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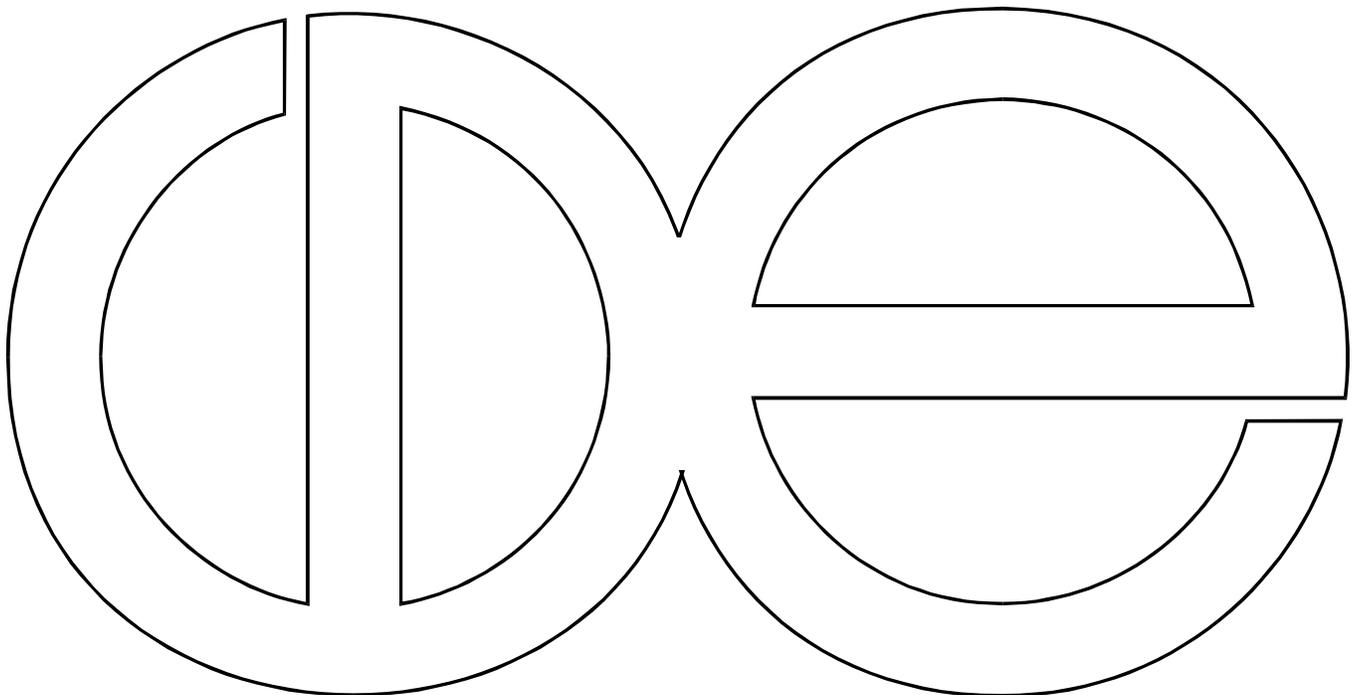
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**Has the Chinese Birth Planning Program
Been Successful in Changing Fertility Preferences?
Evidence from Linked Records in Four Counties
in Rural Northern China**

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Abstract

The success of the Chinese One-Child policy and its rural adaptations in changing reproductive behavior and bringing about a dramatic fertility decline is unquestionable. However, an important but as yet unanswered question is the extent to which the strict implementation of such policies over the past two decades has been successful in changing fertility preferences. Using data from two overlapping surveys conducted in four counties of rural China in 1991 and 1994, we assess the validity of fertility preferences against subsequent reproductive behavior and explore the conditions under which the move towards wanting no more children occurs. Our results suggest that the acceptance of policy-sanctioned family size partly follows the development gradient and partly reflects the degree of policy enforcement. High acceptance occurs in the most urban and industrialized county and in the county with the most rigid family planning program. Conversely, acceptance is weak among women living in the poorest county and in the county where policy enforcement is most lenient and flexible. These findings have important implications for the future of Chinese fertility in the absence of strict policies and their enforcement.

Introduction

China's crude birth rate has been halved in less than three decades, dropping from 33 to 16 per 1,000 between 1970 and 1998 (State Statistical Bureau 1998). Most of this decline occurred during the 1970s (Coale 1984; Feeney, Wang, Zhou, and Xiao 1989), with the “later, longer, fewer” (*wan xi shao*) campaign (Blayo 1997, pp. 155-166), the less coercive precursor of the One Child policy. Although the economic and social underpinnings of this fertility transition may already have been in place (Greenhalgh 1988), the pace of decline in rural areas owed much to the “awesome strength” of the *wan xi shao* campaign (Lavelly and Freedman 1990, p. 365).

