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**From the One to the Two-child Policy: the  
Policymaking Process of China's Family Planning  
Reform**

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*Ai miei incredibili genitori,  
a mia sorella Caterina e mio fratello Luigi.*



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## **TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION**

*Jihua shengyu zhengce* (计划生育政策) is the Mandarin phrase used in official documents to define population policies; its best translations are ‘family planning policy’ or ‘birth planning policy’. The commonly used term ‘one-child policy’ is inappropriate. The Chinese government has never drafted nor implemented a policy that limited every Chinese citizen to have just one child. In the history of Chinese family planning peculiar categories of people have always been exempted from the only child restriction. Nevertheless, academic literature extensively employs the expression “one-child policy” for the sake of synthesis and to avoid redundant repetitions. Thus, all the three formulas (‘family planning policy’; ‘birth planning policy’ and ‘one-child policy’) are present in this thesis with the original Chinese meaning of *jihua shengyu zhengce*.

## 前言

中国的计划生育政策是该国最家喻户晓、最有争议性的政策之一。经过三十五年的严格实施，中国计划生育政策一直是学术研究的主题和媒体关注的话题。2015年12月中华人民共和国中央政府调整了造成种种人口问题的国策，允许全国每个家庭生两个孩子。这一历史性的变化再次刺激了公众舆论，因为“全面二孩”政策对民众生活的各个方面都将带来影响。

从人口学的角度来看，此政策涉及到人口的规模、机构和增长。从政治和思想体系的角度来看，它代表着政府在人口管理方面转向了一种与之前相反的态度，即从强力控制生育率到逐渐鼓励生育第二个孩子。从官僚机构的角度来看，2013年国家人口和计划生育委员会与卫生部合并为国家卫生和计划生育委员会，此举精简了一系列错综复杂的官僚系统。从家庭的角度来看，计划生育政策的放宽扩大了个体的生育选择并且给予了每对夫妻决定家庭规模的更大自由。

在分析人口政策时，这些方面都是应该考虑的。根据不同角色的观点，人口这一概念有不同的意思。对于人口统计学家和经济学家来说，它是一种趋势和一种预测；对于政治家来说，人口是一个目标；对于官员来说，它是一个配额；对于夫妇来说，就是他们自己的未来。

本毕业论文主要研究人口在政策决定过程中的辩论焦点。

人们经常认为中国的决策过程是自上而下的集权主义，并且在没有真正公众参与的情况下中国共产党作为整个系统的最高层而做出决定。谈及1980年以来的改革开放时代，西方政治学家李侃如 (Lieberthal; 1988, 1992)、兰普敦 (Lampton; 1992) 以及奥格森伯格 (Oksenberg; 1988) 对该概念进行了调整。他们通过分析中国水电部的决策方式建立

了一个更加完整性的政治理论叫“碎片化权威主义”(Fragmented Authoritarianism)。

根据他们的观察，虽然中共中央是掌握决定权的唯一机构，但是在某种程度上地方政府也保留自治权，并且在跟财政和经济资源有关的情况下，“中央”与“地方”和“部门”与“部门”之间的谈判空间会越来越开阔。到目前为止，若要描述改革开放以来的中国，“碎片化权威主义”的理论框架一直保持着有效性并得到了学术上的认可。

二十一世纪初，研究中国政治与社会的后辈学者使用“碎片化权威主义”来解释更多的决策过程。如2009年由毛学峰教授(Andrew Mertha)撰写的《2.0的碎片化权威主义》(Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0)丰富了以前理论的内容。具体地说，在与政府谈判时，毛学峰教授提炼并概括了政治机构以外但能影响到舆论的新群体，叫“政治实业家”。通过对处理此类问题看法的新颖角度和灵活的叙述方式，政治实业家能参与日益多元化的决策谈论。

此毕业论文的目的是分析我国计划生育政策的历史，特别是从所谓“独生子女”政策阶段到“全面二孩”政策阶段，并且判断“碎片化权威主义”适用的范围，之后把决策方式和理论框架进行结合。

谈到我国的计划生育政策，伴随着人口的快速增长，1970年中央政府开始实行人口控制的一些措施。虽然“晚稀少”政策的温和生育限制有效地减低了中国的总体生育率，但是政府依然顾忌中国巨大的人口规模会对实现经济发展和邓小平的“四个现代化”造成障碍。因此，1980年9月25日《人民日报》发表了由总书记胡耀邦撰写的公开信。

公开信主要的内容是“提倡一对夫妇只生育一个孩子”<sup>1</sup>。1982年计划生育提升至基本国策的重要地位，而且通过宣传、教育等强有力的行政措施被官员自上而下实行了。

为了了解“一胎政策”被政府选择的原因，人类学教授葛苏珊 (Susan Greenhalgh; 2008) 选用了人类学与民族学的工具。她研究了政策的起源和它引起的“科学决策方式”。葛苏珊达到的结论是1980年严格的计划生育政策是由政客和科学家少数群体决定的。这些社会精英的代表向政府提出了控制人口的三个不同建议，其中不仅涉及到管理人口的政治态度，而且也影响到被文化大革命所削弱的共产党的公信力。

根据葛苏珊 (Greenhalgh, 2008) 的观点，“独生子女”政策强调中国政治的一个重大转变：共产党的正当性再也不囿于马克思主义和毛泽东思想的意识形态，而依托于西方科学和技术，后者也逐渐获得至高无上的地位。随着这个变化，共产党用科学技术思想把决策全过程非政治化了，这样任何决定都成为一个不可否认的科学真理。在计划生育决策时科学家把人口控制简化为一种数学模型，忽略了人口政策的许多方面，如文化、习俗以及民众感情，并忽视了其给社会和经济带来的一些严重后果。

当2015年放开“二孩”时，几乎没有人对此感到惊讶。长期以来，许多人口学者对中国人口的失衡问题早已达成了共识且向政客提出过警告。中共领导也意识到中国不可继续保有如此低的生育率，所以实行了二胎政策。新政策的目的是重新平衡人口结构，以减缓前一政策

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<sup>1</sup>人民日报，《关于控制我国人口增长问题致全体共产党员、共青团员的公开信》，1980年9月25日。

的后果，特别是快速的老龄化、短缺的劳动力以及过高的出生人口性别比。

关于“二胎”政策，有人会认为政府的决定是自上而下的对国家经济问题的回应。其实，计划生育政策的放松化是一个漫长的、包括很多参与者的变革过程。

2000年独生子女政策已接近预定期限的时候，一组人口学家开始讨论我国生育率已低于“2.1更替”水平这一问题，并且他们提请了国家人口和计划生育委员会有计划地逐步放开二胎生育。由于计划生育政策的重要性，这个辩论复杂且持久，但是从2000年到2015年越来越多的人口专家、经济学者、文学界人士、商人、活动家等各种各样的人士开始公开推动生育政策的调整。

与1980年参加控制人口问题讨论的参与者相比，此次参加争论的人数更多、研究背景更多元。由于他们的影响力，尽管他们中的大部分人不属于政治机构，但是一直跟中央政府保持交流，而从来也没有公开反对中央的措施。基于此，他们成为了“政治实业家”。与前辈科学家叙述的人口问题相比，他们的角度有独创性。具体地说，他们向政府提供的数据和案例都来源于对国内一些地区实行的宽松政策的考察。1980年代中期以来，山西翼城、甘肃酒泉、河北承德和湖北恩施等地方已经在实行一对夫妇可以生两个孩子的政策。根据学者的研究结果，那里的人口保持着低增长，也没有发生引发生育反弹或多孩生育增多的问题。在严格计划生育政策下，中央政府在指定地区允许了计划生育政策例外的出现，这是因为计划生育体制也具有高度的政治碎片化特征。

关于近年推动“全面二孩”政策的争论，此毕业论文依靠“碎片化权威主义”的一些理论工具，并且尝试回答下面的问题：

— 首先，上述“政治实业家”的背景和相互关系是什么？他们怎么利用计划生育系统的特点来出现呢？

— 其次，他们通过哪些新颖的叙述方式表达了他们的想法且在多大程度上挑战了国家的官方叙述？

— 关于过去的政策的评估如何影响中国人口政策的未来？

为了分析上面提到的问题，本毕业论文依靠的参考文献主要来源于政治学和社会学方面。论文分为三个主要的部分，每个部分大概的内容和信息来源如下：

— 第一章关于从 1980 年发表的公开信一直到 2015 年放开二孩改造的计划生育历史。本章依靠的参考文献主要包括 Greenhalgh (2008)、Basten et al. (2014)、Winckler (2002) 以及 Zeng et al. (2016) 的研究作品，也包括世界银行集团的统计数据和政府官方的相关文件。

— 第二章的题目是《碎片化的权威主义与中国计划生育》。一开始笔者介绍《碎片化的权威主义》的理论框架，然后使用此理论框架来了解计划生育的法律和官僚体系。主要文献来自 Lieberthal 和 Oksenberg (1988)，Lieberthal 和 Lampton (1992) 的著作直到最近由 Mertha (2009) 和 Brødsgaard (2017) 发表的新解。

— 第三章，也就是最后一章节，分为两个部分，第一个部分关于促进人口政策放开的“政治实业家”(political entrepreneurs)，第二个部分关于他们向政府提供的新颖“问题框架”(issue framing)，也就是说他们通过哪些带有吸引力的叙述方式来表达自己的想法。此章主要的信息来源包括 Riley (2017)，来自报纸和杂志这类媒体的

资源 (Science, 2010; The Star, 2010; New York Times, 2011; 南方周末, 2011), 并且包括两个相反课题组给中共领导提供的官方建议 (2004 年; 2007 年; 2009 年; 2015 年) 以及笔者在北京中国人民大学人口与社会学院进行的三次采访的成果 (宋健教授, 2019 年; 吕利丹副教授, 2019 年; 周宁香博士生, 2019 年)。

## **INTRODUCTION**

China's family planning is one of the country's most notorious and debated policy. Subject of a conspicuous amount of academic research and often in the spotlight of the media, it reemerged in the public debate recently when, after thirty-five years of strict implementation, it was amended in a universal two-child policy (December 2015). The relaxation of China's one-child policy represents an historical shift, with implications at various levels.

The consequences on the macro level consist of different outlooks. From the demographic perspective, its effects are estimated on the numbers of population: its size, structure and growth. A two-child policy was implemented with the aim of inverting the trend of China's low fertility rate and reshape the down-oriented growth line on graphs. From the political and ideological point of view, it symbolizes an apparently reversed approach of the government towards population management: from strictly anti-natalist to moderately pro-natalist. On the administrative level, a complex and ramified bureaucratic structure has been dismantled with the merger of the National Population and Family Planning Commission into the National Health and Family Planning Commission (2013). On the microlevel, the relaxation of the one-child policy has broadened individuals' reproductive choice and gave a greater freedom to couples in deciding their family size.

When investigating population policy, all these levels should be considered. Depending on the point of view, population represents a different object to look at. For demographers and scientists, it's a trend and a projection; for politicians, a target; for officials, a quota; for families, it's their own future. This thesis investigates population in its policy externalization, especially on the level of policymaking processes; the subject of research is population as a topic of debate.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

China's policymaking is commonly considered a top-down, authoritarian process, where the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represents the apex of the whole system and is legitimized to take decisions without a real public participation. At the end of 1980s, the scholars K. Lieberthal (1988, 1992), D. M. Lampton (1992) and M. Oksenberg (1988) reviewed this conception in consideration of the Opening up and Reforms era. They

developed a more faceted framework, defined “Fragmented Authoritarianism”<sup>2</sup>. According to their observation, China’s policy-making process was characterized by a concentration of power at the Center and a greater autonomy at the lower levels, with a high degree of fragmentation and space for bargaining mechanisms between the “top” and the “bottom”. This theoretical framework has been consolidated, revised and integrated over the years, while it retains validity till nowadays in describing post-Mao China.<sup>3</sup>

Forms of population control were implemented in China since the early 1970s, but year 1980 is considered the beginning of the so-called one-child policy: in September, the governmental newspaper *People’s Daily* published an Open Letter drafted by the Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang<sup>4</sup>, “encouraging” every Chinese family to have only one child. The government implemented the new directive nationwide, through mobilization at the grassroot level, propaganda, education and coercion.

How did the government arrived to take this drastic decision? Susan Greenhalgh (2008) investigated the origins of the policy and the process of “scientific policymaking” that it produced, with an ethnographic research at the micropolitics level. She concluded that the one-child policy was the result of a debate among a very small number of people, an élite made of politicians and scientists. Actors competed with three different proposals in a contest not just over population control, but over the ideological base of legitimacy for the CCP, the identity of which had been “broken” by the Cultural Revolution. The supremacy of Marxian ideology and Mao Zedong Thought was substituted by the supremacy of Western science and technology, in an effort to depoliticize the center’s decisions and remove them from public debate. The PRC became a technocracy governed by a party of “engineers-turned-politicians”<sup>5</sup>, and population control was reduced to a mathematical model that neglected many levels of population studies, like the socio-cultural and political-economic context.

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth G. LIEBERTHAL, David M. LAMPTON, *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, University of California Press, 1992. And, Kenneth G. LIEBERTHAL, Michel OKSENBERG, *Policymaking in China: Leaders, Structures and Processes*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Kjeld Eric BRØDSGAARD (edited by), *Chinese Politics as Fragmented Authoritarianism. Energy, Earthquakes and Environment*, Oxton and New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> S. GREENHALGH, *Just one Child: science and policy in Deng’s China*, Berkely, University of California Press, p. 294, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem* p. 334.

Building up on the work of Lieberthal et al. (1988, 1992), Andrew Mertha (2009) further developed the concept of Fragmented Authoritarianism. In the bargaining process with the state, Mertha included new actors external to the main institutional bodies and yet able to make their voice heard. He identified three categories of “political entrepreneurs”: officials opposed to a given policy, journalists and individuals within Chinese NGOs. These actors of change accessed to a process “increasingly pluralized” by presenting new narratives, or “issue framings”, articulated and amplified in an innovative way<sup>6</sup>.

When the one-child policy was relaxed, in 2015, few observers were surprised: for a long time, demographers had warned of the imbalances caused by family-planning and the CCP’s leadership was aware of its negative effects. Thus, aim of the two-child policy was to rebalance the structure of China’s population and lessen the consequences of the previous policy: a rapid increase of elderly population, a quick-pace process of aging, a decrease in the working force and a high sex ratio at birth.<sup>7</sup>

What may seem to many a predictable and maybe too late decision of the government, taken with a top-down push in response, once again, to economic problems, was actually a lengthy process of change. Within this process, advocacy for a relaxation of the policy had started since 2000, when the one-child policy was close to its scheduled end, and lasted 15 years. The debate has been extremely complex and yet very participated: it involved a variety of voices and made of the unquestionable, basic-state policy (基本国策 *jibenguoce*) a more pluralized arena of discussion. These actors, if compared with the ones that shaped the one-child policy, were numerous and diversified and interacted with the central government as external advisors: not inside the establishment and, yet, not against it. The way they framed China’s population problem presented innovations, if compared with the scientific approach of their predecessors. They were able to exploit the high degree of variety and fragmentation of family-planning implementation to present to the government proofs of the feasibility of a universal two-child policy.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew MERTHA, “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0: Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 200, 2009, p. 995-1012.

<sup>7</sup> “The sex ratio at birth refers to the number of boys born alive per 100 girls born alive.” OECD, *Definition of Sex Ratio at Birth*, “Glossary of Statistical Terms”, 04/01/2006 (updated), [online] URL <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=2447>. Accessed on 04/02/2020.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRUCTURE

In the first place, this research tries to demonstrate the consistency of Fragmentation of Authority as a theoretical framework in contextualizing China's family-planning bureaucratic structure. According to the framework, participants in the relaxation debate should be defined "political entrepreneurs" and their version of the story should be considered an "issue framing".

In addition, focusing on the concepts of "political entrepreneurs" and "issue framings", the research addresses the following questions:

- How have these new political entrepreneurs emerged and what were the favorable conditions within the system that allowed them to do so?
- Who are the most influential voices in the debate and how are they interconnected?
- What new narratives have they been articulating and to what extent have they challenged the state narratives?
- How can a different evaluation of the one-child policy in the past shape the future of China's population policies?

The first chapter of this thesis is dedicated to the gradual historical evolution and ideological transition of family planning from year 1980, under the administrations of Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, focusing on major legal changes. This chapter relied on secondary sources (Greenhalgh 2008; Basten and Jiang 2014; Winckler 2002; Zeng and Hesketh 2016); statistical data (World Bank Group) and official governmental documents.

The second chapter, entitled "Fragmented Authoritarianism and Birth Planning" is opened by a definition of the framework - from the first theorizations to recent revisions – and followed by its application to the birth planning context. Relevant literature on Fragmented Authoritarianism ranges from Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988); Lieberthal and Lampton (1992); to the more recent Mertha (2009) and Brødsgaard (2017).

The third chapter is articulated in two macro areas: policy entrepreneurs and issue framings. Drawing from a schematic comparison between the actors behind the one and the two-child policy, the narration focuses on the groups and the individuals that took part in the relaxation debate and outlines the connections among them. The second part of the

chapter explores the two opposite issue framings expressed by contending groups of scientists in the debate, one advocate for an immediate openness to two children, the other standing for the maintenance of the *status quo*. Differences among the two are demonstrated by a comparison between two official proposals presented to the government by the two contending groups (National Population Development Strategic Research Group 2007; Advocacy Group 2009). R. Riley (2017) was a fundamental source for this section, in addition with media secondary sources (Science 2010; The Star 2010; China Daily 2011; The New York Times 2011; Southern Weekend 2019;), official proposals for policy reform (2004; 2007; 2009; 2015) and interviews conducted in Renmin University (Beijing) to Professor Song Jian (March 2019), Assistant Professor Lü Lidan (October 2019) and to PhD student Zhou Yuxiang (March 2019).



## 1. FROM THE ONE TO THE TWO-CHILD POLICY, A GRADUAL PROCESS

### 1.1 Ideology and Science behind Reproduction in China

In Imperial China, the ideal of family was prescribed by Confucian norms, the most important of which was to continue the family line by producing a male heir (传宗接代 *chuanzongjiedai*). Consequently, the pillar of the Chinese family system was embodied by sons, and the reproductive behavior was epitomized by the expression 多子多福 *duoziduofu*, “the more, the merrier”, large families and different generations living in the same place were the ideal standard (四世同堂 *sishitongtang*).

With the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Confucian ideology<sup>1</sup> was officially substituted with a Marxian ideology of population, which considered itself as antithetical to the Malthusian theory of population growth<sup>2</sup>. According to Marx, population redundancy would have been substantial only in relation with job opportunities and not with natural resources, i.e. overpopulation was only a symptom of the inability of capitalism to absorb labor.<sup>3</sup> It became a hallmark of socialist theory that man, correctly organized in his role as producer, could overcome almost all social and natural obstacles.

In this respect, Mao Zedong’s official position on population was rooted in Marxian ideology, but in addressing the issue of overpopulation, Mao’s views were deeply ambivalent and changed over time. His categorical refusal to population control was visible in 1957, in the Anti-rightist campaign, with the attack on Ma Yinchu (1882-1982), an economist and president of Peking University who was silenced and removed from his position because of his essay “New Population Theory” (新人口论 *Xin renkou lun*). Ma’s thesis, published on the People’s Daily, stated that an unchecked population

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<sup>1</sup> “Ideology is a form of social or political philosophy in which practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones. It is a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it”. Maurice CRANSTON, “Ideology”, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27/11/2014, [online] URL <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ideology-society>. Accessed on 13/03/2019.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Robert MALTHUS, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, London, J. Johnson, 1798. In this work, Malthus developed his Theory of Population. According to it, while population grows exponentially (increases according to birth rate), food production increases arithmetically (at given points in time). According to Malthus, if left unchecked populations can outgrow resources.

<sup>3</sup> In his theory of “relative overpopulation”, Marx insisted that the problem of population was not universal, but relative to the mode of production. GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 45

growth could compromise China's economic development and citizens' life quality, and called for measures to slow down the population growth.

Since the condemnation of Ma, demography became a sensitive topic and population studies were suppressed. Mao's ambivalence led to a divergence of opinion among the leadership on this issue: while the radicals were firmly against birth control, more moderate politicians, such as Zhou Enlai, fought to get the issue on the Party's agenda. Thanks to Zhou's resolve to contain population growth, population control was included in the Fourth Five-Year Plan in the early 1970s. In order to distinguish the Chinese birth control policy from the neo-Malthusian population control, Marxian theorists were encouraged by Zhou to find a base for ideological legitimation of the new policy. Ultimately, it was agreed that, in China, only a comprehensive state plan governing population for the benefit of society could create a balance between the population growth and economic development.<sup>4</sup>

In 1960, when the world population reached 3 billion (the last billion being added in only 30 years) and China's population witnessed exponential growth<sup>5</sup>, the international population movement emerged<sup>6</sup>. In the West (especially in the USA), a wave of Neo-Malthusianism spread throughout the academia, the political community and the public opinion, the main concern being an imminent Malthusian population crisis<sup>7</sup> that would threaten the planet's sustainability.

A new awareness for the ecological impact of men on natural resources led many scholars to find in population the root cause of environmental degradation. At the end of 1960s, a series of parallel studies were published on the subject and, in 1969, President Nixon called on the UN to take a leadership role on population issues<sup>8</sup>, which

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<sup>4</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 58-59.

<sup>5</sup> China's first modern census in 1953 revealed a population of 583,000,000. In less than 50 years, the number doubled to 1,252,800,000 (1999), so China's population increased between 1953 and the present by more than 670,000,000. Columbia University, "Issues and Trends in China's Demographic History", *Asia for Educators*, 2009, [online] URL [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china\\_1950\\_population.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1950_population.htm). Accessed on 14/03/2019.

<sup>6</sup> The population movement is defined by two strands: one which was concerned with the numerical increase of population and the fear of its impact on the environment (the "macro" strand), while the other was related to women's individual reproductive rights (the "micro" strand). Rachel Sullivan ROBINSON, *UNFPA in Context: An Institutional History*, Washington, Center for Global Development Working Group on UNFPA's Leadership Transition, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Jan FELDMAN, "Population and ideology", *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 5, Imprint Academic ltd, 1984, pp. 361-375.

