



## **Female Deficit in Asia: Trends and Perspectives**

**International conference, Singapore, 5-7 December 2005**

**Organized by CEPED - CICRED - INED**

**Hosted by the Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis**

### **SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME**

In a context of rapid social and economic change, characterized most notably by rapid fertility decline and economic growth, several Asian countries are witnessing an exacerbation of discrimination against women from conception to adulthood. As a result, an almost simultaneous female deficit has emerged in regions of Asia over the last three decades, leading to a gradual masculinization of the population.

As long as sex ratio unbalances remained restricted to a few specific regions or social groups, they were almost invisible from a statistical point of view. But the deficit of females has now grown to unusual proportions in several countries. In Asia's two most populous countries, China and India, discriminatory practices have intensified in some areas and, at the same time, have spread to new geographic areas and social groups previously unaffected. In a few other countries, the increase in sex ratio at birth or among children is still recent and moderate, but requires close monitoring. Finally, it has been observed that the initial surge in the proportion of male children has come to a halt in some countries and recent statistics suggest that the sex ratio is now less unfavorable to girls, with a sex structure that may come back to a normal level in a near future.

It is now crucial to examine regional trends and differentials in a comparative perspective to understand both the context and the mechanisms of the recent waves of "hypermasculinity" recorded in Asia.

The proposed meeting will also offer the opportunity to discuss policy and methodological issues that are directly related to this new phenomenon and examine the future implications of male-dominated populations. More precisely, this conference aims at exploring four dimensions of the female deficit:

- trends and differentials
- measurement issues
- social and demographic consequences
- interpretation and policy responses

## **Provisional programme**

### **Session 1**

This session will focus on the trends and differentials in female deficits observed in Asian countries, from the Caucasus Region to Southeast Asia. What are the long-term trends in age-specific sex ratio levels? Consequently, what can be considered as the Asian norm in sex distribution by age, considering that Asian countries have often been displaying higher proportions of males than those of females for centuries in comparison to the rest of the world? How large is the deviation from the norm?

Close examination of trends in sex ratio levels in different countries is necessary to characterize the recent development such as growing masculinization or gradual reduction of discrimination levels. Recent census or survey data may also facilitate the identification of masculinization waves affecting new countries in Asia. In some, more developed Asian countries, female deficit may have already reached a ceiling and start to decrease, following a transitional pattern that may be of considerable relevance to other countries where the female deficit is still on the increase.

Of particular importance to this session will be the studies of observed differentials across subpopulations as it has observed that sex ratio unbalances vary widely within a country between provinces and social groups. Variations across groups often point to the social, economic or cultural factors behind increased masculinization.

#### **Trends and differentials**

- Improvement or further degradation in already affected regions
- The recent emergence of female deficit in Asian countries
- Regional and social differentials in female discrimination

### **Session 2**

This session will be devoted to the presentation of methods used to assess the extent of and trends in female deficit is not only to know how many women are missing: we need also to understand how women have disappeared from the statistics.

The estimation of missing girls requires a systematic approach to its proximate determinants: the under-registration of female births or children, the measurement of illegal practices such as sex-selective abortions, the estimation of excess mortality among female children from survey data or vital statistics, the detection of infanticide or of preconception selection methods, etc. Spatial and statistical analysis of sex ratio differentials across subpopulations also offers a promising field for methodological developments.

#### **Measurement issues**

- The proximate determinants factors of observed sex ratio distortions
- Sex ratio of birth vs. age-specific sex ratio as summary indicators
- Estimating the frequency of sex determination before birth and sex-specific abortion
- Monitoring sex ratio degradation at macro and micro levels

### Session 3

This session will focus on the consequences of female deficit. Demographic prospects will evaluate the possible effects of the unbalanced sex structure on female schooling and participation, on the marriage market (marriage intensity, age at marriage, divorce and remarriage, probability to remain single among male generations, etc.), on future fertility trends and on marriage migration at national and regional level as well.

In areas long affected by female deficit, socio-anthropological approaches will be used to examine the potential consequences of missing females on society as a whole, and especially in terms of gender relations (female "value", women status, sexual behavior, women trafficking, etc.). Standard demographic projection methods may also allow us to forecast the long-term impact on the sex and age structures in regions where intense sex bias has been observed.

#### **Impact**

- The gender unbalance among adults: trends and differentials in core areas
- The deficit of brides: observations and social implications of the marriage squeeze
- Impact on female schooling, age at marriage and workforce participation
- Female deficit and long-term demographic forecasts

### Session 4

This final session will serve as a conclusion for the conference. By confronting different aspects of the process of demographic hypermasculinity in Asia, contributions to this session will offer an interpretative framework and discuss potential policy responses. As a matter of fact, the determinants of this almost simultaneous phenomenon across Asian countries are still widely disputed. The respective contributions of cultural factors (such as traditional forms of patriarchy), demographic transition (especially rapid fertility decline and population policies) and other social or economic factors (such as the liberalization of local economies) have to be examined in a critical manner to account for the parallel trends observed in several Asian countries.

Several governments, both national and regional, have developed policies to counter the threat of growing gender discriminations. Papers will describe the different components of these policies and evaluate their impact on discriminatory behaviors. More adaptive micro-level initiatives can also be examined as a way to respond to gender bias within local contexts.

#### **Interpretation and policy responses**

- Family planning policy and gender discrimination
- The role of old and new patriarchal institutions
- Economic liberalization and its impact on gender arrangements in Asia
- National, regional and local initiatives to fight against gender discrimination

[see CALL FOR PAPER PROPOSALS](#)