Some observers believe that the post-1979 Chinese family planning policy was therefore unnecessary (Sen 1997) or only of transitory importance (Scotese and Wang 1995). We think that this minimizes the demographic impact of the One Child policy and its successors.¹ The Chinese government is hoping to raise living standards by quickly containing population growth. It views as insufficient fertility that is “moderately low” (Greenhalgh 1992, p. 26) or “not materially different” (Sen 1997, p. 15) from a period Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 2.0 (Wang 1996, p. 67; Blayo 1997, pp. 167-170; Hua 1980). A “minimum need” of one son and one daughter (Greenhalgh 1992) implies a cohort TFR of 2.5, even if no couple has more than three children. This compares with

¹We distinguish between the *policy*—the woman-specific limits on fertility and the lengths the government is willing to go to see that these limits are maintained—and the universally “legitimate” aspects of the family planning program, such as information, education, and communication campaigns, and the provision of free or subsidized contraception and gynecological services. Although this distinction is not made by those authors who are skeptical of the efficacy and necessity of the family planning policy, we suspect that most would concede the utility of the legitimate aspects of the family planning program, if only as mechanisms by which couples can put low fertility preferences into practice (Bongaarts 1997).

the TFR of 1.5 implied by the One-Son-Two-Child policy now common in rural areas. This policy allows rural couples to have two children if the first born is a girl, provided they wait several years and the mother is of sufficient age (Li 1995; Tu 1995, p.170; Feng and Hao 1992).

The difference in a fertility goal of “something over one” versus “something over two” is tremendous (Feeney *et al.* 1989, pp. 315-317). It implies acceptance of the extinction of the (male) lineage in a quarter of all families and a crushing intra-familial burden of inter-generational support. The Chinese government and family planning officials are sensitive to the difficulty of reaching below-replacement-level fertility in rural areas. When policies were relaxed in the mid-1980s, fertility increased as couples with a recent first birth quickly progressed to a second birth (Luther, Feeney, and Zhang 1990); both policy and program were quickly tightened up (Hardee-Cleveland and Banister 1988). Economic and social change has reduced the demand for children, but the very low levels of fertility that were reached in the 1990s primarily reflect programmatic effort and demands (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994; Feeney and Wang 1993).

The effectiveness of the Chinese family planning policy in stimulating rapid change in fertility behavior and maintaining below-replacement-level fertility in many rural areas is due to a pervasive bureaucracy that mobilized or intimidated the whole population—from the village upward—in the service of birth limitation. The One Child policy was implemented with economic and administrative incentives for one-child families, but also penalties for couples having out-of-plan births (Hardee-Cleveland and Banister 1988; Aird, 1986) and for cadres failing to meet quotas for family planning work

(White 1991). This policy was very successful in urban areas. In rural areas, however, it involved accommodations to the strong preference for a son (Greenhalgh and Li, 1995) through the introduction of the One-Son-Two-Child policy.

The Chinese government is showing further willingness to ameliorate the negative impact of the coercive aspects of its family planning program through better quality contraceptive and reproductive health services (Population Council 2000; Gu 2000, Simmons *et al.* 2000), the extension of personal choice regarding which contraceptives to use, and the abolition of annual birth planning *quotas* for administrative jurisdictions, now taking place in conjunction with programs sponsored by the United Nations Fund for Population Activity (UNFPA 1997). The Chinese are hesitant, however, to relax, even experimentally, couple-specific fertility limitations (the *policy*, as distinct from annual quotas); they fear an increase in fertility similar to that during the previous easing of policy in the mid-1980s (Luther *et al.* 1990). Although the One Child policy has been successful in changing reproductive *behavior* to levels below what people really want, as reflected by measures of fertility preferences (Freedman 1997; Thomas 1995), the government is concerned that the current family planning policy and its implementation have not sufficiently squelched the latent demand for children, especially in rural areas (*cf.* Lively 1997).

Yet the One Child policy and its rural adaptation have now been in place for two decades, at a time when even rural China has been strongly affected by massive liberalization in the economic realm. This has led to a greater commodification and monetarization of everyday life—a process implicated worldwide in the change from high to low fertility (Caldwell 1976; Freedman 1979; Mason 1997). Changes in rural

areas include de-collectivization, diversification of the village economy into industry and commerce, rapid loss of arable land to population growth and state-run construction projects, and growing awareness that agricultural income can be heightened by improving technological inputs. These factors have convinced couples of the benefits of fewer, higher “quality” children, although they have not weakened the motivation for at least one son (Greenhalgh *et al.* 1994). In urban areas, the rise of petty capitalist activities among women is changing society’s and households’ expectations about roles and obligations of women and children, thus increasing support for birth limitation and acceptance of the limit imposed by the one-child policy (Gates 1993).

To these structural changes and conditions should be added the very persistence of the One-Child policy and its rural adaptations: It is now in its third decade. A generation of young people has grown up in its thrall. Memory of alternative choices and policies must be fading. In a social and political environment in which a continual theme has been the subordination of individual goals to those of the collectivity (Lee and Wang 1999), we should not dismiss out of hand the possibility that acquiescence is in the process of shading into acceptance. To what extent has the strict implementation of the program over the past two decades been successful in changing fertility preferences (Freedman 1997)? Is the coercive program, which limits the number of children Chinese women can have, still necessary?