<sup>8</sup> Betsy HARTMANN, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control*, Boston, South End Press, 1995.

led to the establishment of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). The UNFPA's goal was to address population issues in developing countries by implementing different projects according to regions.

The population movement triggered an interconnected response from institutions, politicians, universities and mass media. It's hard to determine how these actors influenced each other and if there was a temporal succession in the publication of academic research and the implementation of political decisions but, it is a fact that the population movement gained more and more popularity<sup>9</sup>. The following studies are considered critical in the diffusion of such theories for the impact that they had both on the academic arena, on the public opinion and on China's birth control narrative.

The first is the best-selling<sup>10</sup> and controversial "The population Bomb", written by the Stanford University Professor Paul Ehrlich in 1968. In this work, he warned of future mass starvation due to overpopulation and advocated immediate action to limit population growth. Hereafter, Ehrlich became the president of the Zero Population Growth Movement (ZPG)<sup>11</sup>, a political movement strongly supported by Yale University. The movement's mission was to raise public awareness on the link between population growth and environmental degradation and, in turn, encourage people to have smaller families.

In the same year Garrett Hardin's article, "The tragedy of the commons" (1968), was published in the academic journal "Science", advocating for a new extension in morality that would legitimate population control. Hardin was a Professor of Human Ecology at the University of California and, in his article, he identified "commons" as goods that men can enjoy freely, without any restrictions. Hardin's thesis is that individuals will exploit the commons in order to maximize their advantage, imposing a cost on the whole society. Freedom to breed is one of the last surviving non-regulated commons, of which Hardin wrote: "Will bring ruin to all" and "The only way we can

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<sup>9</sup> In parallel a Pro-Life movement was expressing opposite ideas in the USA. Derek S. HOFF, "The State and the Stork: The Population Debate and Policy Making in U.S. History", *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 100, No 1, 2013, p. 276.

<sup>10</sup> *The Population Bomb* sold more than 2 million copies and went through 20 reprints by 1971. Ehrlich appeared more than 20 times on NBC's "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson". Derek S. HOFF, "A long fuse: 'The Population Bomb' is still ticking 50 years after its publication", *The Conversation*, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> The ZPG movement was founded by Paul Ehrlich, Richard Bowers (a lawyer from Connecticut) and Charles Lee Remington (a Yale University professor).

preserve and nurture other and more precious freedoms is by relinquishing the freedom to breed, and that very soon.”<sup>12</sup> Hardin doesn't advocate for a technical solution to solve the matter, but instead he suggests that only through an extension in morality, i.e. the use of “mutual coercion”<sup>13</sup>, people will refrain from breeding.

In the meanwhile, in Rome, a group discussion involving 30 European scientists, economists and businessmen was initiated to focus on global problems: in 1971 they constituted an informal international association called “The Club of Rome” and the following year, a group of researchers from the MIT produced the first report for the Club discussions, called “Limits to Growth” (1972)<sup>14</sup>. For the first time, the report pointed out that economic, political, social and environmental problems were interconnected. It presented mathematical models to show the risks for the planet of the increase of five crucial elements: population, agricultural production, consumption of nonrenewable resources, industrialization and pollution. The scenarios that resulted from the predictions in the “Limits to Growth” were dramatic and sent a shock wave among the public and drew many criticisms from the academic world.

While these scientific studies were mainstream and at the basis of the population debate in the USA and part of Europe, in China, the Marxian ideology remained the official version of the government, as clearly reflected in the speeches of the leaders on public occasions. The most important confrontation with international counterparts occurred in Bucharest in 1974, during the United Nations Population Conference. In line with a Cultural Revolution spirit, the speeches given by the Chinese delegation (reviewed by Zhou Enlai himself) were highly ideologically oriented on the struggle between the Third World and Imperialist superpowers, being played out in a Marx-versus-Malthus contest over population management. The Marxian thesis of “relative overpopulation” is underlined:

Of all things in the world, people are the most precious. Once the people take their destiny into their own hands, they will be able to perform miracles. Man, as worker and as creator and

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<sup>12</sup> Garrett HARDIN, “The Tragedy of the Commons”, *Science*, No. 162, Issue 3859, 1968, p. 1243-1248.

<sup>13</sup> By this Hardin means a coercion which is “mutually agreed upon by the majority of the people affected” and uses two examples to explain it: the imposition of taxes and the prohibition of bank robbery. *Ibidem.*, p. 1247.

<sup>14</sup> The director of the MIT team was Dr. Dennis L. Meadows. The Report was written by him, his wife Donella H. Meadows, Jørgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, with the contribution of a team of 17 members specialized in different fields analyzed in the report.

user of tools, is the decisive factor in the social productive forces. Man is in the first place a producer and only in the second place a consumer.<sup>15</sup>

And while it is emphasized that a large population has a positive value, the main cause of poverty is found in the economic oppression by the superpowers:

The large population of the Third World constitutes an important condition for strengthening the struggle against imperialism and hegemonism and accelerating social and economic development. [...] Is it owing to over-population that unemployment and poverty exist in many countries of the world today? No, absolutely not. It is mainly due to aggression, plunder and exploitation by the imperialists, particularly the superpowers.<sup>16</sup>

Speeches in the PRC are highly significant, and the choice of words is never accidental: in this extract from the speech given in Bucharest, the dichotomy between scientific, mathematical reasoning and ideology is evident. The Chinese delegation describes the Western approach as functional to prove a non-consistent problem and, therefore, biased.

What a mass of figures they have calculated in order to prove that the population is too large, the food supply too small and natural resources insufficient! But they never calculate the amount of natural resources they have plundered, the social wealth they have grabbed and the super-profits they have extorted from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Should an account be made of their exploitation, the truth with regard to the population problem will at once be out. Their multitude of population statistics will not help them a bit either.<sup>17</sup>

Ten years later, in 1984, at the UN International conference on population, held in Mexico City, Wang Wei, the chairman of the delegation of the PRC, delivered a totally different speech, which epitomizes the total shift in the Chinese approach to the population problem. The base of legitimation from ideology, turned into *science* and population from a precious resource, turned into a *problem*.

China is the most populous country in the world. In seeking the solution to its population problem, China, as a developing socialist country, has been making unremitting efforts to develop economy while controlling the rapid population growth in order that population growth may be in keeping with socio-economic development and commensurate with utilization of natural resources and environmental protection. (...) To solve the population problem is a great

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<sup>15</sup> Population Council, "Chinese Statements on Population at Bucharest, 1974, and Mexico City, 1984", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1994, p. 451.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 452.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 454.

cause in human history. We are convinced that with socio-economic development and scientific and cultural advances, and also with continuous deepening of people's understanding about the population issue, mankind will be sure to correctly and effectively solve the problem of its own development.<sup>18</sup>

How did this change occur? What were the critical events and who the actors that made it possible? At the macro-level, in 1978 with the economic reforms, Deng Xiaoping heralded a major shift in the base of Party's legitimacy: ideology was replaced with science and technology, the main means to achieve modernization of agriculture, industry and national defense, and to control Chinese population.

At the micro-level, the encounter with Western scientific reasoning occurred in mid-1978, at the Seventh Triennial World Congress of International Federation of Automatic Control (IFAC), in Helsinki. In this occasion, more than 1,100 scientists from different countries gathered together to present their research on highly technical and applied subjects, among them optimum guidance and control methods.<sup>19</sup> Song Jian represented the Chinese delegation at the meeting and after his return to China he would play a major role in population policies, becoming the "father" of the one-child policy. Song Jian was a control theorist and expert on missile guidance and control systems, trained in the Soviet Union and a PhD from Moscow University. Well protected by political connections and the patronage of Qian Xuesen, the initiator of China's aerospace and missile defense program, Song could enjoy a relatively free and privileged place in the Chinese intelligentsia, as defense scientists were not ideologically or politically restricted. Given this favorable position, Song had the chance to get in touch with international publications which were extremely advanced, if compared to the Chinese scientific research. On the occasion of IFAC, Song encountered the ideas of two Dutch control theorists. G.J. Olsder and Huibert Kwakernaak, who had developed a new cybernetic-based natural science of population control that was close to views of the Club of Rome. After the meeting, Song spent a week with the two scientists at the Twentieth University of Technology in Enschede (Netherlands) and got extremely fascinated by their theories<sup>20</sup>:

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 458.

<sup>19</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p 135.

<sup>20</sup> Mara HVISTENDAHL, "Has China Outdrawn The One Child Policy?", *Science*, Vol.329, Issue 5998, 17/09/2010, p. 1460.

After more than ten years of isolation from the outside world, during a visit to Europe in 1978, I happened to learn about the application of system analysis theory by European scientists to the study of population problems with a great success. [...] I was extremely excited about these documents and determined to try the method of demography.<sup>21</sup>

To apply these ideas to population control, Song and his team had to lean on a different ideological base of legitimation: an openly neo-Malthusian ideology, at the base of the population movement in the West, was unacceptable in the Marxian China. According to Marx, population can only be relative to the mode of production and Song's thesis couldn't distance itself too much from this socialist dogma. In order to render his work politically admissible, Song converted these ideas from Malthusian ideology to international scientific truth<sup>22</sup>; his theories weren't expressed through ideologically charged narrative, but through numbers, calculations, schemas and graphs, thus "neutralizing" any possible political statement. In his work, synthesized in the essay *Population System Control*<sup>23</sup>, Song never directly cited Western sources and never used expressions like "crisis", "population bomb", "catastrophe".<sup>24</sup>

With the implementation of the one-child policy in 1980 and the political support for Song's proposals, the ideological base of the population policy became scientific reasoning, mathematical models and technology-based empirical results. Even if Marxism was not officially rejected, it was no more the criterion for decision making; science and its unquestionable facts became the benchmark of right and wrong. This approach to population control well fitted in the overall project of economic reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, in fact, Science and Technology was not only one of the Four modernizations<sup>25</sup>, but the core prerequisite to realize the other three.

A more pragmatic approach and the imperative to "Seek truth from facts" (实事求是 *Shishi qiushi*) were the new base of CCP's legitimacy. Modern science, perceived as opposite to ideology, besides regaining people's trust in the Party, became the only mean to development and the only way out from backwardness. Political leaders spread

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<sup>21</sup> SONG Jian, "Systems science and China's economic reforms", in YANG Jianchi (edited by), *Control Science and Technology for Development*, Oxford, Pergamon Press plc, 1986, p. 1-8.

<sup>22</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 144-145.

<sup>23</sup> SONG Jian, KONG Deyong, YU Jingyuan, "Population System Control", *Mathl Comput. Modelling.*, Great Britain, Pergamon Press plc, Vol. 11, 1988, p. 11-16.

<sup>24</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>25</sup> The Four Modernizations, set forth by Deng Xiaoping, aimed at strengthening the fields of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology in China.

through propaganda their unshakeable faith in science, creating a sort of scientific culture and thus, ideology. According to Greenhalgh (2008), the Deng Era's scientism operated through the language of numbers and mathematics and, on one hand, its incomprehensibility contributed in enforcing its authority, on the other hand, it made it uncontestable and above the political debate.

Deng's Four modernizations on the macro-level and the encounter between Song Jian and European scientists close to the Club of Rome on the micro-level brought to a gradual transition from Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought ideology, to modern science and technology. This change mainly influenced the political leadership, the top-level decisions and the political discourse. In the meanwhile, at a personal level, the deep-rooted Confucian idea of the family line was hard to shake up in the name of Modern Science, especially in the countryside.

## 1.2 1980s: Deng Xiaoping – One-child Policy for Economic Progress

At the time of Mao's death in 1976, Chinese population surpassed 930 million people, accounting for a quarter of the world population, with just 7% of the world's arable land. Two-thirds of the population were under the age of 30, and the baby boomers of the 1950s and 1960s were entering their reproductive years<sup>26</sup>, while the per capita GDP was only 165,41 USD/year<sup>27</sup>. Economic development and modernizations, as the core of Deng Xiaoping's CCP base of legitimacy, implied that one of the leadership's main goals was to raise the per capita GDP.<sup>28</sup>

Since 1978, political leaders supported one child families by formally advocating "One is best, two at most, spacing for at least three years" and by issuing concrete measures in over 10 provinces including rewarding parents with one child and punishing those with two or more<sup>29</sup>. However, since the 1960's baby boomers entered their reproductive age in 1980s, and Deng set the goal of 1000 USD per capita income by year 2000, the only solution appeared to be a drastic decrease in population growth. In February 1980, a set of demographic goals was issued, including a total population

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<sup>26</sup> WANG Cuntong, "History of the Chinese Family Planning program: 1970-2010", *Elsevier Inc.*, 2012, p. 564.

<sup>27</sup> In the same year, the USA per capita GDP was over 8600 USD. *GDP per capita (current US\$) – China, United States*, "The World Bank", [online] URL <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=1977&locations=CN-US&page=5&start=1974>. Accessed on 11/03/2019.

<sup>28</sup> WANG Feng, CAI Yong, GU Baochang, "Population, Policy, and Politics: How Will History Judge China's One-Child Policy?", *Population and Development Review*, 2012, p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

of 1.2 billion by 2000 and a population growth rate equal to zero<sup>30</sup>, but concerns among the leaders on the social feasibility of the policy persisted and even if everybody agreed on limiting population, there was no consensus on an immediate one-child-for-all policy.

In April 1980, in Zhongnanhai, debates among politicians<sup>31</sup> and scientists were launched in order to reach a decision and Song Jian shifted the focus of the problem from economic development, to ecological warning, shaping the population issue not as a matter of poverty, but as a matter of survival.

On June 26, 1980, the one-child policy was approved by the Secretariat of the Central Committee and enforced not by law but by propaganda and education; according to Greenhalgh (2008) a law mandating one-child families would have been extremely controversial.<sup>32</sup> On September 26, the CCP advocated one child for all in an Open Letter<sup>33</sup>, drafted under the supervision of Hu Yaobang, published in the People's Daily and addressed to the General Membership of the Communist Party and the Membership of the Chinese Communist Youth League. The release of the Open Letter can be considered as the official beginning of the one-child policy.

The implementation of the policy was in line with the previous Maoist mobilization campaign: cadres were in charge with propagandizing the masses, selecting targets, applying sociopolitical pressure and setting economic disincentives in order to make the people comply; but the use of coercion and harassment was strictly forbidden.

For the sake of restricting population figure and achieving the goal of GDP growth, three instruments were employed: mass voluntarism, i.e. a behavioral change instilled with a top-down strategy; propaganda and a penalty-reward system; and finally, the force of law and the Party authority. On the institutional level, the National Family Planning Commission (NFPC), founded in 1981 and lead by Chen Muhua, constituted the vertex of the birth planning system, a huge network of affiliated governmental and

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 119.

<sup>31</sup> Chen Yun, Chen Muhua and Hu Yaobang were among them. GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 271-306.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 293.

<sup>33</sup> "An open letter was a special communication vehicle that offered the party Center both symbolic and political benefits. It had been used only once before." *Ibidem.*

nongovernmental organizations in charge of managing population.<sup>34</sup> In 1983, the birth planning was elevated by general secretary Hu Yaobang as a basic-state policy (基本国策 *Jiben guocce*), underlying its mandatory nature and its removal from public debate.<sup>35</sup>

The effect of the policy on the people had a dualistic nature: urban citizens accepted the fact of having just one child quite easily, while in the countryside it was intensely resisted. The reasons behind this divergence lied in a series of factors: in cities, one, maximum two, children were already the desired family size, the costs of raising children was really high and son preference was weak, moreover, the fear of sanctions was a powerful deterrent as many couples depended on their employers in the system of work unit (单位 *danwei*).<sup>36</sup> As Basten and Jiang write:

In urban areas, violating the new policy meant loss of access to schools, medical care, factory jobs, housing and social welfare.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, in rural areas, where 80 percent of the Chinese population lived, the desired number of children was between two and three and one of them had to be a male. In the countryside, too, the childbearing expenses increased and the idea “the more, the merrier” became dated, but a strict one-child policy was not acceptable. People’s resistance encountered brutal state crackdowns and violence: in 1983 a nationwide sterilization campaign was launched and extra pregnancies, no matter how late they were, forcefully suspended<sup>38</sup>. In 1986 a relaxation of the policy loosened the tension in the countryside, but a harsh repression occurred again in 1991, after a rise in fertility. The local response was severe because a new responsibility system, called “one-vote veto” (一票否决 *yipiao foujue*), was introduced by the central government. According to this system, local officials were evaluated by their performance in meeting population targets and judged personally responsible for failing to do so<sup>39</sup>; this meant

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<sup>34</sup> WONG Siu-lun, “Consequences of China’s New Population Policy”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 98, 1984, p. 221-222.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> Susan GREENHALGH, *Cultivating Global citizens: population in the rise of China*, Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 47.

<sup>37</sup> Stuart BASTEN, JIANG Quanbao, “China’s Family Planning Policies: Recent Reforms and Future Porspects”, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2014, p. 494.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas D. KRISTOF, “China’s Crackdown on Births: A Stunning, and Harsh, Success”, *The New York Times*, 25/04/1993, [online] URL <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/04/25/world/china-s-crackdown-on-births-a-stunning-and-harsh-success.html> Accessed on 15/03/2019.

in practice salary reduction, job downgrade and even dismissal for local cadres, who responded with drastic actions.

During Deng's leadership, the population control was mainly a matter of numbers and targets; the one-child policy was conceived as a scientific, economic-oriented plan and people's social behavior and family desires were downplayed for the political goals. By 1993, the central government achieved success: the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) had fallen to about 1.868, below the replacement level of 2.2.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.3 First Modification of the One-child Policy (1984)

In response to the resistance in the countryside, the Party issued in 1984 the Central Document n.7, loosening the policy and introducing more realistic and achievable modifications. The change occurred at various institutional levels, from the center, down to local communities and coincided with the appointment of the new Minister in Charge of the NFPC, Wang Wei (December 1983).<sup>41</sup>

The Document introduced changes in ideology, policy, workstyle and organization<sup>42</sup>: on the ideological side, which retained a fundamental role in Chinese policymaking, birth planning was reconfirmed as a mean to serve economic goals, but at the same time needed a strong sensitization of the people. In order to renew its relationship with the masses, the CCP used a strategy of compromise, synthesized by the slogan "open a small hole to close up a large one" (开小口堵大口 *kai xiao kou du da kou*). At the provincial level, this meant a reform in fertility policy which allowed some exceptions to a strict one-child policy: rural couples whose first child was a girl were allowed to have a second (the so-called 1.5 child policy, 一孩半政策 *yi hai ban zhengce*), while ethnic minorities, people with physical disability, inhabitants of poor or remote regions, and workers performing hazardous activities could have two children<sup>43</sup>. Such a reform was driven by two basic principles that couldn't be overestimated by the Party: sons ensure personal and familial continuity and children can be a critical economic asset in particular conditions. In this perspective, the one-

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<sup>40</sup> The Total Fertility Rate is the average number of children per woman. *Fertility rate (total births per woman) – China*, "The World Bank", [online] URL <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=CN>. Accessed on 20/03/2019.

<sup>41</sup> Susan GREENHALGH, "Shifts in China's Population Policy, 1984-86: Views from the Central, Provincial, and Local Levels", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1986, p. 491.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 492-493.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

child policy needed to be adapted to these specific needs of the people. At the central level the state showed more flexibility by modifying the population target in 1985 from 1.2 billion in 2000, to *about* 1.2 billion.<sup>44</sup>

The Central Document n.13 of May 1986, substituted the Document 7 and was issued together with the Draft Plan for the Seventh Five-Year Plan. This draft was mainly in line with the previous one, the Party's attention was mainly on local cells and implementation methods which included regular home visits, contraceptives deliveries, healthcare assistance and use of media and propaganda to attack traditional beliefs. This capillary action produced good results in term of drops in fertility rates, a rise in the use of contraceptives and a decrease in criticism and complaints about local cadres.

#### **1.4 1990s: Jiang Zemin – Focus on Education and Contraception**

During the Jiang Zemin era (1993-2003), birth planning entered a phase of consolidation, especially in its grassroots-level implementation. Data on population growth were extremely positive when Jiang became president (1993): that year the TFR went below the replacement level; the program had accounted for 54 percent of the reduction in fertility and had successfully avoided 338 million births, which counted as a state expense equal to 7.4 trillion yuan<sup>45</sup>.

According to Jiang, a policy in any area should represent three things (the Theory of Three Represents): the development of the most advanced productive forces; the practices of advanced culture; and the fundamental interests of the Chinese people.<sup>46</sup> At the base of the new politics, this new ideology involved also birth planning and resulted in a more sustainable application of the policy: instead of relying on coercion, the leadership pushed on education and instead of requiring forced sterilizations and abortions, it promoted contraception<sup>47</sup>. A series of reforms took place in the 1990s to ameliorate the whole system: “professionalization” (training of professionals at the local level), “rectification” (against administrative abuses), “normalization” (against sex-selective abortion), “incentivization” and “collateralization” (conceding material

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 494.

<sup>45</sup> Edwin A. WINCKLER, “Chinese Reproductive Policy at the Turn of the Millennium: Dynamic stability”, *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2002, p. 395.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 389.

<sup>47</sup> “China continued to maintain the highest overall contraceptive usage and prevalence of long-term contraception in the world.” WANG, “History of the Chinese Family Planning program: 1970-2010”, *op. cit.*, p. 567.

benefits to complying couples and indirect incentives from related programs).<sup>48</sup> Another preeminent reform, together with these goals, was “internationalization” of birth planning, i.e. to accept international advice and assistance and promote a more people-centered approach to population control.

The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994 and promoted by the United Nations, was a key forum where these ideas emerged. The discussion, which had among its participants 20,000 delegates from governments, agencies, NGOs and mass media, touched a variety of population issues, and shifted the focus from limiting population growth to providing reproductive health care and empowering women. The State intervention had to be reversed from a “top-down” approach to “bottom-up”; the CCP partially incorporated this shift in its governance of population by drawing the attention to “medicalization” and “feminization”, in relation to women’s reproductive health-care, education and economic participation. In 1995, six selected counties were chosen by the NFPC to implement a pilot project based on quality of care (优质服务 *youzhi fuwu*) and informed choice with a more client-centered approach, i.e. free choice of contraceptive methods for couples, with the assistance of professional and technical staff<sup>49</sup>. The then Minister of the NFPC and Chairman of the All-China Women’s Federation, Peng Peiyun, was an active promoter of women’s development and woman cadres training.

