

Lewis Turning Point in China: Interviewing Perceptions of Fertility Policies by Unmarried Female Millennials

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Abstract : Benefiting from the demographic dividend, China has enjoyed export-led economic growth since 1978. While Lewis's model marks the structural transformation from the low-wage 'subsistence' sector to the 'modern sector' as the end of labour surplus, the Chinese government seems eager to extend such benefit by promoting a series of fertility encouragement policies, contrasting to its firm and strict birth control since last century. Based on a Attride-Stirling's thematic analysis of interviews with unmarried female millennials in China, this paper argues that the young female generation responded to current fertility policies negatively, where the policy ineffectiveness and irresponsiveness have further worsened their marriage and childbirth reluctance. Instead of focusing on changes in wage level, this research contributes a qualitative perspective to the existing theoretical debate on the Lewis turning point, implying an inevitable end of demographic dividend in China. Highlighting the greater focus on female consciousness among the younger generation, it also suggests a policy orientation towards resolving outdated social norms to accommodate the rising female consciousness since millennials will become the childbirth mainstay in forthcoming years.

Keywords : lewis model, fertility policy, demographic dividend, one-child policy

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