Fertility Preferences in China: The Available Evidence

In the 1970s, rural couples wanted two sons and a daughter (Parish and Whyte 1978). In their review of surveys conducted in rural and suburban areas of nine Chinese

provinces between 1982 and 1985, Whyte and Gu (1987) found that a two-child family (one boy, one girl) was the most common preference. Choe and Tsuya (1991) analyzed a 1985 survey of rural Jilin and found that female respondents reported a mean ideal number of children of 1.95. In her studies of three villages in Shaanxi province, Greenhalgh and colleagues (1994, pp. 381-382) found that, by the early 1990s, preference for one son and one daughter had replaced a preference for one child of each sex *or* two sons, as reported by the same respondents when interviewed in 1987. This change was attributed to the rising cost of sons, who require a new house when they get married, and a growing sense that a daughter would help support her parents in old age. From a small 1992 survey and in-depth interviews conducted with Beijing and Shenyang women, Milwertz (1997) concluded that *urban* Chinese women understand the ideology of population control and accept demographic targets promoted by the state. They accept the one-child policy norm about family size and forego their own two-child family norm, at least in response to questions about fertility preferences worded to incorporate the perspectives of the individual, the family, and the state.

Two studies suggest that Chinese women underreport their fertility preferences, to conform to politically correct reproductive behavior—a sensible strategy in a country where out-of-plan pregnancies are penalized by fines or mandatory abortions, and memories remain of the disastrous impact on individuals of past political campaigns. Hermalin and Liu (1990) found that a data collection method that guaranteed confidentiality—the anonymous mail-back of questionnaires—yielded higher reports of desired family size than did traditional face-to-face interviewing. The difference was half a child (1.8 versus 2.3) in Shanghai in the mid-1980s. Wang (1990) obtained a similar

result for the same period based on a survey he conducted in a county in Sichuan province. The response to a direct question on family size preference yielded a mean of 1.7, as compared with an adjusted estimate of 2.1 based on preferences revealed from forced choices between pairs of family types.

Do any of these numbers have any meaning in contemporary China? Is fertility related at all to desire for children? How has the government family planning policy influenced these desires? Repeated surveys allow one to assess the degree to which expressed intentions are consistent with subsequent reproductive behavior (Freedman, Hermalin and Chang 1975; Westoff 1981), and vice versa. In this paper, we make use of a unique data set consisting of linked records across two surveys fielded in 1991 and 1994. These surveys were conducted for the project “Introducing New Contraceptives in Rural China” (INCRC) in four rural counties of Northern China. In both surveys, women were asked how they felt about the number and sex composition of their children, and the number and sex composition they would want for their family in the absence of the family planning policy. These data allow us to assess the construct validity of fertility preferences against subsequent fertility behavior and to observe changes in preferences, either because the original desires are satisfied by a subsequent birth experience, or because of a change of heart—of compliance with, or acceptance of, the policy, in the face of previous wishes.

Study Design and Data

The INCRC project was a field experiment conducted by the State Family Planning Commission of China with technical input from universities in China and

abroad. The primary purpose of the study was to assess the possibility of relaxing total state control of reproductive decision-making by offering women a choice of contraceptives, including new methods (Norplant) and superior versions of existing methods (Copper-T rather than single ring IUDs). An attempt was also made to improve the service orientation of family planning workers. The experimental component of the project included the assignment of these new “inputs” to rural townships chosen at random from a larger number of townships selected by means detailed below. Townships not selected to receive improved contraceptives, *etc.*, served as controls.

The analyses in this paper, however, do not draw on the experimental design of the INCRC project. First, differences between treatments and controls were vanishingly few, although the INCRC study did record much change not associated with the randomly assigned treatments. Second, variables on which we condition in the analyses below—for example, family size preferences—were measured *prior* to the assignment of townships to treatment and control basis. Although it is conceivable that subsequent fertility histories, attitudes, *etc.* could be influenced differentially by experimental inputs (or lack thereof), respondents to the surveys are randomly distributed with respect to treatment or control status. Thus experimental treatment effects (if any) cannot account for subsequent attitudinal differences between, for example, respondents with one boy in the initial survey and those with one girl.

The Baseline Survey was conducted in December 1991 (Tu, Hereward, Qiu and Ni 1992; Tu and Hereward 1992), before the implementation of the experimental features of the INCRC project. The Follow-up Survey was conducted in July 1994 (Tu and Hereward 1994), after the experimental changes had been in place for between two and

two-and-a-half years. Both surveys involved complex, multi-stage samples (Smith 1999). (Tables presented below are thus adjusted to reflect sampling weights and design effects.) The target population for the Baseline Survey was married women under the age of 35; for the Follow-up survey, married women under the age of 38. This ensured that all birth cohorts represented in the Baseline Survey were also represented in the Follow-up Survey.