Crackdown on local maladministration and coercion found legal expression in the official notice listing “seven don’ts” (七个不均 *qige bujun*), issued on July 10, 1995 by the NFPC. The list proposed seven prohibitions that local cadres had to respect in case of violation of birth planning regulations, including not to arrest or harm violators and not to destroy or impound their property.<sup>50</sup> To reduce coercion the system of community birth quotas was abolished, and the government shifted its efforts from fertility reduction at any costs, to keeping the achieved fertility level as low as it already was.

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<sup>48</sup> WINCKLER, “Reproductive Policy at the Turn of the Millennium”, op. cit., p. 382

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 383.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

## 1.5 The Law on Population and Family Planning of 2001

For more than 20 years since the publication of the Open Letter which advocated for only one child per family, family planning in China had not found any match in national law, just a vague “duty to implement fertility planning” was prescribed in the Marriage Law of 1980 and in the Constitution of 1982<sup>51</sup>. There were several reasons behind this: to what extent could the law be uniform for the multi-faceted China? How feasible could prescription on contraceptive methods be? How to define if the permitted number of children was just a recommendation or an imposition? The solution, in order to draft the Law, was to keep it as general as possible and to let national regulations and subnational legislation deal with the details.<sup>52</sup>

Immediately before the Law of 2001, the “Decision on Strengthening Population and Family Planning Work” was issued in 2000, providing the “guiding thought” for current Chinese reproductive policy. The Decision is divided in seven parts, respectively on reaffirming the importance of limiting population growth, defining the goals for the decade 2000 to 2010, setting the process of regulation of the policy and reaffirming the Party’s responsibility for meeting population goals<sup>53</sup>. There are some important innovations in the Decision concerning population quality, seen in a less “eugenic” sense, but with more attention to maternal and childcare; new methods like positive economic incentives are also underlined. For the first time, issues like sex balance, support to an aging population and awareness of demographic distortions were officially addressed.

The 2001 Law on Population and Family Planning<sup>54</sup> follows the same political direction: citizens’ duty to limit childbearing is juxtaposed to their right to reproduce.

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<sup>51</sup> WONG, “Consequences of China’s New Population Policy”, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>52</sup> WINCKLER, “Reproductive Policy at the Turn of the Millennium”, op. cit., p. 388.

<sup>53</sup> “By 2005, China is to have its population within 1.33 billion (excluding the population of the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan Province). The annual average natural growth of its population should not exceed 9%. [...] By 2010, China is to have its population within 1.4 billion and the Chinese people will lead a much better life with an obvious improvement of its population quality. [...] By the mid-21st century, the total population would reach its peak number of 1.6 billion to be followed by a gradual decrease.” Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guowuyuan xin bangongshi 中华人民共和国国务院新闻办公室 (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC), *Zhongguo Ershiyi Shiji renkou yu fazhan* 中国二十一世纪人口与发展 (China's Population and Development in the 21st Century), Beijing, 2000, [online] URL <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=dbref&id=27>. Accessed on 18/03/2019.

<sup>54</sup> Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Population and Family Planning*, “lowinfochina”, 09/01/2002, [online] URL <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=2209&lib=law&SearchKeyword=&SearchCKeyword>. Accessed on 18/03/2019.

The structure of the Law is from the general to the particular: it starts from general principles and macro-demographic population planning, down to micro-demographic regulation of reproduction and incentives, health services and legal responsibilities. Contraception is once again pointed as the main method to realize birth control, while abortion and sterilization are not explicitly mentioned. Another important introduction is the “social compensation fee” (社会抚养费 *shehui fuyangfei*), which substitutes the penalty for extra child: instead of imposing a sanction, the government is requiring non-compliant families to pay the compensation to society for the extra costs of raising extra children. Given its broad nature, the Law omits many important details, left at discretion of local authorities: no population targets or birth quotas are established, early marriage or out-of-plan births are not “forbidden”, as well as termination of out-of-plan pregnancies and refusal of sterilization are not mentioned. Space for extralegal means of enforcement was left to local politicians.<sup>55</sup>

In its practical implementation, the birth program was associated with “service stations” equipped with technical service providers, birth planning clinics (present in 80 percent of the villages) and at least one professional worker in 99 percent of villages.<sup>56</sup> New measures were introduced in respect to sexual health, such as sex education for adolescents, men’s health and AIDS awareness. Coercive behavior and corruption were put under constant state vigilance in 2000 and 2001.

## **1.6 The Hu-Wen Administration – Scientific Concept of Development and “Quality Child”**

As analyzed previously, the management of population has always been highly interconnected with the CCP’s ideology: under Mao Zedong Thought, it followed a Marxian approach, during Deng Xiaoping Theory, it was highly scientific and linked to GDP growth, while in Jiang Zemin’s Three Represents, it became more sustainable and mainly relied on education. When the Hu Jintao - Wen Jiabao<sup>57</sup> administration took power, birth planning was already a basic-state policy and a recently formalized law,

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<sup>55</sup> WINCKLER, “Reproductive Policy at the Turn of the Millennium”, op. cit., p. 397.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 399.

<sup>57</sup> Hu Jintao was CCP General Secretary, Chairman of the Central Military Commission and President of the PRC from 2003 to 2013, Wen Jiabao was Premier of the State Council and Party Secretary of the State Council from 2003 to 2013. Together they formed the so-called Hu-Wen Administration (胡温体制 *Hu Wen tizhi*).

but its evolution was still “in progress” and was shaped by the Hu-Wen “scientific concept of development” ideology.

After more than 20 years of pushing economic growth at the expense of social welfare and environment preservation, China’s new leadership aimed at correcting evident social imbalances and promoting individuals’ well-being: the main points of preoccupation were about rural development, regional gaps, science and technology and ecology<sup>58</sup>. At the Third Plenary Session of the 16<sup>th</sup> Central Committee held in October 2003, the emerging political line was to “Take people as the main thing (以人为本 *yiren weiben*), establish a concept of comprehensive, coordinated, sustainable development, and promote comprehensive economic, social and human development”<sup>59</sup>.

The population problem incorporated in this framework was reshaped as a social and human problem: the government focused on resolving the distortions caused by the stress on pushing fertility down as fast as possible and emphasized the importance of fostering high-quality people through health and education<sup>60</sup>.

In the “State Council Decision on Fully Enhancing the Population and Family Planning Program and Comprehensively Addressing Population Issues” (hereafter the Decision) of 2007, the government describes population growth as highly complex and with risk of rebounding, as from 8 to 10 million Chinese a year are expected to be born. Important priorities are listed and consist in “stabilizing the low fertility level, addressing population issues in a comprehensive way and promoting all-round human development”<sup>61</sup>. While confirming future efforts in limiting population growth and endorsing the previous experiences, the Decision points out the importance of

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<sup>58</sup> Joseph FEWSMITH, “Promoting the Scientific Development Concept”, *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 11, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Renmin Wang, *Zhongguo gongchandang dishiliujie zhongyang weiyuanhui disanci quanti huiyi gongbao*, 中国共产党第十六届中央委员会第三次全体会议公报 (Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party), Renmin wang 人民网 (People’s Daily online), 14/10/2003, [online] URL <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1024/2133923.html>. Accessed on 03/04/2019.

<sup>60</sup> GREENHALGH, *Cultivating Global Citizens*, op. cit., p. 52-57.

<sup>61</sup> *Introduction About the Decision on Fully Enhancing Population and Family Planning Program and Comprehensively Addressing Population Issues*, “china.org.cn”, [online] URL <http://www.china.org.cn/e-news/news070123-2.htm>. Accessed on 03/04/2019.

“population quality in terms of health and education” and underlines that “the priority of [...] family planning program lie in rural China”<sup>62</sup>.

The Decision stresses four main areas of improvement: gender discrimination with a consequent abnormal sex ratio (Part V), a uniform management for migrants and native residents (Part VI), the construction of a social service system for elderly people (Part VII) and the improvement of the family planning structures in terms of public finance, infrastructure, human resources and technology (Part VIII).<sup>63</sup>

The core narrative of the Hu-Wen administration was to build an “all-inclusive harmonious socialist society”, through the implementation of the scientific concept of development; this idea is repeatedly mentioned in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan for National Economic and social Development. Even though birth planning is not directly discussed, in the Plan, the government distances itself from the past idea of development that gave excessive emphasis on the expansion of economic aggregates, and imbalanced development among regions, between urban and rural areas, and between economic and social dimensions in favor of social well-being, humanistic values, and environmental protection<sup>64</sup>.

### 1.7 China’s Population at the Beginning of the New Millennium

At the turn to the 2000s, China’s population presented many complexities and important changes from the past, exemplified in the following data:

- **Demographic Indicators:** even though, in 2000, China retains the biggest population in the world, with 1,27 billion people, the average population growth rate is just 0,9%, low if compared with India<sup>65</sup> (1.6%) and very close to developed countries (0.8% in the USA). The percentage of urban population is 30%, increasing at a rate of 3,6. The TFR is significantly decreased at 1.80 (it was 2.7 in 1979, when the one-child policy was launched), while in the same year in India is 3.13.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>64</sup> Barry NAUGHTON, “The New Common Economic Program: China’s Eleventh Five Year Plan and What It Means”, *China Leadership Monitor*, No.16, 2005.

<sup>65</sup> The comparison with India is motivated by the similar size of the two countries’ populations.

<sup>66</sup> UNFPA, *The state of world population 2000. Lives Together, Worlds Apart: Men and Women in a Time of Change*, 2000, Tables p. 67-73, [online] URL [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/swp2000\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/swp2000_eng.pdf). Accessed on 27/06/2019.

- **Mortality and Reproductive Health:** China's mortality rate accounts for 41 on 1000 live births, a high number if compared with developed countries, but still nearly half of the Indian rate (72/1000). This data is related with the percentage of births assisted by skilled attendants, which rates 85 in China (86 in Eastern Asia and 35 in India). Life expectancy, a key indicator to evaluate a country's health condition, is 67.9 for men and 72 for women (2000). The per capita central government expenditures for education and health are respectively 71.1 and 61.2 thousand USD (65.5 and 13.4 in India). The use of contraceptive (both any methods and modern methods) is rated as the highest in the world, 83 percent is the contraceptive prevalence and there are just 5 births per 1000 women aged 15-19 (over 100 in India).<sup>67</sup>
- **Education:** the gross rate of primary enrolment is quite positive, equal to 122 for males and 123 for females, but drops at secondary enrolment (74/66), especially for girls.<sup>68</sup> The percentage of illiterate is relatively low, but still shows a discrimination against females: rates 9% for boys and 25% for girls (the Indian rate is 32% for males and 56% for females).<sup>69</sup> These data indicate a significant institutional effort to promote education from the state, but at the same time, a culturally strong preference for boys against girls.
- **Economic Indicators:** As one of the main purposes of population control was the increase of per capita GDP, this fundamental data is to be watched over the years: in 1980 the per capita GDP was 194.805 USD, comparable to the poorest African countries, in 1990 it was nearly doubled at 317.885, number that tripled in a decade, reaching 1053.108 USD per capita in 2000, the goal set by Deng Xiaoping in 1980s.<sup>70</sup>

In parallel with this complex process of transformation, the Chinese population presented two important imbalances: a distortion in the sex ratio and a too fast aging society connected with a shrink in the working age-population. As demographers noted, these negative consequences of the policy were reversing the demographic dividend, so

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>68</sup> Gross enrolment ratios indicate the number of students enrolled in a level in the education system per 100 individuals in the appropriate age group.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>70</sup> *GDP per capita (current US\$) – China*, “The World Bank”, [online] URL <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=CN>. Accessed on 27/06/2019.

that the decline in fertility and mortality instead of causing an acceleration in economic growth, was slowing it down.<sup>71</sup>

Several warnings from scientists concerning imbalances in the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) were addressed to the leadership since 1990s, but only in the Decision (2007), the problem was officially recognized by the government. SRB represents the number of boys per 100 girls, born in a given period. The average rate of SRB, with no human interventions altering biology, is 105 (between 103 and 107), if SRB deviates from the average, then a society shows a preference for male (or female).<sup>72</sup>

As displayed in the following table, before 1980s China's SRB stayed within the normal range, while after 1982 has exceeded 107, and grew in the following 20 years. The causes of this abnormality are prenatal sex identification and gender-specific abortion<sup>73</sup>, which advantaged boys over girls because of the traditional preference to have a son.

Year	SRB	Year	SRB
1953	104.9	1990	114.7
1964	106.6	1991	116.1
1970	105.9	1992	114.2
1979	105.8	1993	114.1
1982	107.2	1995	117.4
1987	111.0	1997	120.4
1989	111.3	2000	119.9

Figure 1: Sex Ratio at Birth in China from 1953 to 2000. *Gender Gaps in China: Facts and Figures*, "The World Bank", 2006, p. 4, [online] URL <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTOPGENDER/Resources/Gender-Gaps-Figures&Facts.pdf>. Accessed on 27/06/2019.

The phenomenon was widespread all over China, except for the minorities concentrated regions of Tibet, Qinghai, Guizhou and Xinjiang (2000 Population Census). Even though the phenomenon is present in big cities as well, it reaches the highest peaks in rural and poverty-stricken areas (SRB exceeded 130 in Anhui, Hubei, Guangdong and Hainan provinces). Instead of balancing the ratio, the 1.5-child policy

<sup>71</sup> ZENG Yi, Therese HESKETH, "The effects of China's universal two-child policy", *Lancet*, Vol. 388, No. 10054, 2016, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Gender Gaps in China: Facts and Figures*, "The World Bank", 2006, p. 4, [online] URL <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTOPGENDER/Resources/Gender-Gaps-Figures&Facts.pdf>. Accessed on 27/06/2019.

<sup>73</sup> Both illegal since the early 1990s, but still lacking effective implementation.

exacerbated it, as the message it sent to Chinese was that female children's value was less than male children's value in ensuring family welfare.<sup>74</sup>

Province	SRB	Province	SRB
Beijing	114.58	Heilongjiang	107.52
Tianjin	112.97	Shanghai	115.51
Hebei	118.46	Jiangsu	120.19
Shanxi	112.75	Anhui	130.76
Inner Mongolia	108.48	Zhejiang	113.11
Liaoning	112.17	Fujian	120.26
Jilin	109.87	Jiangxi	138.01
Shandong	113.49	Chongqing	115.80
Henan	130.30	Sichuan	116.37
Hubei	128.02	Yunnan	110.57
Hunan	126.92	Guizhou	105.37
Guangdong	137.76	Tibet	97.43
Guangxi	128.80	Shaanxi	125.15
Hainan	135.04	Gansu	119.35
Qinghai	103.52	Ningxia	107.99
Xinjiang	106.65		

Figure 2: China's Sex Ratio at Birth by Province, 2000 Population Census. Gender Gaps in China: Facts and Figures, "The World Bank", 2006, p. 6, [online] URL <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTO/PGENDER/Resources/Gender-Gaps-Figures&Facts.pdf>. Accessed on 27/06/2019.

One of the main problems caused by a high SRB consists in the risk of social instability due to an excess of men unable to find a spouse at marriage age. According to calculations by Poston et al. (2005), between 2000 and 2021 the total surplus of men will be more than 23.5 million.<sup>75</sup> With not enough women to marry in the Chinese marriage market, a consistent amount of men will become "bare branches" (光棍儿 *guanggun*) in a society where marriage is nearly universal and virtually everyone is expected to marry. As Eberstadt (2000) notes:

Unless it is swept by a truly radical change in cultural and social attitudes toward marriage in the next two decades, China [is] poised to experience an increasingly intense, and perhaps desperate, competition among young men for the nation's limited supply of brides.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> ZENG, HESKETH, "The effects of China's universal two-child policy", op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Dudley L. POSTON Jr., Karen S. GLOVER, "Too Many Males: Marriage Market Implications of Gender Imbalances in China", *Genus*, Vol. 61, No. 2, 2005, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Nicholas EBERSTADT, *Prosperous Paupers & Other Population Problems*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 2000, p. 230.

For this reason, since the 2000s, the gender gap has been a serious concern among China's leaders, who operated through law and propaganda aiming at promoting gender equality. According to Greenhalgh (2010) these measures are not enough to contrast a culture and economic environment that in many ways discriminate against girls and women, thus will take a long time to restore a normal SRB.<sup>77</sup>

The other important distortion in the Chinese population composition at the turn of the century was a too rapid aging society: even with a relatively young population (median age around 32 and only 7.6 percent of over 65 years old in 2005), the pace of acceleration of the percentage of elders was worrying. Projections taken in the early 2000 show an increase of older population prognosticated to 28 percent in 2040, with a median age of 44.<sup>78</sup>

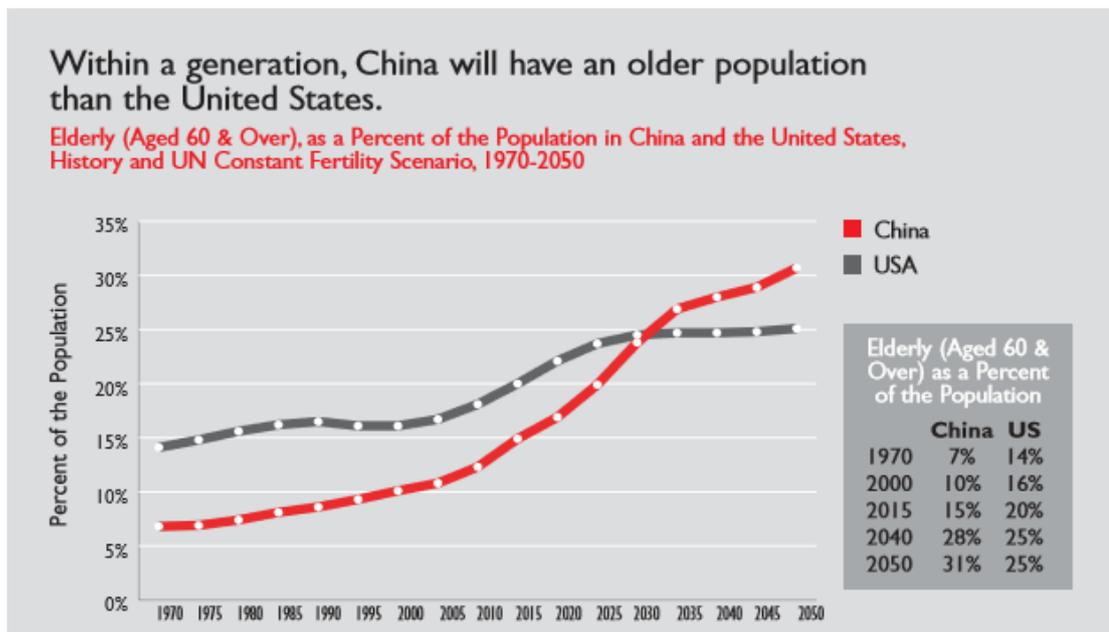


Figure 3: Percentage of population aged 60 and over in China and in the USA, from year 1970 to year 2050. Richard JACKSON, Neil HOWE, *The Graying of the Middle Kingdom: The Demographics and Economics of Retirement Policy in China*, Washington DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Prudential Foundation, 2004, p. 3.

The process of aging, endemic to every developed society, emanates from two fundamental forces: falling fertility and rising longevity. This tendency is usually gradual and occurs after a society has reached a well-off status, China's sudden shrink

<sup>77</sup> GREENHALGH, *Cultivating Global Citizens*, op. cit., p.77.

<sup>78</sup> Richard JACKSON, Neil HOWE, *The Graying of the Middle Kingdom: The Demographics and Economics of Retirement Policy in China*, Washington DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Prudential Foundation, 2004, p. 10.

in fertility, though, took place at a still low-income stage, lacking two fundamental support systems: health care insurance system and the public pension. Without any pension or health-care coverage (only 25 percent of the workforce had any kind of pension in the early 2000s), the main source of sustenance, for the great majority of Chinese, were their children.<sup>79</sup>

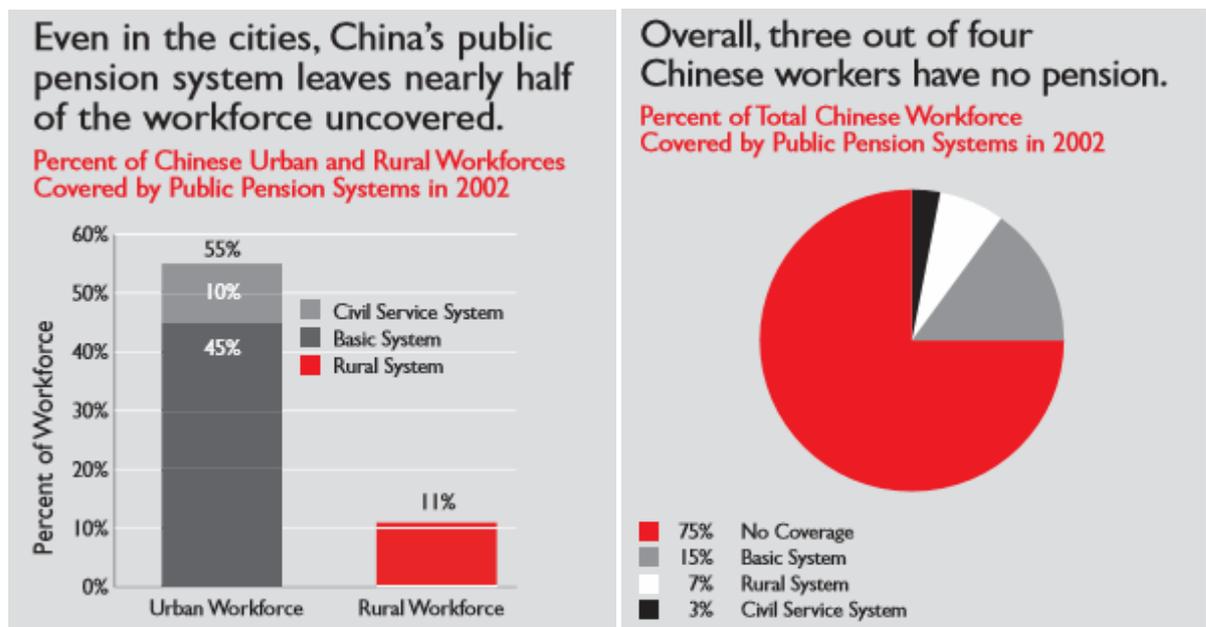


Figure 4: Richard JACKSON, Neil HOWE, *The Graying of the Middle Kingdom: The Demographics and Economics of Retirement Policy in China*, Washington DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Prudential Foundation, 2004, p. 13.

