly parents.

Conducting promotion and advocacy activities among stakeholders, to promote gender equality and encourage male involvement.

Promoting matrilineal marriage, and creating a social environment whereby 'daughters can also take care of elderly parents'.

Conducting training for good models promoting the equal status of women to men and developing women's economic empowerment.

Results

After 10 years of activities, the living environment for girls has significantly improved in Chaohu; the high SRB has been curbed, and has stabilized around 110 males per every 100 females from 2008 to 2010.

Yancheng of Henan Province: Social Policy Innovations from a Gender Perspective¹⁷

Background

Yancheng district is located in southern Henan province. In terms of economic development and family planning, Yancheng ranks in the middle for the province. Yancheng was one of the first pilot counties that took part in the 'Care for Girls' Action in China. While some progress was made after the first pilot cycle, the SRB remained higher than normal. In 2006, with technical support from the Population and Development Research Institute of Xi'an Jiaotong University, and the organization and coordination efforts of the family planning sector at all levels, the Yancheng government began efforts to improve and innovate relevant social policies addressing the imbalanced SRB.

Key strategies

Policy initiatives: Yancheng has established a 'Seven Guarantees' policy system, which is based on the principle of gender equality and takes a people-centered approach. Its aim is to improve the survival environment of female children, to raise the social status of women and to effectively address high SRB. The 'Seven Guarantees' policy includes benefits and incentives for girls and their families in seven areas, including pension, health services, living conditions, education support, employment, reproduction support and rights protection/gender equality.

In order to ensure the implementation of the policies, the Yancheng government established four working mechanisms, including accountability mechanisms for local party and government leaders, financial support mechanisms, project monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and gender equality examination mechanisms.

Results

These policy initiatives and their implementation have effectively improved the economic and social status of families with female children, and the survival environment of female children has been largely improved. Traditional cultural beliefs that value men over women, the role of men in carrying on family names and men's responsibility for caring of their parents in old age care have all been changed. People's attitudes toward reproduction have been altered. In addition, women's economic empowerment has been strengthened and their social status has been visibly enhanced.

16. See Xi'an Jiaotong University, 2011

17. See Li, 2011



The sex ratio imbalance has received increasing attention in China. The Chinese government has adopted and carried out a series of policies, laws and strategic actions to address the skewed sex ratio at birth in order to improve the survival of female children, enhance women's status, and promote gender equality.



Relevant Laws and Policy Documents

- ♀ In 1986, the National Family Planning Commission and the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China issued a joint *Notice on Prohibition of Arbitrary Fetal Sex Identification*, which put the issue of imbalanced sex ratio at birth on the agenda of the Chinese government.
- ♀ After 1990, NPFPC, the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China, the State Food and Drug Administration and other ministries of the People's Republic of China, either independently or jointly, promulgated a series of administrative regulations to prohibit fetal sex identification and sex-selective pregnancy termination for non-medical purposes.
- ♀ In the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Maternal and Infant Care* (1994) and the *Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China* (2001), passed by the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, fetal sex identification and sex-selective pregnancy termination for non-medical purposes were declared illegal.
- ♀ In 2005, the State Council of the People's Republic of China issued the *Action Plan for Extensively Unfolding of the Care for Girls Action and Comprehensively Addressing the Issue of Abnormally High SRB*, and in 2006, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council of the People's Republic of China promulgated the *Decision on Fully Enhancing Population and Family Planning Programme and Comprehensively Addressing Population Issues*. The two documents marked a new stage for the Chinese government to address the skewed sex ratio at birth in a more comprehensive manner.

Strategic Actions

- During 2000–2003, the government of Chaohu city in Anhui province carried out the innovative ‘Chaohu Experimental Zone for Improving Girl Child Survival Environment’ project, which explored basic elements of the national ‘Care for Girls’ Action.
- During 2003–2005, NPFPC piloted the ‘Care for Girls’ Action in 24 counties in 24 provinces that have an extremely high imbalanced SRB. The intervention was focused on six key areas: combating illegal fetal sex identification, combating sex-selective induced abortion as well as infanticide and abandonment of girls; providing quality integrated family planning and maternal health services; strengthening advocacy; developing benefit-oriented social policies; improving the management and evaluation and enhancing capacity of local leaders.
- In 2006, the State Council of the People’s Republic of China officially launched the nationwide ‘Care for Girls’ Action, setting up an experimental “Five-in-One” working mechanism that integrates advocacy, benefit-oriented social policies, family planning and maternal health services, combating non-medical sex determinations and sex-selective abortions, and management and evaluation system, actively promoting effective measures such as amending gender-biased provisions in village regulations and monitoring registration of newborn babies.