There were 24 randomly selected townships in the study, six from each of four purposively selected counties. Administrative records were used to create a demographic and contraceptive surveillance system for all married women of reproductive age in all 24 study townships (Smith, Tu, Merli, and Hereward 1997). This surveillance system provided the sampling frame for the Follow-up survey.

There were 192 randomly sampled (from within townships) villages in the Baseline Survey, 120 in the Follow-up Survey. The Baseline Survey yielded an n of 8,603, the Follow-up Survey an n of 11,759. In these settings, non-response, *i.e.*, refusal to be interviewed is not a viable option, so sample selection is tantamount to inclusion.

The Follow-up Survey was designed to overlap 25% of the Baseline Survey villages, yielding $n=2,735$ women interviewed in both surveys. In most of the analyses below using records linked across the two surveys, we have limited our sample to the 85% ($n=2,323$) of these records where we are most confident that linkages have been done correctly.

The four counties (two in Hebei province, two in Shandong) participating in the INCRC study were purposively selected.² Any population inference above the county level must rely on extra-probabilistic criteria (*e.g.*, Sudman 1983, pp. 154-163; Kish 1987, pp. 27-31). “The criteria for the selection of the four counties were that they have an average family planning performance and that they be representative of the provinces’ socioeconomic and geographic diversity” (Tu 1995, p. 170). They were also supposed to represent “the kind of model in family planning that the government has been trying to promote” (Tu 1993, p. 1). Rather than bemoan that the four counties were not randomly selected, we have made a virtue of a necessity, by studying closely the variation among the counties in (a) regulations regarding family planning; (b) strictness in the enforcement of these regulations; (c) the role of family planning in the political “connectedness” of the county; and (d) socio-economic factors such as urbanization and income. Viewed from this perspective, each county provides variation in macro (setting) characteristics that potentially affect their demography.³

The project counties were Huasheng and Pangxie in the Tangshan municipality of Hebei province and Ciqixian and Shanshui in Zibo municipality of Shandong province.

²One of the two Shandong “counties” is actually a district; and one of the two Hebei counties was promoted from County to City status during the course of the INCRC project. Such alternative designations can occur for administrative and political as well as ecological reasons. As these four agglomerations are of the same order of magnitude in both area and population size, we refer to all of them simply as counties.

³Inference to the demography of each county can be made with probabilistic sampling theory, since sampling within counties is random. From this standpoint, each of the counties is a distinct subpopulation. The four counties together are an ill-defined population, their presumed typicality notwithstanding. It is therefore preferable not to aggregate above the county level. Similar issues would arise even if the four counties had been randomly selected, since the representational properties of random sampling only arise as the number of sampling units becomes comparatively large.

(County names are pseudonyms.) Tangshan is east of Beijing and north of Tianjin, and is best known as the site of perhaps the most destructive earthquake in human history. Zibo is east of Jinan, the capital of Shandong province, en route to Qingdao. The four counties are parts of the rural hinterlands of these cities.

Huasheng is the closest to Beijing, at about two to three hours drive. It is designated as a semi-mountainous county and contains a Man ethnic minority who were settled in the area to protect the Qing tombs, the burial site of China's last imperial dynasty. Our sample is 24% "minority" (Man), and 79% of these are concentrated in one of the six sampled townships. Huasheng also has a strong post-imperial pedigree. It was home to Wang Guofan, whose agricultural co-operative was singled out for praise by Mao Zedong in the early 1950s, and whose political connections made Huasheng a model county (Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991).

Pangxie is another two hours past Huasheng, on the coast. It has been a model county for family planning work since the start of the *wan xi shao* campaign in the early 1970s. It remains the best-performing county in Tangshan city as regards family planning; high performance means strong adhesion to rules, high contraceptive prevalence, low fertility, and few unplanned births. Maintaining this high standing is a major goal of each of the county's administrative powers, from the family planning commission to the county government to the party committee. They rely on propaganda work, more so than in the other three counties. Local officials champion the county's status as a coastal enterprise zone, but the economic payoff is not evident. The economy still relies mainly on agriculture, and has not benefited from the rapid development that

has visibly transformed other Chinese counties. Pangxie is a throwback: politics, not economics, still rules.

Ciqixian is an hour's drive south of Zibo, the railhead for the overnight train to Beijing. It is the most urban and industrialized of the four counties, although many of its townships are mountainous and rural. Ciqixian has the highest proportion of women employed in non agricultural activities (only 34% of Ciqixian's respondents reported their occupation as farmers). New urban sprawl is evident in Ciqixian as is the mushrooming of industrial enterprises.

Shanshui borders Ciqixian to the south; it is more mountainous and rural. Local officials are quick to point out the county's humble standing. Shanshui is spare and desolate, and in the county town certain amenities (*e.g.*, heat) are in short supply, so this is partly genuine self-effacement. On the other hand, in a country in which humble origins are a virtue, and data highly fungible, Shanshui appears to have good political connections, since being a "poor county" puts them in line for provincial subventions.