Such a family support was furthermore undermined by two main factors: strict population policies and urbanization. Due to one-child policy, an only child had to provide economic assistance to two parents and four grandparents (the so-called ‘4-2-1’ family structure), with a consistent amount of personal pressure. To gain more opportunities and income, the only child is usually forced to move from the countryside to the city. The exodus of young adults to the cities led to a faster aging process in the countryside, leaving the elders devoid of social securities and, ultimately, children’s support. The exponential growth of this “floating population” impoverished the rural areas and triggered fierce competition for low-income jobs in the Chinese megalopolis.

<sup>79</sup> With a fifth of the world’s population, China produces less than five percent of the world’s GDP; on the other hand, the USA population accounts for only 4 percent, but retains a GDP equal to 32 percent of the world’s total. JACKSON, HOWE, *The Graying of the Middle Kingdom*, op. cit., p. 5.

The drastic slow-down in population growth has an impact on working-age population, which will decrease by 18 percent in 2050, after a peak in 2015, making the burden of a rising elderly population even heavier.

### **1.8 Xi Jinping: from the First Modification to the Universal Two-child Policy**

The criticalities above mentioned were addressed by Xi Jinping, coherently with the previous leaders: the idea of building a “harmonious society” perdures as one of the pillars of the present administration’s ideology and the distorted effects of an over 30-year long one-child policy needed a political response. Together with demographic imbalances, ethical and moral issues surrounded the history of birth control in China: a large number of couples suffered the death of their only child, hopeless of having another (the term 失独家庭 *shidu jiating*, literally a “family which loses its only child”, entered into use to describe this particular situation); the use of coercion, observed since the 1980s; a system of fines for extra births which imposed huge economic pressure on the middle class, without being effective for poor and rich families; an extremely heavy family structure on the back of an only child.<sup>80</sup>

The change occurred in three steps: the first, on the institutional level, the second and third on the policy level. In March 2013, the National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPFPC), the core of the administrative structure of population control, merged with the new National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC), implying less political relevance of population control. The NPFPC was a cabinet-level executive department under the State Council, and constituted a complex and enormous machinery which, in 2005, involved 509.000 employers at the township level, 1.2 million village administrators and 6 million “group leaders”.<sup>81</sup> The dismantling of NPFPC represented the first sign of relaxation.

On the policy level, a shift occurred in November 2013, during the Third Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC), when Xi Jinping delivered a report entitled “Decision of the CCCPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform” (hereafter called “the Decision”). The Decision touches various aspects of reform and is filled with highly

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<sup>80</sup> BASTEN, JIANG, “China’s Family Planning Policies: Recent Reforms and Future Prospects”, *op. cit.*, p. 495.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 501.

ideological references. At the end of the XII paragraph, concerning “Promoting Reform and Innovation of Social Undertakings”, the Decision states:

While persisting in the basic national policy of family planning, we will initiate a policy that allows married couples to have two children if one of the parents is a single child, and gradually adjust and improve the birth policy to promote balanced population growth in the long run.<sup>82</sup>

After the coming out of the Decisions, the director of the NHFPC, Wang Pei’an, revealed the official reasons of the reform to the press: the measure was taken to address the problem of “low birth rate”; the two main demographic “structural problems”, i.e. the decline in the working-age population with the increase of the elderly and the “long-term high sex ratio at birth”; the weakening of the traditional functions of the family and a cultural change in fertility desires, that happened both in urban and rural areas.<sup>83</sup>

The number of eligible couples estimated by demographers was around 11 million; Zhai Zhenwu, the deputy president of the China Population Association and a demographer at Renmin University forecasted an increase of about 1 million extra births per year after the modification of the policy. These numbers not only were irrelevant in order to solve the problems of population aging and high sex ratio, but also resulted from optimistic predictions, which didn’t take into account the likelihood or the financial possibility of all eligible couples to have a second child.

From the beginning, the demographic impact of this revision was expected to be marginal, but the result was even below expectations: among the audience of beneficiaries, in August 2015, only 1.69 million had applied, just 15.4% of the estimated.<sup>84</sup>

Only two years later, in 2015, the government accelerated the process of relaxation by allowing all couples to have two children starting from 2016. The change occurred on the legislative level: there was first an announcement, during the Fifth Plenary Session of the CPC 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee on September 29, declaring the end

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<sup>82</sup> The Supreme People’s Court of the People’s Republic of China, *Decision of the CCCPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform*, 08/10/2015 (updated), p. 11, [online] URL [http://english.court.gov.cn/2015-10/08/content\\_22130532\\_11.htm](http://english.court.gov.cn/2015-10/08/content_22130532_11.htm). Accessed on 08/07/2019.

<sup>83</sup> BASTEN, JIANG, “China’s Family Planning Policies: Recent Reforms and Future Prospects”, op. cit., p. 495.

<sup>84</sup> WANG Feng, GU Baochang, CAI Yong, “The End of China’s One-Child Policy”, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2016, p. 83.

of the decades-long one-child policy. Thereafter, on December 27, the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress adopted a decision amending the Population and Family Planning Law of 2002.<sup>85</sup> Finally, the two-child policy became law applicable nationwide, to be effective from January 2016. The article 18, which in the previous version of the law called for one child for every married couple, and authorized two children where the requirements specified by laws and regulations were met, was modified to contemplate two children for every couple and more than two whenever permitted by provincial-level regulations. In the same article, the sentence "encourages late marriage and late childbearing" was removed.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, on December 31, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council announced in a decision that couples who bear no more than two children are no longer required to obtain birth permits.

This was a turning point in the evolution of China's population control, which set the definitive end of the one child restriction, but not of anti-natalist policies.



Figure 5: A couple of twins in Gulou square (Beijing). Picture taken by the author, 20/04/2019.

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<sup>85</sup> Laney ZHANG, "China: Two-Child Policy Becomes Law", *The Law Library of Congress*, 2016. Source found on the website <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/china-two-child-policy-becomes-law/>. Accessed on 13/07/2019.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*.

## 1.9 The Effects of the Universal Two-child Policy and Future Perspectives

The adjustment of rules and regulations happened smoothly and gradually, in response to a set of problems that the majority of scientists had pointed out, but a change in terms of personal transformation and transformation of collective patterns towards having two children did not occur. The demographic results, starting from year 2016, had been disappointing.

The desired baby-boom set at around 21.88 million births per year to be reached in 2018 didn't happen. Instead, the number of births from 2016 to 2018 constantly declined: there were 17.86 million newborns in 2016, 17.23 million in 2017, and just 15.23 million in 2018, the lowest birth rate in China since 1961<sup>87</sup>.

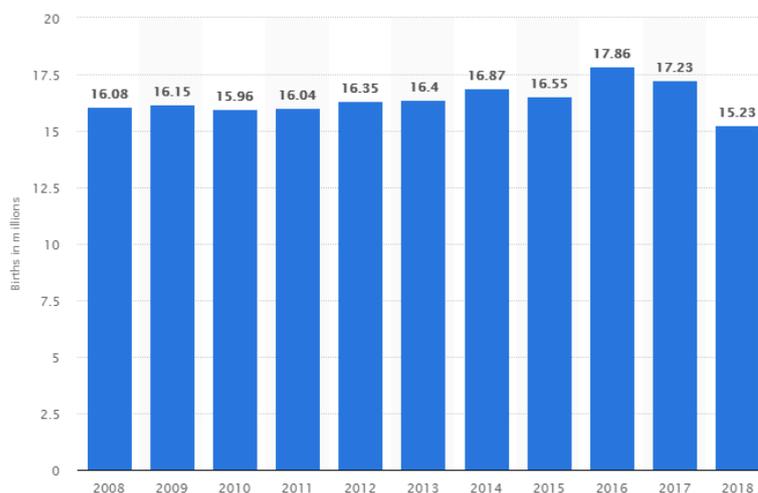


Figure 6: *Number of births per year in China from 2008 to 2018 (in millions)*, “Statista Research Department”, [online] URL <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250650/number-of-births-in-china/>. Accessed on 13/07/2019.

The TFR remains stable at 1.6 number of children per woman.<sup>88</sup> TFR is the key indicator which impacts on the proportion of elderly people, the workforce and economic development, the sex ratio, public health, and the environment.<sup>89</sup> Even though the universal two-child policy will ameliorate imbalances that could have worsened, if China would have continued with the previous one-child policy, positive effects will not be visible in the short term.

<sup>87</sup> *Number of births per year in China from 2008 to 2018 (in millions)*, “Statista Research Department”, [online] URL <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250650/number-of-births-in-china/>. Accessed on 13/07/2019.

<sup>88</sup> *Fertility Rate (total births per woman) – China*, “The World Bank”, [online] URL <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=CN>. Accessed on 15/07/2019.

<sup>89</sup> ZENG, HESKETH, “The effects of China’s universal two-child policy”, op. cit., p. 4.

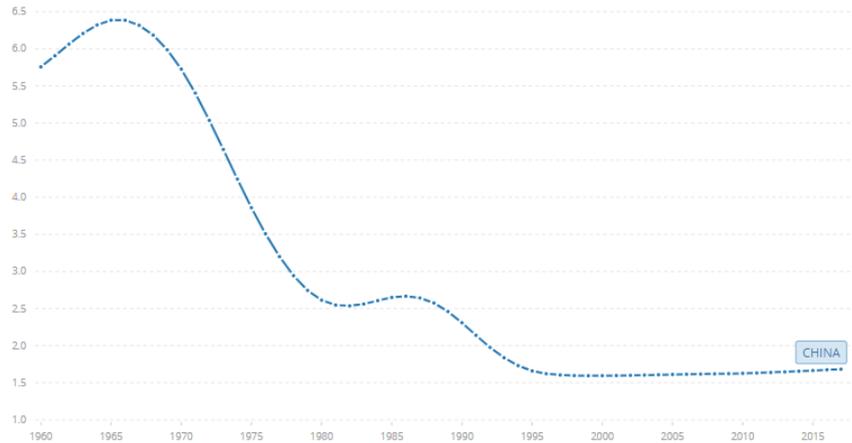


Figure 7: Fertility Rate (total births per woman) – China, “The World Bank”, [online] URL <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=CN>. Accessed on 15/07/2019.

According to the BBC, in the next ten years the number of Chinese women aged 23-30 will decrease by 40%, with a consequent shrink in number of births, which will account only for 8 million in year 2030.<sup>90</sup> According to the UN’s 2017 Revision of World Population Prospects, in 2050, over 60-year-old people will rate 35.1% of the whole population of China.<sup>91</sup> Considering that a society is defined “old” when the proportion of the population aged 65 and over exceeds 8 to 10 percent, China will face many challenges in supporting the elderly.

If the two-child policy’s impact on demography can be considered irrelevant, it had important consequences on the political, ideological and individual level. The NHFPC, the political protagonist in terms of population control, accepted the necessity to reform a decade-long policy and showed itself opened to future changes that may go towards free choice of reproduction “according to population development trend” (Minister Li Bin said).<sup>92</sup> The total elimination of family planning from China’s law was forecasted by several international mass media in August 2018, reporting that the new draft of the Civil Code, to be adopted in 2020, would have removed all “family

<sup>90</sup> Victor Fraile RODRIGUEZ, “China birth rate: Mothers, your country needs you!”, *BBC News*, 25/12/2018, [online] URL <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-46558562>. Accessed on 15/07/2019.

<sup>91</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Ageing 2017 - Highlights*, ST/ESA/SER.A/397, 2017, [online] URL [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2017\\_Highlights.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2017_Highlights.pdf). Accessed on 16/07/2019.

<sup>92</sup> LUO Sha, HAN Jie, LI Wenxi, “To Implement Universal Two-child Policy and Build Healthy China – NHFPC Officials Answer Reporters’ Questions”, *Xinhua News Agency*, 08/03/2016.

planning-related content”<sup>93</sup>, but this statement was denied in a Response published on the National Health Commission website on January 8, 2019. Family planning is still labeled as a “basic state policy”, a clear sign that the government keeps claiming authority on it; a more radical political change towards freedom of breeding has not happened yet.

### 一、关于全国人大删去所有法律中各种有关“计划生育”的内容

习近平总书记指出，“宪法是国家的根本法，是治国安邦的总章程，具有最高的法律地位、法律权威、法律效力，具有根本性、全局性、稳定性和长期性”。2018年3月11日，十三届全国人大一次会议审议通过《中华人民共和国宪法修正案》，保留“国家推行计划生育”等相关表述。人口与计划生育法等法律均根据宪法制定，不宜立即全面删除“计划生育”内容。

进入新世纪以来，我国人口形势发生重大转折性变化。以习近平同志为核心的党中央科学把握人口发展规律，顺应人民群众期待，从实现中华民族伟大复兴中国梦的战略高度出发，作出逐步调整完善生育政策、促进人口均衡发展的一系列重大决策部署。计划生育也实现由控制人口数量为主向调控总量、提升素质和优化结构并举转变。下一步，我委将按照中央要求，着眼新时代中国特色社会主义现代化建设战略安排，综合考虑人口数量、素质、结构、分布等诸要素的关系，以及人口与经济社会资源环境之间的互动影响，科学把握人口规律，会同相关部门提出解决新时代人口问题的中国方案，促进人口均衡发展，为实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦提供持久的动力和强大的支撑。

### ***[1, Concerning the Elimination from the Law of any Reference to “Birth Planning” by the National People’s Congress.***

*The general secretary Xi Jinping states that “The Constitution is the basic national law, the corpus of regulation that provides stability to the country; it retains the highest position, authority and effectiveness in the legislative system. It is fundamental, comprehensive, stable and long-lasting.” On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018, during the thirteen session of the National People’s Congress (NPC), the “amendment of the Constitution*

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<sup>93</sup> Benjamin HAAS, “China could scrap two-child policy, ending nearly 40 years of limits”, *The Guardian*, 28/08/2018, [online] URL <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/28/china-could-scrap-two-child-policy-ending-nearly-40-years-of-limits>. Accessed on 16/07/2019.

*of the PRC” was approved and the formulation “Birth planning is carried out at the national level” was maintained. Regulations on population and birth planning are aligned to what is established by the Constitution, it is not advisable to immediately remove them completely.*

*Since entering this century, the Chinese population changed significantly, the CCP Central Committee with comrade Xi Jinping as the core, scientifically regulates population development, complies with the masses desires, proceeds from the challenge of realizing the Chinese dream, undertakes gradual modifications to ameliorate the birth planning policy and promotes a series of decisions and plans for an equal development of population. Birth planning also underwent a transition from only focusing on controlling population numbers, to including also people’s quality and population optimum structure. On behalf of the Central Government needs, the next step will be to make plans to the challenges of socialism with Chinese characteristics of the new era, globally consider the relationship between essential factors, such as population quantity, quality, structure and distribution, together with the reciprocal influence between population, economy, society, resources and environment, while, at the same time, the relevant departments will propose programs to solve the population problems of the new era, will promote population equal development and provide enduring motivation and strong support to the realization of the Chinese dream.]<sup>94</sup>*

In official declarations, birth planning is still surrounded by an ideological halo; in particular, in this passage, several references to the ‘Chinese dream’ (中国梦 *zhongguo meng*), one of the most recurring Xi Jinping’s slogan, appear. Standard formulas are also used, for example the sentence ‘Scientifically regulate population’ (科学把握人口发展规律 *kexue bawo renkou fazhan guilü*) is present twice and epitomized the role that science still fulfills in birth control and in CCP’s public rhetoric.

A shift in ideology towards pro-natalism took place, even within the restriction of two children per couple. This change finds application in practical solutions the government is willing to adopt to support parents and allow them to have a second child; at the opening session of the 2016 National People’s Congress (NPC), Premier Li Keqiang stated that

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<sup>94</sup> QIU Renyu, “China Signals That It Won’t Scrap Birth Restrictions”, *Caixin*, 13/02/2019, [online] URL <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2019-02-13/china-signals-that-it-wont-scrap-birth-restrictions-101379176.html>. Accessed on 18/07/2019.

We will improve the supporting policies to complement the decision to allow all couples to have two kids [...] We will encourage the development of kindergartens open to all children.<sup>95</sup>

In March 2016, an announcement granted Beijing's mothers an extra month maternity's leave; the deputy director of the NHFPC, Wang Pei'an,

Urged other government agencies, such as ministries of education, finance, human resources and social security, to draw up favorable measures and policies to encourage larger families<sup>96</sup>.

Besides government's efforts to improve mother and child healthcare, child education and women's employment, propaganda started to play a role in encouraging childbearing. The People's Daily, on 6 August 2018, published a full-page article persuading readers on the advantages of having a second child.<sup>97</sup> The title on the side article says: "To give birth is a family matter, but also a national matter".

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<sup>95</sup> GBTimes, "Two-child policy highlighted at China's parliament", *GBTimes*, Beijing, 08/03/2016, [online] URL <https://gbtimes.com/two-child-policy-highlighted-chinas-parliament>. Accessed on 18/07/2019.

<sup>96</sup> Stuart Gietel-BASTEN, "Family planning and fertility transition in China", in Xiaowei ZHANG, Lucy Xia ZHAO, *Handbook on the Family and Marriage in China*, Cheltenham UK-Northampton USA, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017, p. 199.

<sup>97</sup> Peng Xunwen 彭训文, "Rang renmen gan sheng yuan sheng 'erhai'" 让人们敢生愿生"二孩" (Let the people dare and want to have a second child), *Renmin ribao haiwaiban*, 人民日报海外版 (People's Daily overseas edition), 06/08/2018, [online] URL [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2018-08/06/content\\_1872809.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2018-08/06/content_1872809.htm). Accessed on 20/07/2019.



Figure 5: Peng Xunwen 彭训文, “Rang renmen gan sheng yuan sheng ‘erhai’” 让人们敢生愿生“二孩” (Let the people dare and want to have a second child), *Renmin ribao haiwai ban*, 人民日报海外版 (People’s Daily overseas edition), 06/08/2018, [online] URL [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2018-08/06/content\\_1872809.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2018-08/06/content_1872809.htm). Accessed on 20/07/2019.

On Xinhua Daily, an article by two scholars from Nanjing University proposed to set up a birth fund, whose contributors were people below the age of 40; families with a second child could directly withdraw from it, while everybody else had to wait until retirement.<sup>98</sup>

Such a reversal approach is hard to justify when the cadres that carried on birth control, sometimes even with coercive measures, may be still on work. Netizens often criticized pro-natalist propaganda on the web, claiming that the change was too sudden and complaining about the same attempt to control from the central government, just with a reverse objective. “The country is embarrassed about policy prospects” writes Quanbao Jiang.<sup>99</sup>

On the individual level, the new policy had substantial concrete effects: couples who previously were limited to one child and desired a second were able to realize their

<sup>98</sup> RODRIGUEZ, “China birth rate: Mothers, your country needs you!”, op. cit.

<sup>99</sup> Quanbao JIANG, “China’s Urgent Need For Pro-Natalist Population Policies”, *The Zhongguo Institute*, 30/08/2018, [online] URL <https://zhongguoinstitute.org/chinas-urgent-need-for-pro-natalist-population-policies/>. Accessed on 28/03/2019.

wish without side effects, and given the fact that birth desires are circumscribed to one, maximum two children, it is admissible to say that “the new policy will allow almost all couples to meet their reproductive preference.”<sup>100</sup> The relaxation smoothed out differences and dissatisfactions within the community, where different reproductive rules applied to neighbors, friends and relatives and only wealthy could afford the “extra child” fine. Blacklisted children have been regularized, the problem of *shidu jiating* may subside and not freely chosen abortions will decrease, favoring people serenity and the building up of a harmonious society.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> ZENG, HESKETH, “The effects of China’s universal two-child policy”, op. cit., p. 9

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 8.



## 2. FRAGMENTED AUTHORITARIANISM AND BIRTH PLANNING

### 2.1 The Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework

Fragmented Authoritarianism (FA) is a long-time consolidated framework that scholars have developed to describe the Chinese political system starting from the Reforms era (1978). This model is used to explain three dimensions of analysis within the State: value integration, structural elements and policy process, and defines that China's authoritarian political system is structurally fragmented and decentralized, thus leaving space to political actors for bargaining, negotiations, exchange and consensus building, during the decision making process<sup>1</sup>.

Lampton (1987), Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988) overcame the two perspectives traditionally used by scholars to interpret the Chinese political system: the top-down decision making framework, characterized by an extremely powerful group at the apex of the system, which leads undisputed; and the cellular concentration of power, characterized by a highly fragmented system based on delegation of power to local subjects. In *Policymaking in China: Leaders, Structures and Processes*, Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988) believe that the Chinese political system can be better framed as a fragmentation of authority within its bureaucratic structure, and that relationships of power between the Center<sup>2</sup> (*Zhongyang* 中央) and Local units (*difang* 地方) are characterized by bargaining for resources allocation. With the Opening up and Reform era, in order to foster entrepreneurial spirit and economic development, the Center granted more autonomy and control of resources to the local level and accentuated a gap with localities, causing fragmentation. The state remains authoritarian because the Center has the determinant power over localities of unilaterally and suddenly curtail their autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

The other main source of fragmentation in the Chinese bureaucracy occurs between the vertical functional systems (for instance, the Ministry of Finance and its

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<sup>1</sup> LIEBERTHAL, LAMPTON, *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> "The Center" means the top level of authority, based in Beijing and composed by four tiers: the core group of twenty-five to thirty-five top leaders; the layer of staff, leadership groups, research centers, and institutes which link the elite to the bureaucracy; State Council Commission and ministries with supra-ministerial status; line ministries which implement policies. LIEBERTHAL, OKSENBURG, *Policymaking in China: Leaders, Structures and Processes*, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137-142.

offices at the local levels) and the horizontal levels of government (a territorial authority), mutually serving each other and cooperating. Given the complexity of the layers of bureaucracy, consensus building is essential in the policy making process and requires the cooperation of many different actors in different functional systems and levels of government, resulting in a complex and time-consuming process of approval.<sup>4</sup>

Important changes happened in the Chinese governance after Maoism:

The reforms significantly redistributed the flows of information in the system and greatly reduced the role of ideology as a factor in structuring policy formation and implementation.<sup>5</sup>

After 1978, the endorsement of a specific policy or project often depends by the particular interests of a bureaucratic group, which prevails on others after bargaining; support of top leaders is essential in decision making, while collaboration of the localities is fundamental in the practical implementation of a certain policy. Integrative mechanism, like formal communications, meetings, market forces, but also informal mechanisms and personal ties and networks, consent the system to function.

