

# Female Deficit in Asia

Conference synthesis

*prepared by CZG*

Singapore 5-7 December 2005



## What have we learnt during this conference ?

---

- ❑ Facts and figures we weren't aware of
- ❑ Methods we never paid attention to
- ❑ Concepts we had never heard before
- ❑ Criticisms nobody dared to voice
- ❑ Causal links we never noticed so far
- ❑ Policy implications we didn't think about
- ❑ Forecasts that hadn't been attempted earlier
- ❑ Comparisons we would not have drawn
- ❑ Data we should have known about previously
- ❑ Colleagues we should have met before
- ❑ Etc.

## Issues of sources

---

- ❑ Missing data (civil registration, abortion statistics, local data, etc.)
- ❑ Deficient data (underreporting, misreported, etc.)
- ❑ Alternative data source (maps, other surveys on old age or migration, etc)
- ❑ Underutilized data (hospital, etc.)

## Issues of methods

---

- ❑ Usual tools of demographic analysis are not always adequate nor sufficient to capture phenomena related to female deficit
- ❑ New indices and concepts have to be devised
- ❑ New estimation techniques are needed
- ❑ New specifically designed surveys are required
- ❑ Demographers have to go through a lot of experimentation and risky research tests with new tools, hypotheses and data

## The need for multidisciplinary

- Beyond demography, research on female deficit issues will flourish thanks to the inputs of anthropology, sociology, geography, migration studies, history, public health, etc.
- Demographic analysis requires quantitative and local validation through other disciplinary approaches as data *per se* are not enough. We need more narratives and stories to understand our charts and tables
- Demography has after all no theory on female deficit and it will have to borrow insights, concepts and explanatory frameworks from economics, history, anthropology etc.

## Female deficit: intermediate variables (1)

- The social intermediate variables
  - Preconception selection techniques
  - Sex selective abortion
  - Infanticide
  - Excess infant and child mortality
  - Abandonment and adoption
  - Sex selective underreporting
- The biological intermediate variables
  - Ethnic group
  - Age of the mother
  - Parity
  - Hepatitis and other dark horses.

## Intermediate variables (2)

---

- ❑ Identification of all intermediate variables leading to masculinization
- ❑ Measurement issues : estimation, comparability, benchmark values, etc.
- ❑ The need for a comprehensive framework bringing together all intermediate factors

## One thing we know about female deficit: it is uneven and changing

---

- ❑ It is unstable in time and always increasing or at times decreasing, but remains (almost) constant only at "standard biological levels"
- ❑ It is geographically concentrated in regional or national clusters
- ❑ It is never evenly distributed across social groups and rarely universal in a given locality
- ❑ Discrimination strategies differ also widely in space and time as well as within society
- ❑ Will the observed heterogeneity of discriminatory modes across areas and social groups allow us to track the mechanisms at work and the ultimate determinants of gender discrimination?

## Causes for gender discrimination (1)

---

- ❑ Demographic factors and the sex selection situation: parity and sex composition of the offspring
- ❑ Contexts: fertility decline, economic development, social modernization, coercive family planning
- ❑ The identified correlates (demand factors):
  - Ethnic, religious and cultural entities
  - Social and economic groups
  - Urbanization
  - Education levels
  - Female autonomy and women's status
  - Kinship systems, agricultural systems
- ❑ Supply factors
  - Sex selection technology: availability, costs and accessibility
  - Legal regulations

## Son preference

---

The ultimate cause for gender discrimination: son preference and sexual hierarchy

- ❑ How and why does it vary across regions and social groups?
- ❑ Is son preference of social, cultural, religious or economic nature?
- ❑ How is it transmitted ?
  - Through the family from generation to generation?
  - Through the reference group (lineage, castes, sects, village, etc.)?
  - Through weak ties (social interaction, networks, etc.)?
  - Through innovation and diffusion processes?
- ❑ How is it contained and curbed?
  - Through repressive legislation?
  - Through public awareness?
  - Through compensatory benefits?
  - Through social change?
- ❑ Why doesn't it exist where we would expect to find it?