The most salient demographic distinction among the counties is between Huasheng and the other three. Pangxie, Ciqixian, and Shanshui all operate under the One-Son-Two-Child policy, while couples in Huasheng can have two children regardless of the sex of the first child. This is evident in Figure 1, which shows children ever born by age. Women in all four counties quickly have a first birth, usually by age 26. In Huasheng, most soon move on to a second birth; in the other counties there is a substantial delay before approximately half the women move on to a second child. (Figure 1 is a synthetic cohort, but the same pattern is seen when individual cohorts are traced, with some differences in timing.)

—Figure 1 about here—

It is well known that some rural areas have been allowed to relax family planning policy as the local situation warrants; and that variation exists at the local level both with respect to the policy and the vigor with which it is enforced. It is less well known why some rural counties operate under one system and others under another. When we question officials about the *de facto* two child policy in Huasheng, the stock answers are that minority populations are entitled to a second child as are populations in mountainous areas, where life is hard. Indeed, these are principles of the national family planning policy (Blayo 1997). In Huasheng, however, the Man minority is concentrated in only one of our six sample townships, and there are no differences in fertility or enforcement (abortions) by township or by ethnicity within township. Nor is Huasheng near as rugged, isolated, and poor as Shanshui. Its villages, unlike many in Shanshui, which can be reached only via mountain paths, all lie on a plain surrounded by mountains (hence the *semi*-mountainous designation). The real source of this family planning policy difference is a political one. Huasheng's connections and status are sufficiently high in areas other than family planning as to obviate the need to curry favor with higher-ups by good family planning performance. In the words of one Huasheng party official, county leaders are granted "more freedom" from higher administrative levels to operate as they see fit, a degree of autonomy that likely pertains to the realm of family planning as well.

Irrespective of the source of this difference, the alternative environments portrayed by the four counties in terms of organizational and institutional relations governing local implementation of population policies and levels of socioeconomic development that do exist are fortunate from the standpoint of the design of the study.

They give us some leverage over the question of when shifts to acceptance of current family size indicate acceptance—however grudging—of family planning policy. They also enable us to separate program effects on preferences from the effects of other social and economic factors. Thus a crucial distinction in the analyses that follow will be made between family size preferences as expressed in Huasheng, where second children are common, and the other counties, where a first male child means no second birth.

Results

The Baseline Survey questionnaire includes two fertility preference questions: (1) In light of your current situation, how do you feel about your current number of children?, and (2) “If there were no family planning policy, how many sons (daughters) would you personally like to have?” Question (1) was asked again in the follow-up survey, but, in place of question (2), follow-up interviewees were asked how many additional children they wanted, and of these how many boys and how many girls, without any reference to the policy. From these questions, we obtain two preference measures. The first, feeling about current number of children, is based on question (1), and was asked in both surveys. The second, ideal family size, is constructed as follows: for the Baseline Survey, it is obtained as the sum of the number of boys and girls Baseline respondents say they would have were there not a family planning policy;⁴ for the Follow-up, it is obtained as the sum of the actual number of children women have at interview and the additional number of children they say they want.

⁴ This represents the minimum number of children wanted, since for the cases in which respondents were undecided or missing on one sex, but not the other, they were assigned the value for the sex for which they gave a numerical response

The respondent's evaluation of her current situation is virtually identical to the constructed measure of ideal family size, at least in the Follow-up Survey, where respondents were *not* asked to condition their response on the hypothetical absence of the current family planning policy. This can be seen in Table 1, which cross-classifies responses for each measure—feelings regarding current family size and ideal family size—for each survey. In the bottom panel—the Follow-up Survey—almost everyone is on the diagonal; respondents who say that their current number of children is “just right” (or—rarely—“too many”) are respondents whose actual family size is greater than or (most often) equal to their ideal; and respondents whose current family size is “too few” are those where the actual family size is less than the ideal. This consistency—98%—is in excess of that reported by Hermalin, Freedman, Sun, and Chang (1979, p. 77) in their study on fertility preferences in Taiwan (90% in 1967, 87% in 1970), although in their study ideal versus actual family size was being compared with a question on whether or not a woman wanted more children.

—Table 1 about here—

So our question on feelings about current number of children is interchangeable with the gap (if any) between ideal and actual family size, but this does not mean that either is a valid measure of true desires. This is evident in the upper panel of Table 1: The Baseline Survey's actual versus ideal measure was based on a query with the lead-in “If there were no family planning policy...” Comparison of marginals in the upper panel reveals that 72% of respondents had fewer children than their ideal, versus 64% who said the number of children they have currently is “too few.” This discrepancy—which did not appear in the Follow-up Survey—is attributable to the difference in wording, and

conforms with what might be expected: In the absence of the family planning policy, desires would be higher. How much higher? It is very difficult to translate the observed differential into a number of children, since the margins are specific to the age and parity of the women queried; but it does appear that our results are reasonably consistent with the findings of Hermalin and Liu (1990) and Wang (1990). Which is to say that while our subsequent analyses are based on the question about feelings regarding current number of children—since it is asked the same way in both surveys—we acknowledge that it understates “unconditioned” desires for children.