In *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (1992), Lampton and Lieberthal focus on under which conditions bargaining is more likely to occur: they use the FA framework to analyze national issues (the adaptation of the political system to economic reform; the relationship between Party and government; information flows and coordination in the bureaucracy); bureaucratic clusters (education, military system, cadre retirement policy process and enterprises); and the subnational levels (central, provincial and municipal) and found out that bargaining is characteristic of a decision-making process where tangible resources are at stake, i.e. the economic sphere.<sup>6</sup>

Andrew Mertha (2009) enriched the theory of FA with his “*Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0*”: *Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process*, reconfirming the validity of the framework in the contemporary Chinese political system. While previously, the FA framework especially referred to the formal

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 141-142

<sup>5</sup> LIEBERTHAL, LAMPTON, *Bureaucracy, Policy and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 18.

bureaucracy of the Chinese state, Mertha includes actors external from the institutional system and argues that

The process has becoming increasingly pluralized: barriers to entry have been lowered, at least for certain actors, identified here as political entrepreneurs.<sup>7</sup>

Policy entrepreneurs are defined as “advocates for proposals of the prominence of an idea”<sup>8</sup> who are willing to invest their resources to gain a future return, which is consequential from the policy they stand for. They aim at changing the substance of a policy by working inside the policy process they were traditionally excluded from, and not against it. Mertha (2009) identifies three new types of policy entrepreneurs: officials opposed to a given policy, journalists and editors and individuals within Chinese NGOs. In a fragmented political system, as the Chinese one, policy entrepreneurs find interstices within the system to make their voice heard and bargain for their interests.

Policy entrepreneurs frame the issue in an alternative way with the aim of gathering support: they *articulate* it to create a persuasive narrative and they *amplify* it through channels, like the media or international authorities, so that they can recruit allies and “expand the sphere of political conflict”<sup>9</sup>. According to Mertha, effective issue framing does not influence just the *implementation* of the policy process, but also the *policy-making process* at its origins. This is possible because the institutions in China hardly keep up with the pace of the problems China faces, and delegate responsibilities to economic, social and other actors; because information is more accessible and, finally, because successful policy entrepreneurs are encouraged to persist (“Success breeds more success.”)<sup>10</sup>

While Lieberthal (1988, 1992), Lampton (1992) and Oksenberg (1988) employ the FA framework to describe the relationship Party-state, Mertha (2009) extends it to the relationship state-society and emphasizes the increasing pluralization and the lowering of barriers to entry to new actors. Despite the elements of fragmentation,

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<sup>7</sup> MERTHA, “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0...”, op. cit., p. 995.

<sup>8</sup> John W. KINGDON, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, New York, Harper Collins, 1995, p. 122-123.

<sup>9</sup> Elmer Eric SCHATTSCHEIDER, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960.

<sup>10</sup> MERTHA, “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0...”, op. cit., p. 1001.

another strand of scholars remarks the centrality of the CCP in the Chinese political hierarchy and its preeminent position as the heart of the system.<sup>11</sup>

The FA paradigm was born to describe the 1980s China, when the country was at the beginning of the process of Reforms and economic development, in an abrupt discontinuity with its Maoist past. In *Chinese Politics as Fragmented Authoritarianism*, edited by K.E. Brødsgaard (2017), the investigation at the bottom of the ten case studies focusing on different areas of policymaking, is whether the FA framework is still valid in contemporary China, especially under the Xi's administration. Grünberg (2017) states that

What makes the FA concept so durable is its generic nature and flexible, almost system-wide, applicability.<sup>12</sup>

FA remains suitable to the contemporary Chinese context, but needs continuous updating and revisions and, under the authoritarian strengthening of the Xi's leadership, the fragmentation and pluralization of political change and development must be seen as complementary to a stronger integration, given by a highly centralized Party-state system. Grünberg and Brødsgaard (2017), whose works focus on the central bureaucracy, highlight the integrative mechanism enacted within the CCP: according to the former, they are concretized in the form of the Leading Small Groups<sup>13</sup>, flexible but authority-based subjects able to coordinate horizontally fragmented bureaucracies<sup>14</sup>; while the latter uses the expression "Integrated fragmentation" to describe the relationship between the business groups and the Party-state: on the one hand, the administration is simplified to be slimmer and more efficient and the state delegates function to society and market forces; on the other hand, the state retains control by appointing state officials to the managerial positions in the strategic industrial sectors

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<sup>11</sup> Kjeld Eric BRØDSGAARD, ZHENG Yongnian, *Bringing the Party Back In: How China Is Governed*, Singapore, Eastern Universities Press, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Nis GRÜNBERG, "Revisited Fragmented Authoritarianism in China's central energy administration", in Kjeld Eric BRØDSGAARD (edited by), *Chinese Politics as Fragmented Authoritarianism – Earthquakes, energy and environment*, Routledge, 2017, p.32.

<sup>13</sup> Leading Small Groups (*lingdao xiaozu* 领导小组) are coordinating bodies, introduced by Xi Jinping. They address important policy areas that involve several different parts of the bureaucracy.

<sup>14</sup> GRÜNBERG, "Revised Fragmented Authoritarianism in China's central energy administration", op. cit., p. 15-32.

of the economy (*nomenklatura* system) and by controlling their career path through a rotation system.<sup>15</sup>

## **2.2 Application of the Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework to the Birth Planning Context**

Since the first attempts to control the Chinese population in the 1970s, the birth planning bureaucratic and legislative apparatus has shown a high degree of fragmentation and decentralization. Under the broader principle of “slowing down population growth and encouraging only one child per couple”<sup>16</sup>, the implementation of population control has been delegated to local authorities and its provisions have been characterized by a broad number of exceptions.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, since the publishing of the Open Letter in 1980, the Central government has claimed a strong authority over birth planning, defining it a basic state policy, with permanent priority and out of debate or criticism. Despite the importance given by the central government to limit population in order to buster economic development, practical obstacles, given by the diversity of China’s population on its vast territory, caused a natural and progressive fragmentation in the policy practice, which resulted in restrictions that could differ even from village to village<sup>18</sup>.

The first chapter analyzed the evolution of the policy on the political and legislative level, highlighting the general nature of the regulations and of the Law on Population and Family Planning. This chapter focuses on the large and complex bureaucratic structure of family planning and investigates whether this fragmented context was beneficial for critical voices to propose alternatives.

The Reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping had enormous effects on the bureaucratic apparatus, decentralizing decision making in the economic sphere; local governments could act entrepreneurially, according to market forces and were no longer constrained by a centrally planned economy. The central government granted lower

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<sup>15</sup> Kjeld Eric BRØDSGAARD, “‘Fragmented Authoritarianism’ or ‘Integrated fragmentation’?”, in Kjeld Eric BRØDSGAARD (edited by), *Chinese Politics as Fragmented Authoritarianism – Earthquakes, energy and environment*, op. cit., p. 38-52.

<sup>16</sup> GU Baochang, WANG Feng, GUO Zhigang, ZHANG Erli, “China’s Local Fertility Polices at the End of the Twentieth Century”, *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 33, No.1, 2007, p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> BASTEN, JIANG, “China’s Family Planning Policies: Recent Reforms and Future Prospects”, op. cit., p. 493-494.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 494.

bureaucracies more control over fiscal resources, the possibility to allocate them and to retain a share of revenues. Local authorities proved to be resilient: they launched and encouraged local industries to grow, enjoyed the interests in revenue generation and exercised their increasing bargaining power with the central government and other local institutions. In the process of promoting economic development and getting profit, they managed to effectively take part to policy making and influence the policy outcome in a non-democratic political system, which has been described by Western scholars as *fragmented* and *authoritarian*. The model was forged to be applied to economic areas of policy making, as bargaining requires that “tangible resources be at stake”<sup>19</sup>; in fact, a classical arena for bargaining, where FA has been extensively applied, is energy and hydropower.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, it may be critical to study birth planning, a social policy apparently free from economic connotations, under the lens of fragmentation of authority.

Yet, FA framework is a model that needs to be updated over time and that can be adaptable to broader interpretations, and perhaps is suitable for cross fertilization with Science and Technology Studies. For example, in *Bargaining Science - negotiating earthquakes*, L.L.G. Hansen (2017), referring to policy entrepreneurs, wonders:

Should epistemic communities or scientists perhaps be added as a further category? Can epistemic communities be considered ‘policy entrepreneurs’? Or is a reconsideration of the very units of analysis inherent in the FA model merited when a case involves bargaining over science itself?<sup>21</sup>

This is a crucial consideration that links scientists and science to political bargaining, because the technical argument they show their competence on becomes malleable and politicized. Scientists, then, are not just scientists anymore, as they acquire a political authority and “negotiate science itself as if it were a political

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<sup>19</sup> LIEBERTHAL, LAMPTON, *Bureaucracy, Policy and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> LIEBERTHAL, OKSENBERG, *Policy Making in China*, op. cit., p. 269 - 389. Also, Andrew MERTHA, *China's Water Warriors: Citizen Action and Policy Change*, Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Louise L. G. HANSEN, “Bargaining science: negotiating earthquakes”, in K. E. BRØDSGAARD (edited by), *Chinese politics as Fragmented Authoritarianism*, op. cit., p. 120-130. The author refers to the bargaining process occurred between the China Earthquake Administration and the construction company appointed with the construction of a dam in Zipingpu, Sichuan. The object of bargaining consisted in a number, the “maximum possible earthquake”: an estimate of the maximum intensity of a possible earthquake in a particular area. A high number would impact on the construction costs and constitutes a burden on the company; thus, a scientific discussion acquires a political meaning.

problem”<sup>22</sup>. The author believes that FA should be enriched to consider also the category of science as an area of bargaining.

To argue the applicability of FA to birth planning, the next paragraphs individually explain features of fragmentation within it, starting from the evolution of the birth planning bureaucratic apparatus.

### **2.3 Chinese Family Planning Bureaucracy: Decentralization and Integration**

In China’s incremental transition away from communism, institutional changes of decentralization did not just invest economic bureaucracies, but had an impact also on the family planning bureaucracy, which has adapted to a similar process of “liberalization”.

In 1980, when the one-child policy was launched, the program started with a top-down enforcement, and with a vast organizational framework that from the ministerial-level National Family Planning Commission (NFPC), propagated down to administrative organs in township, villages, factories and other work units. The NFPC was responsible for setting family planning targets and delegated the implementation of the policy to provincial governments, which in turn assigned the targets (birth quotas) to lower administrative levels. Day-to-day operations were dealt by local family planning cadres, at three levels of local bureaucracy: county, township and village. Each level meant a degree of seniority, i.e. a county cadre, due to criteria as age, expertise and political importance, ranked higher than a township cadre, and so on.<sup>23</sup>

In 1982, the central government defined birth planning a basic state policy and invested significant resources in terms of budget and personnel to build-up a powerful bureaucracy, and, in order to control the lower levels, enacted a series of integrative mechanisms. Targets were the most important requirement to be met, in the name of a number-based policy: they were periodically announced in central documents and assigned to lower levels and were the base of evaluation of cadre performances. A system of monitoring the local performance evaluated cadres both on the accomplishment of the quotas, on statistics of demographic events and use of

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130.

<sup>23</sup> M. Giovanna MERLI, Zhenchao QIAN, Herbert L. SMITH, “Adaptation of a Political Bureaucracy to Economic and Institutional Change Under Socialism: The Chinese State Family Planning System”, *Politics & Society*, Vol. 32, No. 2, p. 239-242, 2004.

contraceptive. In 1991, to exercise higher pressure on cadres in controlling population, the government adopted the one-veto system (一票否决 *yi piao foujue*), so that

The state holds the political careers of local family planning officials hostage in the event of failure in the enforcement of national policies.<sup>24</sup>

This approach, which led to numerous episodes of manipulation of statistics, use of coercion and corruption, changed in the 1990s, in favor of a client-centered approach: from demographic targets, birth planning aimed at delivering a service to citizens, ensuring reproductive health (especially for women) and strengthening citizens' rights against abuses of enforcement. In 2003, the NFPC changed its name, becoming the National *Population and Family Planning Commission* (NPFPC) and enlarged its scope, by including in its area of governance problems like population ageing and gender imbalances.

This reorientation of the birth planning system happened together with more structural changes in the Chinese society, both of cultural and economic nature, like education, women empowerment, consumerism and a rise in life-costs. As a matter of fact, in the 1990s the desired family size didn't differ much from the prescribed one.<sup>25</sup> The scope of the birth planning bureaucracy, as a consequence, changed from demographic control to the delivery of high-quality contraceptives and reproductive health services.

While these functions required higher per capita expenses in birth planning, necessary to train specialized personnel and purchase new equipment, the financial resources delivered from the top to localities diminished and officials faced financial and budgetary reductions. To collect revenues for family planning, local governments at first heavily relied on the "social maintenance fees", which became "the predominant source of out-of-budget revenue"<sup>26</sup> and was used to "cover ordinary operating costs"<sup>27</sup>. According to Basten and Jiang, the use of social maintenance fee as a source of profit, in many cases directly devolved to officials in the form of a reward for their performance, can be considered a source of obstruction for policy reform.<sup>28</sup> Given the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 240.

<sup>25</sup> BASTEN, JIANG, "China's Family Planning Polices...", op. cit., p.497.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 500.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 499-500.

shrinking in out-of-plan births, this resource dried up and, to compensate for the losses from fines and government fund reduction, local governments extract revenues from services that in the past were provided for free, e.g. contraceptives, pregnancy test, checkups and medical visits. These charged services have increased in quality and diversification and sometimes compete with health system services and products, while being delivered at a lower price. According to Merli et al. (2004), the marketization of family planning is a way to preserve bureaucratic power, in an environment which gives recognition to agencies able to generate profits, encourages self-entrepreneurship and grants a higher degree of autonomy at the local level.<sup>29</sup>

Beside this push for local autonomy in birth planning, another phenomenon that exemplifies the fragmentation of the system is the multiplicity of stakeholders involved, in particular, agencies and provinces<sup>30</sup>. Ministries like Education, Housing, Urban-Rural Development, Civil Affairs and Human Resources and Social Security are clearly interested in the future size and structure of China's population; according to Basten and Jiang (2014), family planning reforms in China present key elements of the bargaining process described by Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988). Provinces are facing autonomously "new policy problems"<sup>31</sup>, like population aging and wage inflation, through diversified instruments. For example, in 2009, the local Family Planning Commission in Shanghai began encouraging eligible couples to have two children to contain the problem of fast growing elderly population<sup>32</sup>; in 2006, the Population and Family Planning Commission of Guangdong did the same thing, and province officials claimed for a relaxation of the policy in 2011<sup>33</sup>; Hubei province simplified the process of application for a second child for its citizens<sup>34</sup>. These "pronatalist" measures were taken at the provincial level within a national context of antinatalism.

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<sup>29</sup> MERLI, QIAN, SMITH, "Adaptation of a Political Bureaucracy to Economic and Institutional Change Under Socialism...", op. cit., p. 247-250.

<sup>30</sup> BASTEN, JIANG, "China's Family Planning Policies...", op. cit., p. 503.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Tanya BRANIGAN, "Shanghai encourages second child for eligible couples", *The Guardian*, London, 24/07/2009, [online] URL <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/24/shanghai-second-baby-family-planning>. Accessed on 04/08/2019.

<sup>33</sup> GU Liping, "Guangdong relaxes one-child policy", *Xinhua News*, 27/03/2014, [online] URL <http://www.ecns.cn/2014/03-27/106926.shtml>. Accessed on 04/08/2019.

<sup>34</sup> LI Changzheng, *Hubei cancels 'One Child' family planning certificate*, "womenofchina.cn", Beijing, 03/03/2014, [online] URL <http://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/news/Highlight/17/816-1.htm>. Accessed on 04/08/2019.

In March 2013, the NPFPC merged with the Ministry of Health and became the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC), and birth planning debunked to a sub-issue of health governance. The merger occurred at each administrative level, so that the family planning division was strengthened, rather than weakened, in its staffing and function.<sup>35</sup> In such complex bureaucratic apparatus, diversified actors and their particular interests, both at the macro-level (provinces and agencies) and at the local level (county, township and village cadres), are source of inertia in the policy making process; no wonders, the resolution to definitively end the one-child policy happened after a gradual and lengthy process, as described in the first chapter.

#### **2.4 “Opening a Small Hole to Close a Big Hole”: Space for an Alternative**

The fragmentation of the birth planning system, the way of proceeding with reforms as “crossing the river by feeling the stones” (摸着石头过河 *mozhe shitou gouhe*), i.e. taking decisions by experimentations, and the support of some top leaders, left space for an important exception within the one-child policy.

In December 1979, in Chengdu, a conference was held to discuss the future of China’s birth planning: top leaders officially opened the debate on population and for the first time all the contending groups of specialists and China’s population policy makers were together to expose their theory and make it prevail on the others. This conference marked a fundamental moment in the history of China, because for the first time the Party encouraged a debate from different perspectives on a political matter of the highest relevance<sup>36</sup>. The three main factions of scientists that fought to have their proposal approved were the Liu Zheng’s group (Renmin University), whose suggestion was to prohibit the birth of three children and strongly encourage one-child families; the cybernetics group, led by Song Jian, advocating for a universal one-child policy to start immediately and Liang Zhongtang, who was strongly against a one-child policy and proposed a “two-child-plus-spacing” policy.<sup>37</sup>

Liang warned politicians of the non-feasibility of a strict one-child policy in the countryside, of the social unrest it would have caused, the repercussion on the family

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<sup>35</sup> BASTEN, JIANG, “China’s Family Planning Polices...”, op. cit., p. 501.

<sup>36</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 193-231.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

structure (he coined the term “4-2-1 problem”) and on the age structure in the future.<sup>38</sup> Due to his political, rather than scientific, background and rudimentary demographic projections, Liang’s objections were ignored by the leadership, fascinated by the technologically advanced calculations, models and graphs provided by Song Jian. Despite Liang’s failure at the conference, his ideas attracted the attention of two preeminent leaders of the CCP: Zhao Ziyang, who became Premier in 1980 and the incoming Secretary General, Hu Yaobang.<sup>39</sup>

In 1984, after a period of major social unrest in the countryside because of a strict enforcement of the one-child policy, Liang Zhongtang presented a report in which he remarked the feasibility of his proposal: late marriage and late births, plus spacing would be accepted by peasants and would allow the population to stay within the 1.2 billion target by 2000. The report, entitled “Use the Law of Population Development as the Basis Upon which to Build Birth Planning Work” (把计划生育工作建立在发展规律的基础上 *ba jihua shengyu gongzuo jianli zai fazhan guilü de jichushang*), was submitted by Liang to central authorities and probably arrived at Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang, who granted him the permission for the experiment in a circumscribed area under his control.<sup>40</sup> Liang selected Yicheng, a county in the northern province of Shanxi considered representative for rural China due to its 78 percent share of rural inhabitants. The policy, called “late marriage and late births plus spacing” (完婚晚育加间隔 *wanhun wanyu jia jiang*), was implemented in July 1985<sup>41</sup>.

A two child plus spacing policy was allowed also in Chengde (Hebei), Enshi (Hubei) and Jiuquan (Gansu); the reasons for this decision were practical: Chengde was a very poor prefecture; Enshi had a population with a high percentage of minorities; Jiuquan showed strong resistance to the one-child limit and institutional insufficiency.<sup>42</sup>

In these four counties, the government allowed a two-child plus spacing policy for the entire birth planning period, making of it an experiment of great scale (it involved eight million people) and of fundamental demographic importance. In fact,

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<sup>38</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 182-183.

<sup>39</sup> Rachel RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People: An Investigation into the Process of Designing Social Policies in China*, PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, September 2017, p. 78

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> YU Qin, FEI Wang, “Too early or too late: What have we learned from the 30-year two-child policy experiment in Yicheng, China?”, *Demographic Research*, Vol. 37, No. 30, 2017, p. 932.

<sup>42</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People...*, op. cit., p. 82.

the data collected from Yicheng, Enshi, Chengde and Jiuquan allowed demographers and politicians to access how the population would have been in China without thirty-five years of one-childization. The “Experiment of eight million people” (hereafter “the Experiment”) was object of discussion among leaders and scientists and was considered a proof of the efficacy, at a minor social cost, of a more relaxed policy to control population. The outcomes of the Experiment were also analyzed in relation to the imbalances produced by the one-child policy.<sup>43</sup>

This was a glaring example of the role that powerful allies, like Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang, could have in a system of policy implementation that often relies on a gradual, experimentalist approach.

Liang’s report was noted by two important officials within the NFPC: Zhang Xiaotong, working for the Policy Research Division and son of the Minister of Health, and Ma Yingtong, a well-known statistician and population expert. In July 1984, the two endorsed Liang’s work by inserting it in a report that they presented in a meeting of the Central Committee and declared Liang’s solution “feasible”.<sup>44</sup> During the meeting, Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang showed their approval to the report, in particular Zhao Ziyang proposed to revise upwards population targets in “few relevant places” and calculate the results. Liang was made aware of the support of the top leaders only in mid-August, but he didn’t receive any official approval to enact his proposal. So, at the beginning of 1985, he asked for permission to the NFPC to start implementing the late marriage and late birth plus spacing policy in a selected location of the Shanxi province<sup>45</sup>.

The final endorsement arrived from the Birth Minister Wang Wei, who replaced the hardliner Qian Xinzong in 1983, and showed a more moderate approach. The Minister ordered in February that “Liang Zhongtang should implement Zhao Ziyang

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<sup>43</sup> YU, FEI, “Too early or too late...”, op. cit. Also, YAN Wei, LI Zhang, “Re-examination of the Yicheng Two-Child Program”, *The China Journal*, No. 72, 2014, p. 98-120. Also, Martin WHITE, WANG Feng, CAI Yong, “Challenging Myths About China’s One-Child Policy”, *The China Journal*, No. 74, 2015, p. 144-159.