Strategic Plans

- The Chinese government has established strategic goals and plans for addressing the imbalanced SRB from 2006 to 2020, with key strategic stages every five years. The three stages are to curb, to bring about a decline and finally to stabilize SRB at a normal rate. It is expected that these strategic goals and plans will fundamentally address the issue of imbalanced SRB and promote gender equality in China.
- Since 2006, within five years, the Chinese government has conducted large interventions addressing the high SRB, and has made some achievements. The SRB in China was 119.45 in 2009, and declined to 117.94 in 2010, indicating that the high SRB has been curbed and the goal of the first stage has basically been reached.
- The Chinese government will continue working on the intervention to bring the SRB down to below 115 by 2015.



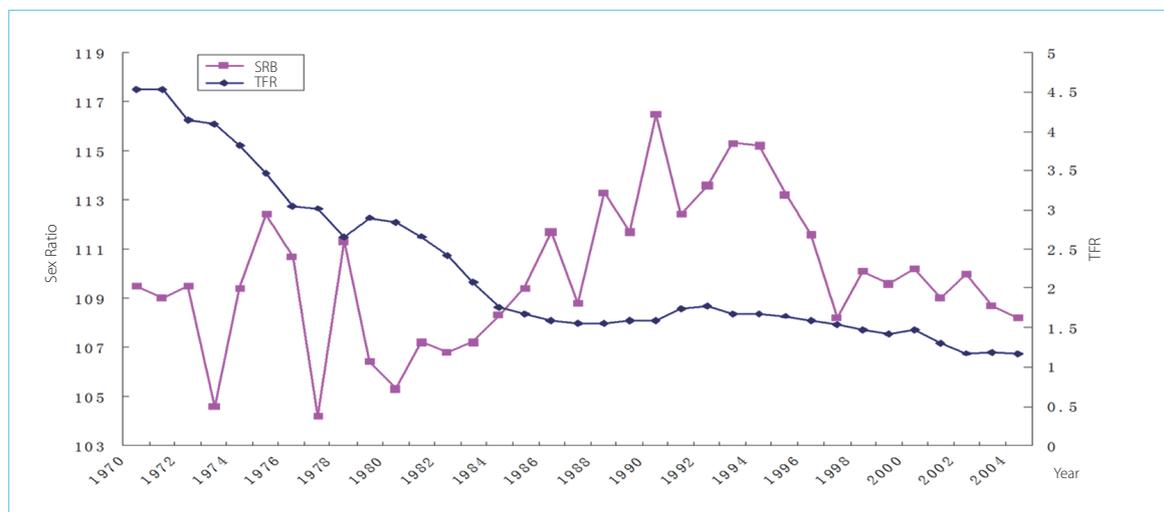
Poster of 'Care for Girls' Action: care for girls, care for the future of the nation.



The Sex Ratio at Birth and Fertility Level in the Republic Of Korea

♀ The once highly imbalanced sex ratio at birth in the Republic of Korea has been basically reversed. As shown in figure 5, the SRB in the Republic of Korea fluctuated between 105 and 111 in the 1970s, with an average of around 109; it then declined to 105.4 by 1980. Since the 1980s, the total fertility rate (TFR, the average number of children a woman will have over her lifetime) in Republic of Korea declined rapidly from 2.83 to 1.59 in 1990, during which period the SRB continuously increased from 107.2 in 1981 to its peak of 116.5 in 1990. Since the 1990s, the skewed sex ratio at birth has been effectively curbed, with an annual decline since the mid-1990s: it dropped to 113.3 in 1995; to 110.2 in 2000; and recently to around 108 (Li, Wei and Ren, 2010).

Figure 5 Fluctuation in sex ratio at birth and total fertility rate in the Republic of Korea (1970 – 2004)



Source: Li, Wei and Ren, 2010

Intervention Experiences in the Republic of Korea

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In 1987, the Republic of Korea amended its Medical Service Law, which prohibits fetal sex identification and sex selective abortion; advocacy activities were simultaneously widely conducted. People's views and attitudes toward fetal sex identification and sex selective abortion changed within a short period.
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The Republic of Korea also introduced policies to ensure women's rights to employment. The government made efforts to increase employment opportunities and improve the economic status of women through awarding and certifying enterprises for providing 'equal employment opportunities for men and women', subsidizing enterprises that recruit female employees in their child-bearing years and implementing a plan offering bonuses during maternity leave.
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To raise awareness on gender equality among the general public, the government broadcast sex education programmes, published information in magazines targeting women, and mainstreamed gender equality training into curricula in primary schools, middle schools and universities.
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In 2001, the Republic of Korea formally established the Ministry of Gender Equality, which is responsible for making policies that protect the rights of women from the national level, integrating resources and coordinating government departments to promote gender mainstreaming in society (Yang and Li, 2009).