Table 1 also indicates a move in the direction of wanting no more children among women who gave a consistent answer: from 23% in 1991 to 48% in 1994. Some of this is attributable to the lower consistency in the Baseline Survey (for the reasons just discussed), but the general pattern—toward greater satisfaction—is what one would expect in any cohort of women. As time goes on, even in China, they may have the child or children they desire. Alternatively, they may revise their preferences as a rationalization of circumstances. In Taiwan, or the US, it is assumed that the number of children is a function of an individual calculus and/or biological limitations, hence a change in preference would result from the realized family goal or a rationalization of circumstances that prompts couples to adjust intentions to match their behaviors. In China, however, a further distinction is necessary, since some of the rationalization may be attributable to the dictates of the state.

Thus, in the analysis below, we ask whether attitudes affect behavior, *i.e.*, whether, among women with one child, reproductive behavior in the inter-survey period is consistent with their stated intentions in 1991. We focus on women with one child as

of 1991 because we are interested in the effect of sex-specific fertility policies on family size preference. We also explore the conditions under which the move towards wanting no more children occurs. Do respondents' reproductive experiences in the inter-survey period determine a change in attitudes towards family size? Or does a change in attitudes imply rationalization/acceptance of the policy?

Table 2 shows that expressed feelings regarding the adequacy of a single child in 1991 had little or no effect on subsequent reproductive behavior once sex specific policies are taken into account. Women with one boy rarely reported a pregnancy during this interval, and whether they did or not was undifferentiated by their feelings toward the adequacy of a single child.⁵ The percentage with one boy who thought that this was adequate was lowest in Shanshui (see the right-most column), the most isolated, rural setting, and highest in Ciqixian, the most urbanized area. Our measure of family size preferences is more predictive of reproductive behavior of women with one girl. In Pangxie, Ciqixian and Shanshui, women who found one child adequate, and who had one girl at that time, were far less likely than those who did not have a pregnancy in the succeeding thirty months. However, the proportion of such women was quite few, the 12% in Pangxie being the highest. In Huasheng, where two children are permitted regardless of the sex of the first child, families with one boy are as likely to have a pregnancy during the interval as families with one girl; and although relatively few couples claimed in 1991 to find one child to be "just right," those that did were just as likely to have another pregnancy as those that did not.

—Table 2 about here—

⁵ In Shanshui, for the difference between 12% and 5%, $.10 > p > .05$.

If the proportions of pregnancies in Huasheng, the county with the more lax family planning policy, are taken as indicative of the “natural” levels of fertility (or at least pregnancies) that would occur in the absence of policies elsewhere, then a shift to a more voluntary policy would result in a large increase in fertility in Shanshui in particular, also in Pangxie, and somewhat less in Ciqixian, where 47% of women with one boy say that this is “just right.” The increase might be greater still if the proportions going on to have another pregnancy in these counties among those with one girl is used as the standard. However, it is hard to say whether these high proportions (e.g., 47% in Pangxie versus 19% in Huasheng) are in part artifacts of the restrictive policies. In any event, there is little in these data to suggest that the family planning policy or program—in its “one boy, or two children if the first is a girl” incarnation—has had much influence on the two child (non sex-specific) norm identified by other observers. Acceptance of one child (identified by the right-hand column) as does exist in 1991 follows the urban to rural gradient seen more generally in China as between cities and the countryside, with the highest percentage of acceptors in Ciqixian, the most urban and industrialized of the four counties, and the lowest in Shanshui, the most rural and poor.

Do respondents’ reproductive experiences in the inter-survey period determine a change in attitudes towards family size? Or have China’s fertility policies made some leeway into changing family size preferences? To answer these questions, we focus on women who in 1991 thought their one child was not adequate and examine the circumstances under which the shift towards satisfaction with their family size occurred.

Table 3 shows the proportion of women who between 1991 and 1994 became satisfied with the number of children they had, by sex of their single child in 1991,

whether or not they experienced an inter-survey pregnancy and the outcome of this pregnancy. From the last two columns, we see that women with one single female child in 1991, a change to a “just right” response corresponds in the main with an additional pregnancy—regardless of the sex of this second child. These families have reached their ideal family size; the dissatisfaction they expressed in 1991 was due to the fact that they had one child in 1991, not that they did not have a boy.