<sup>44</sup> YANG Kuifu 杨魁孚, LIANG Jimin 梁济民, ZHANG Fan 张凡, *Zhongguo renkou yu jihuashengyu dashi yaolan* 中国人口与计划生育大事要览 (A Review of the Important Events in China’s Population and Birth Planning), Zhongguo renkou chubanshe 中国人口出版社 (China Population and Birth Planning), Beijing, 2001, p.124.

<sup>45</sup> WANG Cuntong, “A Review of the Birth Planning Policy Experiments from the 1980s and Some Thoughts”, *Journal of Shanxi Normal University Social Science Edition*, Vol. 39, No. 6, 2012, p. 29-45.

and Hu Yaobang's suggestions"<sup>46</sup> and personally ensured that the experiment be carried on at the local level. In July 1985, after a vertically integrated process of decision making, the experiment became a law and started to be enforced in the Yicheng county.

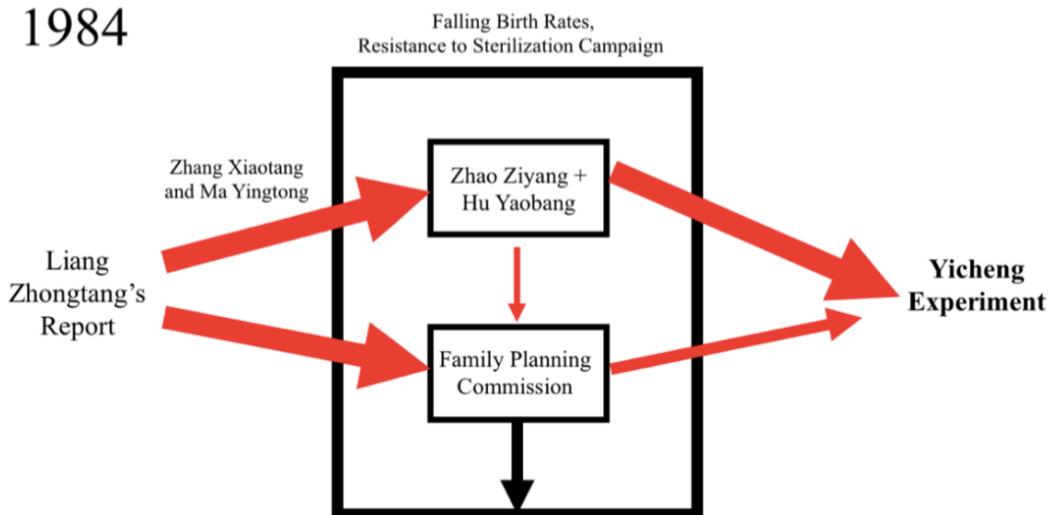


Figure 8: Graphical model of the policy-making process in 1984. Rachel RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People: An Investigation into the Process of Designing Social Policies in China*, PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, September 2017, p. 246.

Rachel Riley (2017) proposes this model to describe a three-stage policy change occurred in 1984: the first stage (left side) describes the suggestion or the effort for policy shift, the second stage (central part) shows the interested policy-makers, from whom the success or the failure of the change is determined (fase three, on the right). The two red arrows entering the rectangle represent the formal and informal channels through which the proposal is directed (respectively, the NFPC and State Council's members like Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang); the vertical arrows linking policy-makers in the second stage represent the communication flow between actors; while the relative weight of the two arrows on the right indicates which actor was more influential to the success of the shift.

In this particular case the model puts in evidence that it was especilly thanks to the endorsement of Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang that the Yicheng experiment was allowed. In a bureaucratic structure of fragmentation of authority, the support of top leaders is a crucial factor in the process of policy change; indeed

<sup>46</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People...*, op. cit., p. 162.

The fragmentation of authorities require that one or more top leaders enthusiastically support the initiation of a major project or policy in order to overcome bureaucratic impasses at lower levels.<sup>47</sup>

## **2.5 The Quality of Care Pilot Project: Favourable Conditions for Further Openness**

At the end of the 1990s, two important international conferences were pivotal in inspiring a new approach of the government towards population control: the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development of Cairo, and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing. The two conferences, coordinated by the United Nations, focused on reproductive rights, women healthcare protection and informed choice of contraceptive methods, under the general idea of promoting a “quality-of-care” in family planning.<sup>48</sup> The then CCP’s leadership, guided by Jiang Zemin, was opened to a more humanistic implementation of the childbearing restriction and the Minister-in-Charge of Family Planning, Peng Peiyun, who would have become the Chairperson of the All-China Women’s Federation, was one of the most active supporters of policy liberalization.<sup>49</sup> The favourable circumstances indicated that the timing for proposing the experimentation of a new method of family planning, was right.

Many Chinese officials and researchers attended the meetings, among them there were Gu Baochang, a demographer graduated at Peking University, with a PhD at University of Texas at Austin<sup>50</sup> and Zhang Erli, a senior official at the NPFPC. Zhang’s point of view was particularly meaningful: within the NPFPC, he was responsible for the implementation of population targets and witnessed the pressure that local officials were suffering to stay within the limits imposed by birth quotas.<sup>51</sup> Zhang convinced himself that a change in family planning program was necessary: with the progress of economic reforms, and the evolution of family culture in China, the birth planning officials had to become providers of high-quality services to their clients, citizens. In

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<sup>47</sup> LIEBERTHAL, OKSENBERG, *Policy Making in China...*, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Judith BRUCE, “Fundamental elements of the quality of care: A simple framework”, *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1990, p. 61-91.

<sup>49</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People...*, op. cit., p. 83-84.

<sup>50</sup> Gu Baochang 顾宝昌, Baidu Baike 百度百科, [online] URL <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%A1%BE%E5%AE%9D%E6%98%8C>. Accessed on 01/10/2019.

<sup>51</sup> Joan KAUFMAN, ZHANG Erli, XIE Zhenming, “Quality of Care in China: Scaling up a Pilot Project into a National Reform Program”, *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 37, No.1, 2006, p. 19.

1995, with the support of Peng Peiyun, Zhang Erli and a group of experts of population, initiated a Pilot Project called “Quality-of-Care” in six selected counties.<sup>52</sup>

In China, a major mechanism of institutional change is the pilot demonstration project process.<sup>53</sup>

Like for the Experiment of Eight Million People, the strategy of proceeding by trial is a typical *modus operandi* in the Chinese decision-making process. The steps followed in order to expand the Quality-of-Care project were three:

1. To prove the feasibility of reform through the pilot project, replicate it and build a consensus for change (by mobilizing powerful officials).
2. To expand the project functionally and geographically.
3. To institutionalize the reforms with policies and programs.<sup>54</sup>

The six counties selected for the project followed several important criteria: they were located in China’s more economically developed eastern coast, in the provinces of Jiangsu, Jilin, Liaoning, Shandong, Shanghai and Zhejiang, where TFR was already low, preventing the risk of an increase in childbearing. To prove the project’s financial sustainability, the six selected provinces had to finance themselves: no central or provincial government funds would be allocated.<sup>55</sup>

The aim of the project was to introduce the six elements of the quality of care, developed by Judith Bruce, in China’s family planning. The elements are choice of methods, information given to clients, technical competence, interpersonal relations, follow-up and continuity mechanisms, and an appropriate “constellation” of services<sup>56</sup> (without increasing birth rates). To implement the six elements, the counties’ family planning offices provided the couples a choice of five contraceptives; strengthened

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>56</sup> BRUCE, “Fundamental elements of the quality of care...”, op. cit., p. 63-64.

counseling on contraceptive methods; enlarged the services for women, such as screening for reproductive infections and follow-up for side effects of contraceptives.

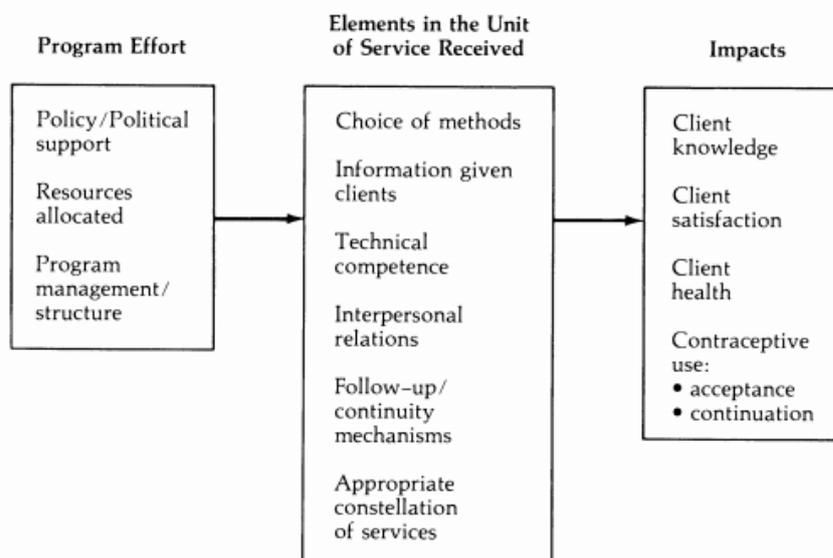


Figure 9: The quality of the service experience: its origins and impacts. Judith BRUCE, "Fundamental elements of the quality of care: A simple framework", *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1990, p. 64.

From 1997 until 1999, the pilot project entered in a phase of expansion: Peng Peiyun showed her approval for replication of the quality of care in other areas of the country, while enthusiastic counties' officials began similar activities on an informal and voluntary base.<sup>57</sup> In 1998, two important changes influenced the history of the project: Peng Peiyun completed her term of office and was replaced by the new Minister-in-Charge, Zhang Weiqing, and Zhang Erli, the project's leader, retired.<sup>58</sup> The project was transferred to the Science and Technology Division of NPFPC; an office was set up in Beijing for day-to-day operations; it received the endorsement of the Minister and Vice Minister at the International Symposium on Quality of Care. In November 1999, an advisory board composed of officials, researchers, NGOs' representatives and women's health activists evaluated the project and published a report.<sup>59</sup> If on the one hand, fertility remained firmly low, on the other hand, women of reproductive age were happier with the service provided by officials, and local cadres

<sup>57</sup> KAUFMAN, ZHANG, XIE, "Quality of Care in China: Scaling up a Pilot Project into a National Reform Program", op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 22.

were eased in enforcing the program, furthermore, the new mix of contraceptive methods contributed to a reduction of sterilizations and abortions.<sup>60</sup>

Starting from the 2000, the project acquired a more central position in the activity of the NPFPC, entering the second step of the process: it provided more services; was expanded in 19 counties; four new sub-projects were added; it was partially delegated to prestigious universities; national and international experts were involved.<sup>61</sup>

At the end of the year, a number of official documents issued from the government set forth the entering in the third step of the process: institutionalization. In December, the central government showed its support to the quality of care reforms in the white paper “China’s Population and Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” and in the Population Law of 2001. In 2002, 2003 and 2004, the pivotal project was further expanded in a number of counties in every province of China.<sup>62</sup>

The success of this project created fertile ground for the gathering of a group of scientists that believed the momentum for policy relaxation was favorable, indeed many of them were already involved in this project. The way the project found its legitimation presents features that are typical of a system of fragmentation of authority: personal ties and the sustain of population planning leaders were determinant to its success; the sample for the project, i.e. the six selected counties, were chosen carefully to avoid adverse fertility outcomes; local officials were mobilized at the bottom on a voluntary base and enthusiastically carried on the initiative.

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<sup>60</sup> LI Ying, “A study of the effects of traditional conventional services and modern quality services on contraceptive choice, use and continuation”, *Social Science Research Policy Brief.*, Geneva, World Health Organization, 1999.

<sup>61</sup> KAUFMAN, ZHANG, XIE, “Quality of Care in China: Scaling up a Pilot Project into a National Reform Program”, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem.*



*“We thought that it was very simple, that once we proposed the policy change, it would be accepted by the government, and we would switch to do something else...But that was not the case.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Gu Baochang*

### **3. POLICY ENTREPRENEURS AND ISSUE FRAMING**

#### **3.1 Policy Entrepreneurs in the Process of Policymaking**

##### **3.1.1 The Actors behind the One and the Two-child Policy: Introductory Comparison**

Pluralization implies a broadening of the voices that participate to debate and the emerging of new narratives that shape the decision-making process. In order to analyze whether birth planning became a more accessible arena of discussion, a preliminary comparison between the actors that shaped the one-child policy and the actors that advocated for a two-child policy opens this chapter.

Susan Greenhalgh (2008), uses an “actor-centered approach” to deeply analyze the protagonists of the one-child policy and the dynamics among them.<sup>2</sup>

Because the number of leaders and scientists centrally involved was remarkably small – perhaps two dozen in all – an actor centered approach should be able to capture the main dynamics of the making of this policy.<sup>3</sup>

In the following pages, the table designed by Greenhalgh (2008) is followed by a similar classification of the actors who emerged in the more recent debate over policy relaxation. Because many voices are relevant in the debate analyzed, a single, comprehensive classification would have been too challenging for the format of this thesis. Categories of actors are presented one by one through this schematic tool, useful for a preliminary comparison.

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<sup>1</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People...*, op. cit., p. 195 (Interview with Gu Baochang)

<sup>2</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

## KEY ACTORS IN THE MAKING OF THE ONE-CHILD POLICY<sup>4</sup>

	<b>Political leaders</b>	<b>Program leaders*</b>	<b>Population specialists</b>
Late Mao Era (1970 - 1976)	Mao Zedong Zhou Enlai Jiang Qing	Liu Xiuzheng** Yu Wang**	People's University: Liu Zheng** Wu Cangping** Lin Fude** Zha Ruichuan**
Early Deng Era (1977 - 1980)	Chen Yun Li Xiannian Deng Xiaoping Wang Zhen Zhao Ziyang Hu Yaobang Hu Qili	Chen Muhua	Missile Ministry: Song Jian Li Guangyuan Yu Jingyuan  Shanxi Party School: Liang Zhongtang

\*Program leaders – those in charge of the State Council’s birth planning agencies – are responsible for coordinating the work of the relevant government agencies in developing and implementing birth policy.

\*\*Involved in early Deng era as well.

Greenhalgh (2008) identifies three categories of policy entrepreneurs: political leaders, program leaders and population specialists. In the post Cultural Revolution China, only these few people had access to the debate over population and just a bunch of scientists had the knowledge and resources to investigate demographic problems. After nearly thirty years of economic reforms, a period of time that was extremely significant for China and that coincided with what many had called a “miracle” in terms of economic development, two factors should be taken into account in the reasoning over pluralization in the population discourse:

- 1) High education, especially in the fields of Science and Technology, was the core of the Four Modernizations and a focus of governmental efforts and expenses. In 2002, China hosted over 2000 higher education institutions and in the first decade of the 2000s the number of graduates per year increased from 1 to 7 million.<sup>5</sup> An

<sup>4</sup> The table is from GREENHALGH, *Just One Child*, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Christina CARON, “China and Canada: Economic Linkages, Migration, and the Canadian Labour Market.” *Canada-China Human Capital Dialogue*, Conference held at Ottawa, 28/11/2012.

increasing number of university students naturally implies a greater possibility to participate in the scientific debate.<sup>6</sup>

- 2) A stable low TFR and the implementation of birth planning for more than three decades made of population policy a less controversial topic to discuss. The scientific debate was actually encouraged by the political leaders.

Keeping this in mind, a focus on who were the actors in the process of change is the first step in order to understand whether the debate on population became more pluralized; this will be necessarily followed by an analysis of the content of their argumentation. The actors I identified are many and diverse and were divided into 5 macro-categories: political leaders, program leaders, population specialists and intellectuals with a political position. A sixth category, which I found harder to define and stays outside from the scientific mainstream debate, is the one represented by activists. Family planning left a very limited space for opponents to engage in an open discussion, because of the high priority given by the central government in limiting population growth. The role they played in the passage that led to relaxation was marginal: activists were few, unorganized and surrounded by an adverse environment. In addition, the object of their constraints has never been to question the one-child policy itself but, rather, to denounce the harmful effects of it and the degeneration into coercion deriving from its sometime brutal implementation. I deemed important to cite forms of activism in the panorama of family planning because, in the case for example of Chen Guangcheng, it fostered international awareness on the on-going darkest sides of the policy. International criticism may have had an impact on the Beijing government as well.

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<sup>6</sup> "The opening up of Chinese society and the revival of population studies as an academic discipline have also produced an independent force that can confront government pressure." WANG, CAI, GU, "Population, Policy and Politics: How will History Judge China's One-Child Policy?", op. cit., p. 126.

## KEY ACTORS IN THE MAKING OF THE TWO CHILD POLICY:

### *Political Leaders*

Political Leaders	Position
Late Jiang Zemin Era (2000-2003)	Jiang Zemin General Secretary of the CCP; President of the P.R.C
	Zhu Rongji Premier of the P.R.C.
Hu Jintao - Wen Jiabao Era (2003 - 2013)	Hu Jintao General Secretary of the CCP; President of the P.R.C
	Wen Jiabao Premier of the P.R.C.
Xi Jinping Era (2013 - )	Xi Jinping General Secretary of the CCP; President of the P.R.C
	Li Keqiang Premier of the P.R.C.
	Zhang Gaoli Vice Premier; Head of the Development and Reform Commission
	Ma Kai Vice Premier; State Councilor
	Liu Yandong Vice Premier; State Councilor; Leading Group for Health Care Reforms

**KEY ACTORS IN THE MAKING OF THE TWO CHILD POLICY:  
Program Leaders**

	<b>Birth Planning Officials</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Years in charge</b>
National Family Planning Commission NFPC (1981-2003)	Peng Peiyun*	<b>Minister in Charge</b>	1988 - 1998
	Zhang Weiqing	<b>Minister in Charge</b>	1998 - 2008
National Population and Family Planning Commission NPFPC (2003 - 2013)	Zhao Baige	Director of the International Cooperation Dep.; Director of the Science and Technology Dep. Deputy Director	1998 - 2003 2003 - 2013
	Ma Li	Head of Population Research Centre	
	Chen Li	Head of Department of Development, Planning and Statistics	
	Li Bin	<b>Minister in Charge</b>	2008 - 2011
	Wang Xia	<b>Minister in Charge</b>	2011 - 2013
	Li Bin	<b>Minister in Charge</b>	2013 - 2018
National Health and Family Planning Commission (2013 - 2018)	Wang Pei'an	Deputy Director	2013 - 2018
	He Dan	Director of the China Population Development Research Centre	2013 - 2018
	Yang Wenzhuang	Head of Department of Population monitoring and Family Development	2013 - 2018

\*Peng Peiyun had an important role in the debate over relaxation also after the end of her mandate as Minister in Charge of the National Family Planning Commission, as the President of All-China's Women Federation and a top-official of the CCP.

**KEY ACTORS IN THE MAKING OF THE TWO CHILD POLICY:  
*Population Specialists***

<i>The Advocacy Group (2000 - 2015)</i>	<i>Renmin University (2<sup>o</sup> and 3<sup>o</sup> generation)</i>	<i>The National Pop. Development strategic group</i>	<i>Shanxi Party School</i>	<i>Western demographers</i>	<i>Economists that researched on population</i>
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Gu Baochang	Zhai Zhenwu	Song Jian	Liang Zhongtang	John Bongaarts	Lin Yifu
Zhang Erli	Hao Hongsheng	Jiang Zhenghua		Wolfgang Lutz	Cai Fang
Guo Zhigang	Guo Zhigang	Xu Kuangdi			Liang Jianzhang (James Liang)
Zheng Zhenzhen					
Zuo Xuejin	Duan Chengrong				
Peng Xizhe	Du Peng				
Chen Wei	Song Jian				
Feng Xiaotian	Liu Shuang				
Li Shuzhuo	Cheng Wei				

Wang Feng\*

Cai Yong\*

\*Key figures of the so-called “Advocacy Group” (in Chinese: 课题组 *ketizu*, meaning “research project group”) were selected with the criterion of number of policy proposals signed and relevance in terms of papers published. Gu Baochang, Zhang Erli, Guo Zhigang, Zhang Zhenzhen, Zuo Xuejin, Peng Xizhe, Chen Wei, Feng Xiaotian and Li Shuzhuo were the only scholars who signed all the three policy proposals. Wang Feng and Cai Yong, despite signed just the last policy proposal, were significant in the issuing of papers and research works, argumentation in conferences and, given their education abroad, international debate over China’s population policy. These 11 scholars are considered the core of the Advocacy Group.