Interagency Statement

♂ On 14 June 2011, OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO issued the interagency statement *Preventing Gender-biased Sex Selection* in response to the serious sex imbalance problem in some South Asian, East Asian and Central Asian countries. The statement offers an in-depth analysis on imbalanced sex ratio at birth, including reasons for sex selection and existing responses; it also provides recommendations for follow-up actions (OHCHR et al., 2011).

UNFPA's Response in China

♀ UNFPA China is very concerned about the issue of sex ratio at birth, and is supporting interventions from the demographic perspective, from the gender and rights-based perspective, as well as from the reproductive health service delivery perspective.

Preventing gender-biased sex selection

An interagency statement
OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO





Gender sensitization training workshop in Dengfeng



UNFPA China publications on gender

- From the demographic perspective, UNFPA China is supporting data collection from three of the ten provinces in China that have the highest imbalanced SRB, in order to provide evidence for developing strategies for interventions aimed at addressing imbalanced SRB.
- From the perspective of gender equality and rights protection, UNFPA China is supporting the development of promotional materials that target gender stereotypes and promote the value of girls; UNFPA China cooperates with National

Population and Family Planning Commission of the People's Republic of China (NPFPC) in its seventh Country Programme (2011-2015) to explore intervention models in Changfeng of Anhui province, Jingan of Jiangxi province and Wugong of Shaanxi province that response to imbalanced SRB. Through promoting amendment of gender-biased village regulations and conducting gender sensitization activities within the Chinese Communist Party School system, the interventions aim to promote long-term advancement of gender equality. UNFPA and NPFPC together with the Central Party School are also making efforts to include gender equality cause modules into the curriculum of Chinese Communist Party schools, with the aim of having long-term effects on policymaking on SRB interventions.

- From the perspective of reproductive health services provision, UNFPA prioritizes awareness raising among stakeholders on the impacts of imbalanced SRB to promote effective local community empowerment and support pilot interventions.
- UNFPA China also cooperates with other UN agencies, including UN Women and UNICEF, to develop a joint strategic framework on imbalanced SRB interventions.
- In the Asia Pacific region, UNFPA China works with countries such as Vietnam and India to prevent gender-biased sex selection in order to reverse the highly imbalanced SRB.

Normally, the consequences of an imbalanced sex ratio at birth would not be immediately evident; rather, it would gradually be revealed over a generation. Were the current SRB to return to normal, the impact of the previously imbalanced SRB would continue to last for a long time, rather than immediately be resolved.

The imbalanced SRB in China emerged in the early 1980s and has continued for about 30 years, and the impact has gradually become obvious. China is now undergoing a series of social problems caused by the imbalanced SRB, which will have long-term significant impacts on future populations and social development.

Demographic Consequences

Imbalanced population structure

The most direct consequence of the imbalanced SRB is an imbalanced sex structure of the population. It is estimated that from 1980 to 2011, the total number of births in China were 628 million. Among this total number, 21–33 million females are 'missing' (Yuan, 2012).

Escalating population ageing

The female deficit resulted in a further decline in fertility, which will subsequently intensify population ageing. This will impose a heavy burden on future socio-economic development in China (Li, Jiang and Feldman, 2006).

Reduction of the labour force

The female deficit and decline in fertility will cause a reduction in the labour force, thus impeding long-term sustainable socio-economic development (Li, Jiang and Feldman, 2006).

Sociological Consequences

Rights of women

SRB imbalance due to discrimination against women firstly violates the rights of girls and women, including their rights to subsistence, participation and development; furthermore, due to the loss of marriageable women and the squeezed marriage market, adult women may be increasingly positioned as 'wife', 'sex partner' or 'reproduction tool', which may foster forced marriage and trafficking of women and girls, and a rise in sexual violence against women and girls. All of these threaten the safety of women and girls (Yang, Attané, Li and Zhang, 2012; Li and Jin, 2012).



Marriage market imbalance

It is estimated that since 2010, about 10 percent of males in China may never get married due to the shortage of females; and this occurrence is intensifying (Jin, Guo, Liu and Li, 2010). As a result, marriageable men in poor rural areas, who are in the most disadvantaged position for spouse selection due to the high imbalance in SRB, may suffer the consequences of the imbalanced sex structure in China's population, which may impact their psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Li, Zhang, Yang and Attané, 2010).

