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A Son Over a Daughter: A Research on Continuing Son Preference in China from the Perspective of the Interaction between Collectivism and Individualization

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Abstract

Between the 20th and 21st centuries, feminism and gender equality have made significant progress in China. Despite this, the preference for male newborns remains prevalent in contemporary Chinese society, leading to an unbalanced gender ratio at birth (111.3:100 according to the latest national population census). This suggests that the advancement of Chinese feminism has not fully addressed the societal norm of favouring male newborns. While the gender ratio at birth is crucial to gender equality, existing research often overlooks the disconnection between the progress in gender equality and the continued preference for male newborns in China. This study utilizes national population censuses as primary data sources and analyzes discourse on Chinese social media as supplementary data. It adopts various cultural perspectives to explore the causes of this phenomenon, examining the interplay between individual, familial, and national dynamics. Since the 20th century, the interaction between traditional collectivism and contemporary individualisation has resulted in unique features of Chinese individualisation that prioritize family success and national prosperity over individual values and freedoms. Although Chinese women's liberation benefited from these interactions, the emphasis on collective success has also reinforced the preference for male newborns, highlighting a blind spot in the development of Chinese feminism.

Keywords: Chinese study, feminism, gender equality, individualisation, male preference