**The Advocacy Group (2000 – 2015):**  
*Signatories of the policy proposals of years 2004, 2009, 2015.*

First Reform Proposal - 2004		Second Reform Proposal - 2009		Third Reform Proposal - 2015	
1	Gu Baochang	1	Gu Baochang	1	Gu Baochang
2	Zhang Erli	2	Zhang Erli	2	Zhang Erli
3	Guo Zhigang	3	Guo Zhigang	3	Guo Zhigang
4	Zheng Zhenzhen	4	Zheng Zhenzhen	4	Zheng Zhenzhen
5	Zuo Xuejin	5	Zuo Xuejin	5	Zuo Xuejin
6	Peng Xizhe	6	Peng Xizhe	6	Peng Xizhe
7	Chen Wei	7	Chen Wei	7	Chen Wei
8	Feng Xiaotian	8	Feng Xiaotian	8	Feng Xiaotian
9	Li Shuzhuo	9	Li Shuzhuo	9	Li Shuzhuo
10	Li Jianmin	10	Li Jianmin	10	Wang Feng
11	Gui Shixun	11	Gui Shixun	11	Ma Xiaohong
12	Liu Yongliang	12	Liu Yongliang	12	Ma Yan
13	Xie Zhengming	13	Xie Zhengming	13	Wang Tianfu
14	Gao Ershang	14	Gao Ershang	14	Wang Di
15	Zhu Chuzhu	15	Zhu Chuzhu	15	Shi Renbing
16	Zheng Yi	16	Zheng Yi	16	Qiao Xiaoqun
17	Li Baihua	17	Chen Youhua	17	Chen Youhua
18	Zhai Zhenwu	18	Li Jianxin	18	Li Jianxin
		19	Wang Guangzhou	19	Wang Guangzhou
		20	Wang Jinying	20	Wang Jinying
		21	Liu Shuang	21	Ren Yuan
		22	Liu Hongyan	22	Sun Xiaoming
		23	Song Jian	23	Li Ding
		24	Yuan Xin	24	Shen Ke
		25	Zhang Rongzhou	25	Shen Jie
		26	Zhou Canghong	26	Zhang Na
				27	Zhang Qiong
				28	Zhang Zhen
				29	Lu Jiehua
				30	Wu Jilei
				31	Mao Zhouyan
				32	Zhao Zhongwei
				33	Luo Weixiang
				34	Huang Wenzheng
				35	Liang Jianzhang
				36	Zhan Zhongle
				37	Cai Yong
				38	Tan Kejian



Signatories of all three Reform Proposals



Signatories of two Reform Proposals

**KEY ACTORS IN THE MAKING OF THE TWO CHILD POLICY:  
*Intellectuals with a political relevance***

<b>Intellectuals with a political position</b>	<b>Field of Research</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Political Position</b>
Ye Tingfang	Literature, Literary Translation	Peking University	National People's Congress; Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Wang Ming	Public Administration; Management	Qinghua University	National People's Congress

**3.1.2 The Advocacy Group and the First Policy Proposal (2001 – 2004)**

At the end of 1990s, several trained-abroad demographers came back to China to share their authoritative ideas on the twenty-year old one-child policy; among them, Cai Yong, a scholar of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Wang Feng, from University of California-Irvine, Gu Baochang, graduated at Peking University and PhD at University of Texas at Austin, etc. Worrying data on population aging and SRB distortion and the approaching of the expected end of the one-child policy, triggered the formation of an advocacy group in 2000, for the relaxation of birth planning.<sup>7</sup>

In May 2001, in Shanghai, Gu Baochang and other 16 demographers gathered to define a work plan and a schedule for a proposal of policy reform to be submitted to the NPFPC; this encounter marked the formation of the advocacy group.<sup>8</sup> The group of scholars was sustained by the Population Council, the Ford Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation, and over two years carried out a vast research on the different fertility policies enacted in different areas of China and under specific conditions, with a consequent calculation of the policy fertility level and of the TFR.<sup>9</sup> The report displaying these calculations was published in 2003 (translated in English in 2007), with the title: “China’s Local and National Fertility Policies at the End of the Twentieth Century”<sup>10</sup>. The authors conducted a survey on 420 prefectures in China and calculated the national fertility level on the base of the fertility policy enforced in every locality,

<sup>7</sup> HVIStENDAHL, “Has China Outdrawn The One Child Policy?”, op. cit., p. 1458-1461.

<sup>8</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People...*, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> GU, WANG, GUO, ZHANG, “China’s Local and National Fertility Policies at the End of the Twentieth Century”, op. cit.

i.e. if every eligible couple would have as many children as allowed by the policy.<sup>11</sup> According to the report, one third of the Chinese population was subject to the one-child policy restriction, while more than half of the population entered in the category of 1.5 children per couple; the remaining 11% fitted in the two-child per couple (10%) and in the three-child per couple categories (a mere 1%). On the national level, at the end of 1990s, the policy fertility level was equal to 1.47 children per couple and coincided with the actual TFR, a number well below the replacement level of 2.1.<sup>12</sup>

**TABLE 4** Distribution of policy fertility and population by China's major regions

Region	Policy fertility (%)			Overall policy fertility	Prefectures		Population	
	One child	Two children	Three children		No.	(%)	(millions)	(%)
East	69.6	30.1	0.3	1.39	156	37.1	463.62	37.4
Central	61.1	38.9	0.0	1.47	110	26.2	419.00	33.8
West	56.9	39.1	4.0	1.56	154	36.7	357.01	28.8
National	63.1	35.6	1.3	1.47	420	100.0	1,239.63	100.0

NOTE: For provinces in each region see note 9.

Figure 10: The policy fertility level at the end of 1990s. GU Baochang, WANG Feng, GAO Zhigang and ZHANG Erli, "China's Local and National Fertility Policies at the End of the Twentieth Century", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2007, p. 140.

The convergence resulted from both the birth planning policy and , on a greater extent, from socioeconomic factors. In the conclusions, the authors state that:

If China wishes to avoid serious negative consequences associated with below replacement fertility in the long run, its policymakers ought to consider new policies that allow more Chinese couples to have more than one child.<sup>13</sup>

One year later, in 2004, the group drafted and submitted the proposal "A Suggestion on Adjusting China's Birth Policy" (关于调整我国生育政策的建议 *Guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyuzhengce de jianyi*). The proposal was signed by 18 population specialists and a non-definitive version was submitted to the Minister of the newly renamed National Population and Family Planning Commission, Zhang Weiqing (2003).<sup>14</sup> Among the signatories there were seven directors of demography programs

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 130.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 145.

<sup>14</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People*, op. cit., p. 91.

in Chinese universities, the Vice President of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and a former top-official of the Family Planning Commission.<sup>15</sup>

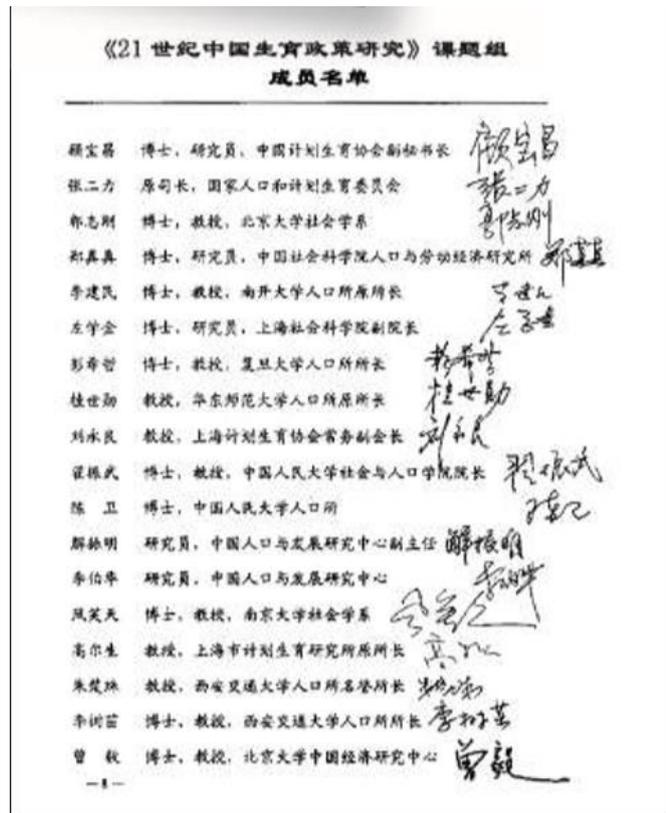


Figure 11: Signatories of “A Suggestion on Adjusting China’s Birth Policy”. Mara HVISTENDAHL, “Has China Outgrown the One Child Policy?”, *Science*, Vol.329, Issue 5998, 17/09/2010, p. 1461.

In April 2004, the agreed-upon version of the proposal was submitted to the NPFPC and the State Council, without being released publicly.<sup>16</sup> In June, a conference was organized in Baoding (Hebei), by the former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun. Among the participants there were the Minister Zhang Weiqing, two Vice Ministers, Gu Baochang and Wang Feng.<sup>17</sup> For the first time, the two leaders of the advocacy group could present their findings to the officials of the NPFPC. During the Baoding conference, the response of officials seemed positive and the demographers convinced the head of the NPFPC’s International Cooperation Department and Deputy Director of the Commission, Zhao Baige, to plan a new conference, with the participation of Western scholars specialized on low fertility.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> HVISTENDAHL, “Has China Outgrown the One Child Policy?”, op. cit., p. 1460.

<sup>16</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People*, op. cit., p. 91-92.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 205.

A two-session Forum, financed by UNFPA, was thus organized in Hawaii and Beijing in the period between April and June 2005. The Hawaii Forum, organized on April 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> in the East-West Centre, was entitled “Forum on Emerging Population Challenges in China and East Asia”.<sup>19</sup>

From the NPFPC only four officials attended the Forum, among them, Ma Li, the Head of the Population Information Research Centre and Chen Li, the head of the Department of Development and Planning and Statistics. On the side of western scholars, some of the most important experts on low fertility took part, such as John Bongaarts and Wolfgang Lutz.<sup>20</sup> When Wang Feng presented his research paper, Chen Li expressed complains on its title, “Can China Afford to Continue its One-Child Policy?” and asked to remove the presentation from the agenda. In the end, the Commission agreed on the discussion of Wang Feng’s paper, but this episode epitomized the NPFPC’s reluctance in considering a shift of the policy.

The second part of the conference, held in Beijing, saw the participation of ten officials from the NPFPC, including the Minister Zhang Weiqing, but, instead of being located in the headquarter of the Commission in the center of the capital, it was significantly moved to the peripheral area of Xiaotangshan.<sup>21</sup> Similarly to the Hawaii forum, in the Beijing conference, experts warned on the low fertility level of China and other East Asian countries and suggested to stop with anti-natalist policies. Also in this occasion, the political leaders seemed to positively embrace these opinions, but actually did not consider policy relaxation as a possibility: according to Gu Baochang, the idea of expanding the Experiment was perceived as too dangerous because a lift of the policy would have resulted in a unsustainable increase in the fertility level.<sup>22</sup>

### **3.1.3 The National Population Development Strategic Research Group**

While the Advocacy Group was submitting its proposal to the Commission for an initial revision, the NPFPC entrusted a group of population specialists to analyze population data in view of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. The National Population Development Strategic Research Group (国家人口发展战略研究课题组 *guojia renkou fazhan zhanlue yanjiu ketizu*) was founded in February 2004, and was led by

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 206 – 207.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 209. (Interview with Wang Feng, 2016)

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem.*

Song Jian, Jiang Zhenghua and Xu Kuangdi.<sup>23</sup> The three strenuous conservatives on population policies have had important positions in the history of China's family planning: Song Jian was the cybernetic engineer considered the "father" of the one-child policy and the author of the projections that supported the government's radical decision<sup>24</sup>; Jiang Zhenghua was the former Vice Minister of NFPC and a firm supporter of one childization; Xu Kuangdi wasn't a trained demographer, but an engineer.

After the Open Letter of 1980, Song Jian political career reached outstanding peaks: in 1985 he became Minister of the inter-ministerial State Science and Technology Commission and the following year he entered the State Council. He held both offices until 1988, when he was appointed President of the Chinese Academy of Engineering. Song covered the top position of member of the Central Committee of the CCP for four terms and a total duration of 20 years (from 1982, till 2002).<sup>25</sup> Despite since the 1990s, engineers and technicians became less relevant in the debate over population and social scientists' authority strengthen<sup>26</sup>, Song Jian retained an unshakeable political prestige and weight inside the CCP. His obstructionism in respect to a policy relaxation was one of the causes of the rejection of the 2004 proposal.

### **3.1.4 Amplification of the Public Debate and the Second Policy Proposal (2009)**

After the restraint of birth planning officials to the proposal for policy relaxation, the group of demographers acted to promote awareness on the problems generated by the one-child policy. Their strategy was of involvement of foreign and domestic experts, reinforcement of their research data and mobilization of the media.

To highlight the linkage between future demographic imbalances and changes in the economic environment, they involved Chinese economists in the analysis: in 2006 two publications written in concert with the economists Lin Yifu and Cai Fang were published.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> SONG Jian 宋健, XU Kuangdi 徐匡迪, JIANG Zhenghua 蒋正华, "Guojia renkou fazhan zhanlüe yanjiu baogao" 国家人口发展战略研究报告 (Report of the Research on the National Population Development Strategy), *Renkou yanjiu* 人口研究 (Population Research), Vol. 31, No. 1, 2007, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> China Vitae, *Song Jian Career data*, "China Vitae", 05/03/2014 (updated), [online] URL [http://www.chinavitae.com/biography/Song\\_Jian/career](http://www.chinavitae.com/biography/Song_Jian/career). Accessed on 02/10/2019.

<sup>26</sup> GREENHALGH, *Cultivating Global Citizens*, op. cit. p.98.

<sup>27</sup> ZENG Yi 曾毅, LI Ling 李玲, GU Baochang 顾宝昌, LIN Yifu 林毅夫 (edited by), "Shiji Zhongguo renkou yu jingji fazhan" 21 世纪中国人口与经济发展 (21<sup>st</sup> Century Population and

Ferment in the population matter took roots also among some intellectuals: in 2006, Professor Ye Tingfang (Peking University) launched a motion at the 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) that created a sensation among Netizens.<sup>28</sup> As the most important translator and expert of Franz Kafka and head of the Research Association of German Literature,<sup>29</sup> Ye Tingfang's background seems far from the population discourse. Nevertheless, in 2006 and 2007, he drafted a proposal, signed by 29 members of the CPPCC, to immediately stop the one child restriction. The petition triggered upsurge of discussion, especially on the Web, where the sentence: "it's not good to have just one" (只生一个不好 *zhi sheng yige buhao*.) became a consensus. The so-called "Ye Tingfang Motion" (叶廷芳提案 *Ye Tingfang ti'an*) received a 5000-character reply from the NPFPC that excluded the possibility of relaxation.<sup>30</sup>

In 2009, in Beijing, the advocacy group held the conference "Forum on Population, Gender and Development" (人口性别发展论谈 *Renkou Xingbie Fazhan Luntan*), with the participation of feminist scholars to examine the consequences of the one-child policy on women and girls.<sup>31</sup> To corroborate the issues presented in the 2004 proposal, the group of demographers gathered more data and carried on a field research on the areas where the Experiment was implemented.

In January, a second policy proposal was submitted to the NPFPC, this time with the signatures of 26 demographers<sup>32</sup>. Unlike before, demographers disclosed the new

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Economic Development in China), Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe 社会科学文献出版社, 2006, p. 257-275. CAI Fang 蔡昉, GU Baochang 顾宝昌 (edited by), *Renkou zhuanbian de shehui jingji houguo* 人口转变的社会经济后果 (The Demographic Transition and Its Social and Economic Consequences), Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe 社会科学文献出版社, 2006, p. 61-83.

<sup>28</sup> JING Yibu 敬奕步, "Ye Tingfang: di yi ci huhan 'Fangkai erhai'" "叶廷芳: 第一次呼喊《放开二孩》" (Ye Tingfang: for the first time the appeal "Let's open to a second child"), *Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末 (Southern Weekend), 22/08/2019, [online] URL <http://www.infzm.com/content/156933>. Accessed on 04/12/2019.

<sup>29</sup> Ye Tingfang 叶挺芳, "Baidu Baike" 百度百科, [online] URL <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%8F%B6%E5%BB%B7%E8%8A%B3>. Accessed on 04/01/2020.

<sup>30</sup> JING, "Ye Tingfang: di yi ci huhan 'Fangkai erhai'", op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People*..., op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>32</sup> *Guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyuzhengce de zai jianyi* 关于调整我国生育政策的再建议 (Another Suggestion on Adjusting China's Birth Policy), Beijing, 2009, [online] URL <http://china.caixin.com/upload/2009jianyishu/2009jianyishu.pdf>. Accessed on 04/05/2019.

proposal to the public through media exposure, in order to get popular support in the bargaining process with the Commission.<sup>33</sup>

According to Cai Yong, the NPFPC's reaction didn't differ from the past and the proposal was not considered by the CCP.<sup>34</sup> In order to raise awareness on the problem and get the support of the public opinion, demographers spread their message through media channels, trying to obtain the attention of the leadership with another strategy. Interviews and articles released by some of the group most active participants appeared on both national and international newspapers.<sup>35</sup> Liang Zhongtang, considered a forerunner in the debate over population, was once again an important voice in this process of amplification: due to the Experiment of Eight Million People, Yicheng became a site of interest for journalists and activists and Liang personally guided them in the experimental area and organized interviews with the local officials.<sup>36</sup>

In the meanwhile, the initiative started from Ye Tingfang in the CPPCC continued even after he left his seat in the Committee: one of the signatories of the "Ye Tingfang Motion", the Qinghua Professor of Public Administration Wang Ming, launched in 2010 another motion, entitled: "Proposal on allowing two children and modifying China's family planning" (关于放开二孩、调整我国人口政策建议 *guanyu fangkai erhai, tiaozheng woguo renkou zhengce jianyi*). In the following five years, he presented several petitions asking to stop China's one-childization.<sup>37</sup> After contradictory reactions from the government, he declared to have obtained a more positive response when an inspector contacted him and invited him to take part to some conferences on the matter.<sup>38</sup>

Another unconventional voice was the one of Liang Jianzhang, internationally known as James Liang, the co-founder of the provider of travel service Ctrip. Together

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> FONG, Mei, *One Child: The Story of China's Most Radical Experiment*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 86.

<sup>35</sup> HVISTENDAHL, "Has China Outgrown the One Child Policy?", op. cit. Also, Sharon LaFRANIERE, "As China Ages, Birthrate Policy May Prove Difficult to Reverse", *The New York Times*, 06/04/2011, [online] URL <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/world/asia/07population.html>. Accessed on 03/12/2019.

<sup>36</sup> Bill SHILLER, "China's happy two-child experiment", *The Star*, 23/04/2010, [online] URL [https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2010/04/23/chinas\\_happy\\_twochild\\_experiment.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2010/04/23/chinas_happy_twochild_experiment.html). Accessed on 03/12/2019. Also, DUAN Yan, SHAN Juan, "Rural two-child policy gives birth to new possibilities", *Chinadaily.com.cn*, 08/12/2011, [online] URL [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-12/08/content\\_14230068.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-12/08/content_14230068.htm). Accessed on 03/12/2019.

<sup>37</sup> JING Yibu, "Ye Tingfang: di yi ci huhan 'Fangkai erhai'", op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem.*

with the Peking University demographer Li Jianxin (signatory of two policy proposals)<sup>39</sup>, in 2012 he published a book with the title: “Too many people in China?” (中国人太多了吗? *Zhongguoren taiduo le ma?*)<sup>40</sup> in which he examines population imbalances and especially the consequences of the aging phenomenon on creativity and vitality in business. Besides being an entrepreneur, James Liang, comes from an academic background<sup>41</sup> and he acted as a vocal opponent to the continuation of the policy by giving interviews<sup>42</sup> and publishing scientific papers. His opinion is in line with the demographers of the Advocacy Group and his visibility, as a successful businessman, might have shaped the debate both internally and internationally.

### 3.1.5 The Third Policy Proposal (2015)

With the new administration Xi Jinping-Li Keqiang, the momentum for policy change seemed more positive; in 2013 two important reforms took place: the NPFPC merged with the National Health and Family Planning Commission, and the policy was relaxed allowing two children for *dandu* couples (couples made of at least one only child). Even though the step for relaxation was really cautious, it went in the same direction of the proposals presented by the advocacy group, thus having a significant symbolic importance. A direct connection between the reform and the proposals though, is not a foregone conclusion:

Although this was similar to the course of action that had been called for the original 2004 proposal, there is no evidence that the group had any hand in this initial shift.<sup>43</sup>

Zheng Zhenzhen commented:

A lot of people said that the first step was too small, but I think the first move was very important to show that there was nothing to worry about when changing it.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> This thesis, ch. 3, par. 3.1.1.

<sup>40</sup> LIANG Jianzhang 梁建章, LI Jianxin 李建新, *Zhongguoren tai duo le ma?* 中国人太多了吗? (Too many people in China?), Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe 社会科学文献出版社, Beijing, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Liang Jianzhang (James Liang) obtained a PhD in economics in Stanford University (USA) from 2007 to 2011. *Liang Jianzhang* 梁建章, “Baidu Baike” 百度百科, [online] URL <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%A2%81%E5%BB%BA%E7%AB%A0/12825>. Accessed on 07/10/2019.

<sup>42</sup> On the Level, “China’s Two-Child Policy? - James Liang. OTL 14003”, *Youtube*, On the Level, 25/03/2014, 30.00 mins, URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zqgBOSe4Ok>. Accessed on 04/08/2019.

<sup>43</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People...*, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 216. (Interview with Zheng Zhenzhen 2016).

After one year and the poor increase in terms of fertility despite the new policy, in December 2014, the group organized a third conference in Shanghai Fudan University, with the title “Facing the Future of Chinese Population Research”(面向未来的中国人口研究 *mianxiang weilai de zhongguo renkou yanjiu*).<sup>45</sup> More than 50 demographers from China and around the world were present and aim of the meeting was to compare the latest researches and analysis on population. Former Minister Peng Peiyun, despite retired and very elderly, played once again a determinant role in the conference and suggested the group to draft a third proposal for policy reform, ensuring that it would arrive directly to the top leadership.<sup>46</sup>

In January 2015, the group presented a third proposal to the NHFPC, with the more imperative title: “Give the People Free Reign to Have Two Children and Abolish Birth Restrictions” (全面放开二孩生育取消对公民的生育限制 *Quanmian fangkai erhai shengyu quxiao dui gongmin de shengyu xianzhi*). This three-page-long draft was signed by 40 specialists.<sup>47</sup>

In the spring of that year, the Xinhua agency organized a field research on the issue and sent ten groups of research in various places in the country to investigate through data comparing and interviews. Reporters asked the contribution of some of the specialists of the advocacy group, such as Wang Feng, and asked them to comment on their research.<sup>48</sup> The fact that the governmental agency was conducting directly this kind of investigation and involving the demographers, was an important sign of internal change within the Party. The confirmation of the intentions of change arrived in October, when, on behalf of the Party, Xinhua published the statement:

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<sup>45</sup> *Zhongguo xuezhe huyu jinyibu fangkai zhongguo shengyu zhengce fudan daxue yu lianheguo renkou jijin zai shanghai gongtong juban renkou yanjiu zuotanhui* 中国学者呼吁进一步放开中国生育政策复旦大学与联合国人口基金在上海共同举办人口研究座谈会 (Chinese scholars advocate for a further relaxation of China’s birth planning - Fudan University and the United Nations Population Fund Jointly Organized a Symposium on Population Research in Shanghai), “Firstlight.cn”, [online] URL <http://nbcc.firstlight.cn/View.aspx?infoid=3461078#> Accessed on 08/10/2019.