## Consequences of gender disequilibria and their policy implications

---

### The marriage market and its flexibility

- Measuring the marriage squeeze
- Assessing the possible adjustments of marriage systems to it: regional and social exogamy, trafficking in women, new marital or family arrangements, the rise of celibacy, out-migration, etc.

### More unexplored outcomes:

- On future number of births
- On masculine migration trends (both internal and international)
- On men's health and sexual behavior, and mortality
- On female education and employment
- On family structures and household economics
- On social and political equilibrium

## When you have no explanatory theory...

---

... find some chronological regularity in your data with potentially predictive abilities...

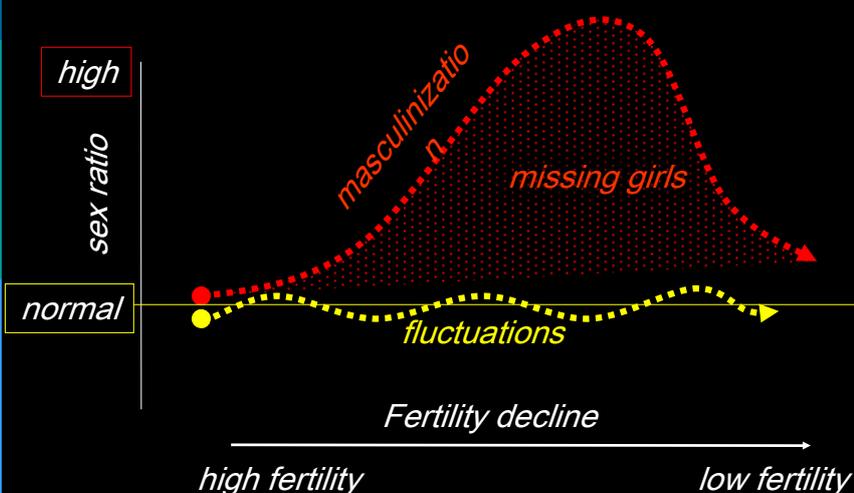
... label it as a “transition”...

... and market it as an indisputable societal “law” to other social sciences.

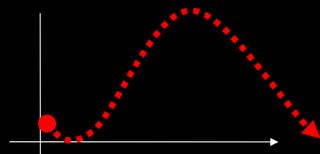
## Masculinization: Transition or cycle ?

- ❑ Is masculinization a short-term transition bound to eventually recede for good ?
- ❑ Or is masculinization a cyclical outburst likely to come back?
  - The case for transition: Korea, Taiwan, historical experience of Japan
  - The case for cycle: Singapore and the chaotic fluctuations observed in the West
- ❑ The big unknown: Is there an upper limit for masculinization processes in China and India for the next decades?
  - What levels of masculinity are demographically sustainable in the short- or in the long run?

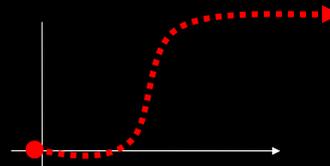
## Sex ratio deterioration (and fertility decline)



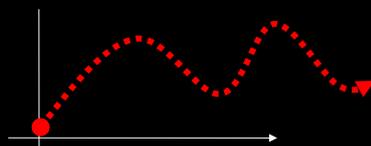
## Scenarios of future sex ratio



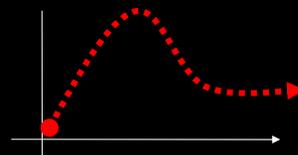
One-time Transition



Long-term increase



Cycles



Transition with final increase

## Lessons and recipes

- ❑ Tomorrow's consequences will be severe and unpredictable : let's get the message across now
- ❑ Global problems call for global thinking: international comparison and collaboration have become compulsory
- ❑ Standard demographic methods won't be enough for such a unique phenomenon: let's be inventive
- ❑ Demography won't tell the whole story of gender discrimination without other social sciences and without better biological understanding
- ❑ And never forget to look back at historical data to understand the contemporary situation

Good bye!

---