—Table 3 about here—

Although, in a context of strong son preference, the birth of a son may truly satisfy women with a first-born daughter, how do we know that women with a second girl are indeed content—that they are not simply giving a politically correct answer? The best evidence is to focus on the percentage of women who are willing to express continued dissatisfaction with their single male child (the difference between 100 and the percentage who became satisfied). The great majority of these women, whether they had an aborted pregnancy in the interval or not—were still willing to state that they had too few children. And these are women who, given existing policies (Huasheng excepted), are never going to be allowed to have a second child. So, since women are clearly willing to express continued dissatisfaction about being forced to have one (male) child only, there seems little reason to doubt that the lack of dissatisfaction among those who will be stopping at two girl children is anything other than real.

The women most likely to express continued dissatisfaction are those with one girl at the time of the first survey and who did not have a child during the interim. The tendency to come to accept a single girl is low in all four counties, ranging from 1 percent in Shanshui to 18 percent in Pangxie. The demand for a second child is stronger among

these women than among those who already have a boy, which suggests some combination of (a) the greater willingness to accept a one-boy family than a one-girl family; and/or (b) a sense of entitlement, as yet frustrated by additional spacing regulations, given by the current sex-specific policy to those with one only daughter.

Conversely, the tendency to come to accept a single boy as sufficient is lowest in Huasheng (31%), where entitlement to a second child does not depend on the sex of the first child. It is also low in Shanshui, the poorest, most rural and isolated of the study counties. In contrast, roughly half the women in both Ciqixian, the most urbanized county, and Pangxie, the county with the most rigid family planning program, come to say that a single male child is “just right.”

Conclusions

Thus such acceptance of a single male child as does occur partly follows a development gradient, and partly reflects the degree of policy enforcement. In Shanshui, the poorest, most rural and isolated county, the “one-son-two-child policy” has had the least influence on the existing two-child family norm. Were future policy relaxation to open a window of opportunity, Shanshui families with one boy would match their family size aspirations with another birth. On the other hand, couples in Ciqixian, a fast urbanizing county, may not perceive the birth planning limitations that ask them to stop at one son as as much of a threat to their prosperity and their old-age security. Those entering their childbearing years in the late 1990s have grown up against the backdrop of rapid development, increased prosperity and the one-child policy. Here, many young rural couples may have simply internalized the message that had to be forced upon the

generation before them—that their lives will be more prosperous if they choose to have fewer children. Sex-specific fertility policies, aided by faster economic growth, may find in couples with one son their most receptive acceptors. Moving towards a more voluntary approach to family planning may not be accompanied by a substantial increase in fertility.

Acceptance—or acquiescence—is also strong where resistance is most futile: In Pangxie, the family planning policy enforced with meticulous vigor for about three decades leaves room for little except abiding by the sex-selective policies. Prognostications about the course of fertility in the event of policy relaxation are difficult without much certitude about the future auxiliary role of socioeconomic development in that county. At the opposite extreme of the spectrum gauged by the intensity of policy enforcement is Huasheng, the most autonomous county on all fronts, including family planning. Here acceptance of the one male child is weakest. Women are benefiting from the leniency and flexibility of local policy implementation and, for the most part, are permitted a smooth realization of their preferred two-child family norm.