Impacts on social stability and public security

Men at marriageable age who are disadvantaged in the marriage market lack effective social support, and are at high risk of committing illegal activities, which may negatively impact social stability (Li, Zhang, Yang and Attané, 2010). These men also lack stable sex lives, which could lead to unprotected sex and vulnerability to STIs including HIV, which is a risk to public health (Jiang and Li, 2009).

The above consequences will not be conducive to the principle of a 'harmonious society'.

Causes of SRB Imbalance in China¹³

2

Root Causes: Culture and Systems of Son Preference

The patrilineal family system in both traditional and contemporary Chinese society gives men a dominant status in the family and/or in social matters such as property inheritance, residential arrangements, family succession and power over women in the family. Moreover, patrilocal marriage has been the dominant form of traditional marriage in China, which determines that sons, not daughters, be the supporters of parents during their old age. This is especially true in rural areas of China. In addition, Chinese Confucianism-based traditional culture emphasizes the importance of having sons. These practices constitute root causes of son preference in Chinese families.

Demographic and Socio-economic Factors

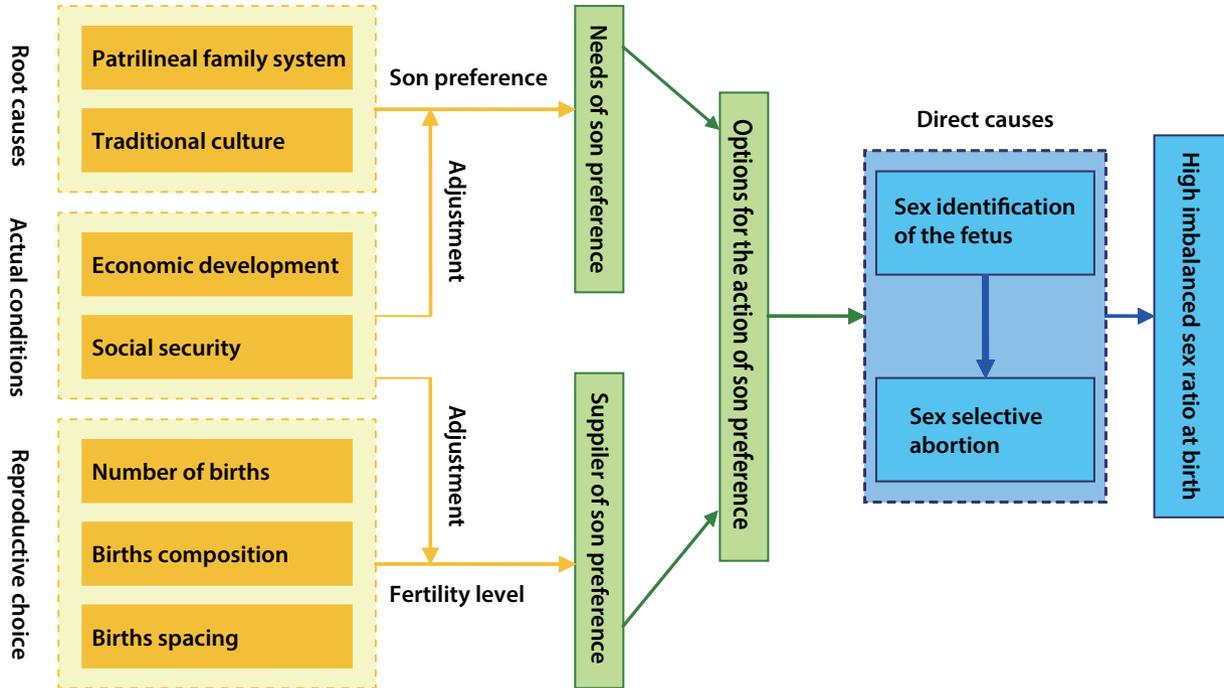
Some important demographic and socio-economic factors have also stimulated and intensified son preference. During the last 20 years, the fertility rate in China has rapidly declined, with the total fertility rate dropping below replacement level. In populations with strong son preference, a major drop in fertility is often followed by a rise in imbalanced sex ratio at birth. Further, China is a developing country in a transitional stage, with the social security system not fully developed in urban areas and even less developed in rural areas. Women do not have equal opportunities to men in education, employment and participation in political affairs. The gender aspect is often missing or neglected in the formulation and implementation of policies for socio-economic development. All these factors not only contribute to the lower social, economic and political status of Chinese women, but also to the idea of son preference in China.

Direct Causes: Sex Selection for non-medical Reasons and Illegal Abortion

Since the 1980s, ultrasound B machines have gradually become accessible and affordable to Chinese families, making it possible to identify the sex of a fetus. While sex selection for non-medical reasons was made illegal in 1994, the practice continues. This directly led to an increase in sex-selective abortions, and consequently resulted in the skewed sex ratio at birth.

The main causes of the imbalanced sex ratios in China are complicated and manifested in varied patterns in different periods and areas.

Figure 4 The mechanism leading to the emergence of imbalanced sex ratio at birth



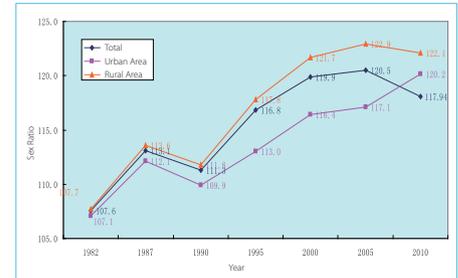
Sex Ratio at Birth in China⁷



Sex Ratio at Birth in China: Urban and Rural Areas

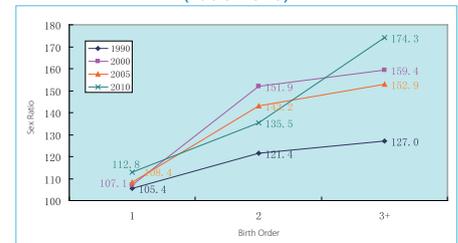
As shown in figure 1, imbalanced SRB in China has grown continuously over the past 30 years, from 107.6 male live births per 100 females in 1982 to 120.5 in 2005, with a slight drop in 2010 to 117.94⁸. The SRB in rural areas is significantly higher than that in urban areas. In rural areas, SRB reached 122.9 in 2005 and 122.1⁹ in 2010. SRB is also rising rapidly in urban areas from 109.9 in 1990 to 117.1 in 2005 and even to 120.2¹⁰ in 2010.

Figure 1 Sex ratio at birth in China: urban and rural areas (1982-2010)



Source: State Council and National Bureau of Statistics, 1985, 1988, 1993, 2002, 2007 and 2012; China National Sample Survey Office, 1997

Figure 2 Sex ratio at birth by birth order (1990-2010)



Source: State Council and National Bureau of Statistics, 1993, 2002, 2007 and 2012

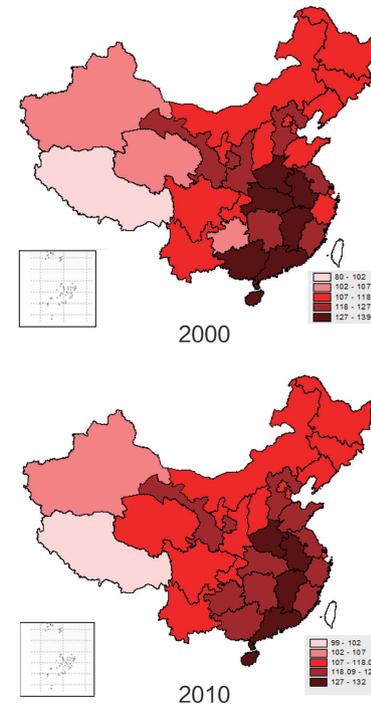
Figure 3 Sex ratio at birth by province in China, 2000 and 2010

Sex Ratio at Birth by Parity

The high SRB imbalance in China mainly results from the abnormal SRB of second or subsequent births. As shown in figure 2, in 1990, the SRB of firstborns was normal, while the SRB imbalance of second, third or subsequent births were high. In 2000, the SRB imbalance of secondborns reached 151.9, and that of third or subsequent births exceeded 159. Compared to 2000, the SRB of second or subsequent births dropped slightly in 2005, yet the SRB of firstborns reached 108.45¹¹. The SRB of secondborns in 2010 declined slightly compared to 2000 and 2005, yet the SRB of firstborns and the SRB of third or subsequent births rose.

Geographical Variation of Sex Ratio at Birth in China

As shown in figure 3, with regard to the overall provincial difference in SRB, according to the population census conducted in 2000, provinces with SRB above 118 mainly centered in east and south areas of Yellow River, among which the SRB rates in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Jiangxi, Anhui, Hubei and Hunan were higher than 127. The basic situation of provincial difference in SRB in 2010 was similar to that in 2000, however there has been a tendency that the gaps among different provinces has been narrowed down with the overall increase of SRB in most provinces, especially in those provinces that had relatively lower SRB¹².



Source: Wang, 2012