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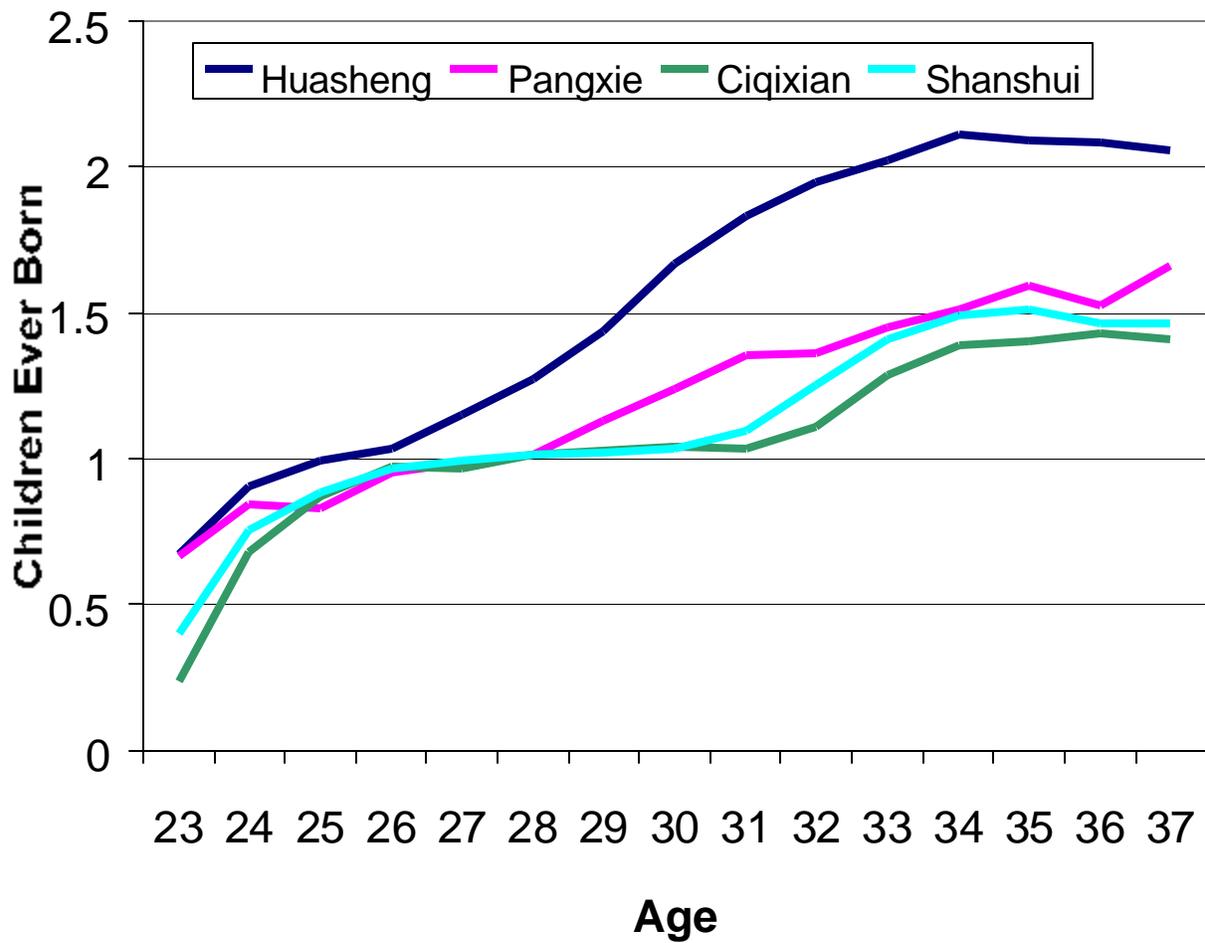
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Table 1. Consistency of fertility preference: Joint percentage distribution of responses to two questions, by women interviewed in both surveys (N=2,323)				
Baseline Survey				
	Just right ^a	Too few	Undecided	Total
Actual = ideal	23.0	0.7	0.3	24.0
Actual < ideal	6.9	62.5	2.1	72.0
Undecided ^b	0.9	0.9	2.6	4.0
Total	30.9	64.0	5.0	100.0
Follow-up Survey				
	Just right ^a	Too few	Undecided	Total
Actual = ideal	47.6	0.3	0.0	47.8
Actual < ideal	1.2	49.7	0.0	51.0
Undecided ^b	0.1	0.3	0.8	1.2
Total	48.9	50.3	0.8	100.0
^a Includes the handful of cases that responded that current number of children is “Too Many.”				
^b 61% of baseline respondents who declared themselves undecided on both or either one of the preference items were childless. Most of the remaining were pregnant at interview.				

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents at Parity One Starting Another Pregnancy in the Ensuing Thirty Months, by Sex of Child, Feelings Regarding Their Current Number of Children, and County			
	Feelings Regarding Their Current (1991) Number of Children (<i>i.e.</i> , One Child)		Percentage Regarding One Child as “Just Right”
Huasheng			
	Too Few	Just Right ^a	
Girl	19% (97)	13% (9)	10%
Boy	17% (118)	18% (28)	24%
Pangxie			
	Too Few	Just Right ^a	
Girl	47% (160)	23% (17)	12%
Boy	11% (166)	14% (69)	33%
Ciqixian			
	Too Few	Just Right ^a	
Girl	23% (238)	6% (31)	11%
Boy	6% (210)	9% (165)	47%
Shanshui			
	Too Few	Just Right ^a	
Girl	33% (160)	0% (3)	1%
Boy	5% (207)	12% (42)	15%
Notes: Cells in bold indicate families that are not entitled to have a second child under existing policy; families allowed in general to have a second birth may or may not have specific permission to become pregnant during the observed interval, since spacing restrictions may also reply.			
^a Includes the handful of cases that responded that current number of children is “Too Many.”			

Table 3. Percentage of Women Who Became Satisfied with their Current Number of Children at Second Interview (July 1994), among Those Who Thought their Only Child was Too Few at First Interview (December 1991), by Pregnancy Experience in the Thirty Month Interval, and County				
Pregnancy Experience between December 1991 and July 1994				
	Neither birth nor abortion	Abortion (only)	Male birth	Female birth
Huasheng				
Boy	31% (99)	14% (12)	100% (3)	100% (4)
Girl	12% (81)	52% (8)	83% (6)	100% (2)
Pangxie				
Boy	50% (148)	14% (16)	100% (1)	100% (1)
Girl	18% (91)	5% (14)	96% (24)	100% (31)
Ciqixian				
Boy	51% (196)	19% (14)	--	--
Girl	12% (178)	2% (11)	100% (24)	96% (25)
Shanshui				
Boy	33% (196)	36% (11)	--	--
Girl	1% (110)	0% (6)	96% (28)	94% (16)

Figure 1. Children Ever Born by Age, by County, Follow-up Survey (July 1994)



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