<sup>46</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People...*, op. cit., p. 218 (Interview with Wang Feng, 2016)

<sup>47</sup> LING Jiangfeng 凌江峰, *39 Ming xuezhe lianming cu quanmian fangkai erhai, quxiao shengyu Xianzhi* 39名学者联名促全面放开二孩, 取消生育限制 (39 Scholars jointly sign for opening to two children and abolish birth limits), “Cmcn.org”, 02/03/2015, [online] URL <https://cmcn.org/archives/14217>. Accessed on 08/10/2019.

<sup>48</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People...*, op. cit., p. 223 (Interview with Wang Feng, 2016).

To promote a balanced growth of population, China will continue to uphold the basic national policy of population control and improve its strategy on population development. China will fully implement the policy of “one Couple, two children” in a proactive response to the issue of its ageing population.<sup>49</sup>

The statement was followed by the modification of the law on Family Planning in December, to enter into force the following year.

### 3.1.6 A Focus on Population Studies in Renmin University of China<sup>50</sup>

Renmin University is a distinguished and ancient university of the P.R.C., historically connected to the CCP. Since its foundation in 1950, Ren Da (short for Renmin Daxue) was devoted to the training of cadres and teachers of social sciences and political theory, being the incubator of the Chinese top leadership.<sup>51</sup> The first independent population center in the history of China was formed in 1974, under the leadership of the statistician Liu Zheng, and was temporary based in Beijing College of Economics.<sup>52</sup> In 1978 it was moved to Ren Da, when the University was reopened after eight years of Cultural Revolution “black-out”. Liu Zheng, with a background in quantitative social science, recruited five colleagues to work with him at the Population Theory Institute: Wu Cangping, an economist graduated at New York University, Zha Ruichuan, a chemical engineer from Qinghua University and Lin Fude, an economist also graduated from Qinghua University.<sup>53</sup> This first generation of demographers was essential in building a literature on population studies and in the formation of population experts: they originated a teaching system for population studies.<sup>54</sup> From 1982 to 1992, the foundations of population studies in China were laid and Liu Zheng was a fundamental authority in establishing a science of population consistent with the Marxian ideology. At the end of the 1980s, five universities in China were granted a PhD in demography: Renmin University (Beijing), Peking University (Beijing), the

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<sup>49</sup> Steven JIANG, Paul ARMSTRONG, Susannah CULLINANE, “China unveils two-child policy”, *CNN*, 27/12/2015, [online] URL <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/27/asia/china-two-child-policy/index.html>. Accessed on 23/10/2019.

<sup>50</sup> During an exchange program in Renmin University (2019), the author had the opportunity to get in touch with one of the most relevant department of population studies in China. This paragraph reports the data gathered from interviews with Professor Song Jian (March 2019), Assistant Professor Lü Lidan (October 2019) and to PhD student Zhou Yuxiang (March 2019).

<sup>51</sup> HAYHOE, Ruth, *China's Universities, 1895-1955: A century of cultural conflict*, Hong Kong: Comparative Education Centre, University of Hong Kong, 1999, p.75-90.

<sup>52</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just One Child*, op.cit., p. 102-103

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Song Jian (21/03/2019).

Southwestern University of Finance and Economics (Chengdu), Nankai University (Tianjin) and the East China Normal University (Shanghai).<sup>55</sup> With the support of the UNPFA, many western demographers came to China to give lectures and the first generation of Chinese students (around ten) went abroad to study, especially to the USA.<sup>56</sup>

The demographers Zhai Zhenwu, Hao Hongsheng, and Guo Zhigang formed the second generation of population specialists of Renmin University (1990s).<sup>57</sup> All of them studied in Renmin University and completed a PhD program there, but then undertook different paths: Hao Hongsheng emigrated to the USA<sup>58</sup>; Guo Zhigang became a professor in Peking University after a Postdoc in Brown University (USA)<sup>59</sup>; while Zhai Zhenwu progressed in his academic career in Renmin University, up to the prestigious role of President of the School of Sociology and Population Studies (2003-2016).<sup>60</sup> Since 2000 he is also the Chairman of the Population Development Studies Center, one of the 100 key national research bases for Humanities and Social Sciences and the only key demographic research base in China, according to the Ministry of Education.<sup>61</sup>

These preeminent roles that Zhai Zhenwu covered, and still covers, in Ren Da and his extensive and influential amount of scientific publications made of him the most eminent voice on population in the University, so much that Professor Song defined him “the boss”.<sup>62</sup> As part of the Group of specialists that assist the Family Planning Commission, Zhai Zhenwu contributed to the discussion on an immediate opening to a

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<sup>55</sup> LU Yu 路遇, *Xin Zhongguo renkou wushi nian* 新中国人口五十年 (Fifty years of population studies in the New China), Zhongguo renkou chubanshe 中国人口出版社 (China Population Press), 2004, p. 1286.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Song Jian (21/03/2019).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> Beijing Daxue shehui xuexi shehuixue renleixue yanjiusuo 北京大学社会学系社会学人类学研究所 (Department of Sociology, Institute of Sociology and Anthropology of Peking University), Guo Zhigang 郭志刚, “shehui.pku.edu.cn”, [online] URL <http://www.shehui.pku.edu.cn/sz/content.aspx?nodeid=71#>. Accessed on 23/10/2019.

<sup>60</sup> Zhongguo Renmin daxue shehui yu renkou xueyuan 中国人民大学社会与人口学院 (School of Sociology and Population Studies of Renmin University), Zhai Zhenwu 翟振武, “ssps.ruc.edu.cn”, [online] URL [http://ssps.ruc.edu.cn/index.php?s=/Index/teacher\\_cont/cid/8/taid/51.html](http://ssps.ruc.edu.cn/index.php?s=/Index/teacher_cont/cid/8/taid/51.html). Accessed on 23/10/2019.

<sup>61</sup> Renkou yu fazhan yanjiu zhongxin 人口与发展研究中心 (Population Development Studies Center), “pdsc.ruc.edu.cn”, [online] URL <http://pdsc.ruc.edu.cn/zxjj/index.htm#>. Accessed on 23/10/2019.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Song Jian (21/03/2019).

two-child policy when the so-called *dandu* policy was still in place. In 2014, he, together with the Renmin University PhD students Zhang Xiangling and Jin Yongai, published an article on the magazine he was director of, Population Research (人口研究 *Renkou yanjiu*), with the title: “Demographic Consequences of an Immediate Transition to a Universal Two-child Policy” (立即全面放开二胎政策的人口学后果分析 *Liji quanmian fangkai ertai zhengce de renkouxue houguo fenxi*).<sup>63</sup> The article is one of the most downloaded and cited on population (36.344 downloads on www.cnki.net on 08/01/2020). It evaluates the consequences of a possible opening-up to two children for every couple in 2012. To understand the impact of the reform, the scholars first calculate the dimension of the target group of the policy (married women of childbearing age with already one child); they then measure the mothers’ desire for a second child; make hypothesis of the temporal distribution of second children born after the reform; analyze the age structure of the target group, considering that maternity desire decrease at the increase of age; finally, adapt these parameters to the timeframe of an immediate openness to a two-child policy.<sup>64</sup> The conclusion is that the target group is very consistent and fertility desire is high (65% of the target group would desire a second child, according to the research), thus an immediate relaxation for every Chinese couple would result in a baby boom, that could be avoided with a more gradual solution.<sup>65</sup> With this publication, Zhai Zhenwu presented himself as a supporter of a prudent line and stands for a gradual resolution of policy change. Opposite to his view, is Professor Gu Baochang (Peking University), who has been advocating for an immediate relaxation of the policy since the early 2000s. In this respect, it is worth noticing that Zhai did not sign the second (2009) and the third (2015) proposals for policy reform.

The third generation (2000) of Ren Da Professors of Population studies includes five Professors: Professor Duan Chengrong, specialized in population’s migration and the floating population problem; Professor Du Peng, specialized in aging societies and elderly problem; Professor Song Jian, specialized in marriage and family structure; Professor Liu Shuang, specialized in public policy and population development and,

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<sup>63</sup> ZHAI Zhenwu, ZHANG Xiangling, JIN Yongai, “Demographic Consequences of an Immediate Transition to a Universal Two-child Policy”, *Population Research*, 2014, 38(2): 3-17.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 16.

finally, Professor Cheng Wei, specialized in statistics of population.<sup>66</sup> The approach towards population is multidisciplinary and partitioned in diversified areas of expertise, with the intent to look at population in a comprehensive way, in line with the international demographic research. In the exhaustive interview that Professor Song kindly accepted, she expressed her point of view over a complete relaxation of the policy as well, exposing a prudent and gradual approach in line with the one of Professor Zhai. According to Professor Song, the variables to take into consideration when modifying a population policy are many and complex: they include the total population size, which is still very big, population structure and number of births, which is still increasing. Looking at the broader picture, Professor Song doesn't consider the aging problem as a crisis, but rather she stresses that a better care and assistance for the elders should be the priority in this context. Population control is a delicate matter where sudden change could bring irreversible consequences, so it is good to proceed step by step. In conclusion, she asserted that for China:

To maintain a moderate low fertility level (at this point) is not a bad thing (不是坏事儿 *bushi huashì*)".<sup>67</sup>

Assistant Professor Lü Lidán, expert in infant population, shared a more decisive approach on future total relaxation: she thinks, agreeing with Professor Gu Baochang, that, in case of no birth limits, a baby boom will not happen in China.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.1.7 Outside Voices: Activists in the Population Debate

In the debate over policy relaxation, activists can't be identified as one category, but rather as individual and separate voices. The way they engaged in the debate runs parallel to the scientific discourse and hardly encounters it, constituting a secondary arena of discussion the goals of which is not a relaxation of the policy, but rather the broader concept of respect for human rights.

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Song Jian (21/03/2019). Also, Zhongguo Renmin daxue shehui yu renkou xueyuan 中国人民大学社会与人口学院 (School of Sociology and Population studies of Renmin University), *Zaigang jiaoshi* 在岗教师 (Current Professors), "ssps.ruc.edu.cn", [online] URL <http://ssps.ruc.edu.cn/index.php?s=/Index/teacher/cid/8.html> Accessed on 23/10/2019.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Song Jian (21/03/2019).

<sup>68</sup> Telephone interview with Lü Lidán (04/11/2019).

In the history of the one-child policy several public protests that started from the grassroots are reported in the media. The causes that led people to gather and protest were several, but always related to the implementation of the policy, and not to the policy itself. Protests especially concerned local cadres' abuses, corruption (Guangxi, 2007)<sup>69</sup>, forced abortions, heavy sanctions and, recently, state's neglect of *shidu fumu* (失独父母), literary parents who lost the only child, left without social securities (Beijing, 2016)<sup>70</sup>. This kind of protests are important demonstrations of social discontent but have very little effect on the policymaking at the central level.

In a study over state-citizens disputes in non-democratic regimes Landry and Tong (2005) point out policy negotiability, i.e. the negotiable nature of a policy, as a main variable for pursuing a dispute against the state in China. Despite a high number of grievances among people, family planning is 'the' example of non-negotiable policy, due to the commitment of the central government towards its implementation and the explicit link between birth quotas and local officials' career prospects. In the survey they conducted, family planning disputes resulted significantly few in respect with other categories of administrative disputes, such as taxation, relocation, penalty, land acquisition, licensing and state subsidies, confirming the hypothesis that policy negotiability is the primary factor taken into consideration to proceed with legal action against the state.<sup>71</sup>

A case of international impact in this respect was the class-action lawsuit brought to the Beijing Court by the "bare-foot" lawyer Chen Guangcheng, who denounced local officials for coercive implementation of the policy in the village of Linyi (Shandong). He then had to serve four years in prison and was later detained in illegal house arrest by local cadres.<sup>72</sup> The story of Chen gained international attention since his successful but hazardous escape from *de facto* detention in Linyi to the US Embassy in Beijing.

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<sup>69</sup> Jonathan WATTS, "Chinese villagers riot over 'one-child' policy", *The Guardian*, Beijing, 21/05/2007, [online] URL <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/may/21/china.jonathanwatts>. Accessed on 03/01/2020.

<sup>70</sup> Neil CONNOR, "Protests in China by grieving "one child policy" parents", *The Telegraph*, Beijing, 18/04/2016, [online] URL [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/18/\\_protests-in-china-by-grieving-only-child-mothers/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/18/_protests-in-china-by-grieving-only-child-mothers/). Accessed on 03/01/2020.

<sup>71</sup> Pierre F. LANDRY, Yanqi TONG, "Disputing the Authoritarian State in China", *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, Panel 13-8: Current Issues in Chinese Politics, Washington D.C., 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Ian JOHNSON, " 'Pressure for Change is at the Grassroots': An Interview with Chen Guangcheng", *NYR Day*, 26/07/2012, [online] URL <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2012/06/26/chen-guangcheng-interview/>. Accessed on 04/12/2019.

After diplomatic negotiations, Chen was allowed to leave China with his family to study in New York's University law school and became a well-known activist for application of the rule of law and respect for human rights in China.<sup>73</sup> The instance presented by Chen to the court was the result of a survey he carried on in 2005 on the abuses perpetrated by local cadres in the enforcement of family planning and, according to scholars, it was the first time that farmers got together to challenge the state against forced abortions and sterilizations.<sup>74</sup> The lawsuit, presented in June 2005, was rejected by the court, but the findings were revealed on the Internet and the foreign press, raising international interest. If the content of the lawsuit was in line with law prescription, indeed any form of coercion was against the family planning law and condemned by the government, Chen Guangcheng acted like an outcast and appealed to the court. Even in 2005, to openly criticize aspects of the crucial state policy by going against the family-planning establishment, was a dead end.<sup>75</sup> The NPFPC later announced that several officials in Linyi had been detained, but Chen faced harsher consequences by been house-arrested from the untouched local authorities.

Chen's case corroborates the idea, inherent also in the FA theory, that a direct confrontation against the political, at least in the family planning context, it's a losing battle. As Greenhalgh (2001) writes:

Serving the state as an establishment intellectual has been virtually the only safe and effective way for Chinese intellectuals to participate in the political and policy debates shaping the nation's future.<sup>76</sup>

From this internal position, feminist scholars emerged as marginal and yet meaningful voices, sharing the point of view of women, directly influenced by family planning policies in many ways. Instead of questioning the policy itself, they discussed the official narrative on the role of the policy in women's lives. The state has always conferred a positive role to the policy, that has freed women from oppressive, traditional values, and family pressure.<sup>77</sup> The urgency of a strict restriction to breed as the only

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>74</sup> Philip P. PAN, "Who controls the Family? Blind Activist Peasants in Legal Challenge To Abuses of China's Population-Growth Policy", *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 27/08/2005.

<sup>75</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Chronology of Chen Guangcheng's Case*, "hrw.org", 19/07/2006, [online] URL <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/11/13/chronology-chen-guangchengs-case>, Accessed on 12/01/2020

<sup>76</sup> Susan GREENHALGH, "Fresh Winds in Beijing: Chinese Feminists Speak Out on the One-Child Policy and Women's Lives", *Signs*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2001, pp. 847-886.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 853-855.

solution to overpopulation and the positive effect of the transfer of authority over reproduction from the traditional family in the hands of the state is uncontested by scholar activists. Following the Cairo Conference (1994) and the Conference on women in Beijing (1995) and thanks to the encounter with exponents of Western feminism in these meetings, a group of feminists scholar-activists has begun to highlight the deleterious effects of the one-child policy on women. In a political climate of more open discussion on family planning in China, mainly encouraged by the NFPC Minister in charge, Peng Peiyun, feminist intellectuals from different backgrounds took critical positions not on the gender issues caused by it, questioning the women salvation narrative.<sup>78</sup>

Their discussion focuses on whether the positive effects policy on women prevailed on the negative ones. The positive, stressed by the official propaganda, are the reduction of the reproductive burden and the ability to pursue personal development in terms of education and career; from the female only child perspective, the devotion of parental attention to girls was the driver for a generation of girls who enjoyed greater opportunities than their parents.<sup>79</sup> These positive, unintentional effects of the policy, were mainly perceived in urban areas. On the other hand, negative effects outweigh the benefits especially in rural areas, because the interests of the state and not of women are at the base of birth control: women are not subject of the policy, but objects of fertility reduction.<sup>80</sup> This approach imposed on women the burden of contraception (without freedom of choice in many cases), sterilization, birth control surgery and forced abortions also in late term pregnancies. These burdens impacted much more on women than men, causing physical, psychological and socioeconomic problems on a great extent.<sup>81</sup>

Objectification of women and their bodies is a characteristic that persists in the universal two-child policy, which was not welcomed by women as a liberating policy, because it didn't mean greater gender empowerment. On the contrary, it poses women in a disadvantageous position in the labor market: since women could now apply for two maternity leaves, they may face discrimination in the hiring process. Cases of

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 857.

<sup>79</sup> Danyang WU, *Youth Feminist Activism in China: An Ethnographic Analysis of an Innovative Action-oriented Feminism*, MA Thesis, Lund University, Social Studies of Gender, 2015.

<sup>80</sup> GREENHALGH, "Fresh Winds in Beijing...", *op. cit.*, p. 870.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 871.

scheduling pregnancies at separate times not to collide with other employees, of fines for not respecting the “pregnancy line” and of discrimination by companies hesitant to hire female employees are reported by national media and social networks.<sup>82</sup>

### 3.2 Issue Framing: Old and New Narratives

#### 3.2.1 Issue Framing: The Three Narratives at the Base of the One-child Policy Debate

When a bunch of demographers, mainly western-trained, started to question China’s birth planning policy in the early 2000s, family planning with its complex and diverse facets had been a basic state policy for nearly 20 years (since 1982). Other basic state policies in China are, for example, equality of the sexes, environment protection and openness to the outside world<sup>83</sup>, conferring to the family planning policy the highly symbolical status of a pillar of the Chinese state.

It hasn’t always been like this: in the Maoist China, the issue of birth control was highly problematic, as ideologically linked to the Western economist Thomas Robert Malthus.<sup>84</sup> When Zhou Enlai, in 1973, asked a group of statisticians to make a population control proposal, he required a solid ideological base to justify it and distance it from Malthusianism. Liu Zheng and his colleagues of Renmin University framed a Marxian theory of birth planning<sup>85</sup>, where the political framework was as important as the scientific one. By calculating the economic burden that population imposed on the State development, the Marxian statisticians revealed to the government that the Chinese population was the main source of backwardness of China and the main obstacle for the nation’s development. A major conceptual innovation introduced by the statisticians was the ‘per capita concept’ (人均思想 *renjun sixiang*), i.e. to divide economic aggregates (arable land, urban housing, industrial crop production, etc.) by the size of the population.<sup>86</sup> The proposal of the Liu Group was to enforce a 20 year-

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<sup>82</sup> Noelle MATEER, Charlotte YANG, TENG Jingxuan, “Lining Up to Get Pregnant: The Unintended Victims of the Two-Child Rule”, *Caixin*, 29/12/2018, [online] URL <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2018-12-29/lining-up-to-get-pregnant-the-unintended-victims-of-the-two-child-rule-101364579.html>. Accessed on 20/12/2019.

<sup>83</sup> *Seven Basic State Policy*, 基本国策, in “Baidu Baike” 百度百科, [online] URL <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%9F%BA%E6%9C%AC%E5%9B%BD%E7%AD%96/670205>. Accessed on 15/10/2019.

<sup>84</sup> This thesis, ch. 1, par, 1.1.

<sup>85</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just One Child*, op. cit., p. 81-124.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 116.

long policy that prohibited the birth of three children and strongly encouraged one-child families.

The group of cybernetics entered in the population debate later, in 1978 and consisted of Song Jian, Yu Jingyuan (a control theorist), Li Guangyuan (a computer expert) and Tian Xueyuan (an economist).<sup>87</sup> With the data of the Public Security Bureau and the computers of the missile ministry, they made projections of the growth of Chinese population in the following decades. The conclusions were similar to the ones of Liu Zheng (population was the main cause of China's backwardness), but the perspective from which Song considered the problem was much wider: population was a biological entity and its out-of-control growth was a threat not only to China's environmental resources, but to the whole planet's survival. Through numbers, graphs and mathematical systems, they evidenced the urgency of the problems China faced: it was a real Malthusian crisis and by scientizing it, Song made it politically unattackable.<sup>88</sup>

Liang Zhongtang and other intellectuals well-embedded in the rural areas developed an alternative approach to the population problem. Member of the People's Liberation Army and teacher in a Party school, Liang Zhongtang started studying population in 1979, worried about the possible implementation of a one-child policy.<sup>89</sup> He firmly believed that drastic population control wouldn't have been accepted in the countryside, and if imposed, it would have triggered severe discontent. In the debates with scientists, Liang's authority suffered from his lack of formal education and of mathematical competences, moreover his Marxist philosophy and Maoist fervor didn't fit in Deng's modern and scientific vision of China.<sup>90</sup> Liang made of peasants the subject of his "two-child-plus-spacing" policy, later implemented in the areas of Yicheng, Chengde, Jiuquan and Ershi.

All the three proposals shared a common truth which was in clear contrast with the way population had been considered in the past: a large population is a problem, and not a resource. Differences in narratives and contents concerned *how* to control it.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125-168.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 150-152.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 173.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 208-209.

The adoption of the most radical of the three proposals was sustained by a powerful narrative synthesized in these points:

1. The speed of world population growth is a critical threat to the planet sustainability and will compromise the access to limited natural resources. The size and composition of China's population make of it the main responsible for the Planet survival.
2. Population growth is the main obstacle for the accomplishment of the Four Modernizations and for China to become a developed nation.
3. The population problem cannot but be solved urgently, with an immediate, drastic solution to be adopted for everybody. A universal one-child policy is the only possible way.
4. Social implications, cultural factors and individuals' desires are secondary and less relevant.

Later on, these ideas remained solid in the rhetoric used by the CCP regarding China's family-planning. For example, a very famous official assumption states that the one-child policy has prevented 400 million births, more than USA and Canada's population combined.<sup>91</sup> On October 2011, the People's Daily states:

Since China introduced the family planning policy over 30 years ago, the policy has prevented 400 million births, and delayed the 'day of seven billion' of five years.<sup>92</sup>

In September 2014, a report of *The Economist* ranked China's one-child policy fourth in the global efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions: according to it, the policy contributed to a reduction of 1.3 million tons of carbon emission in China as of 2005.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Penny STARR, "400 Millions Lives 'Prevented' Through One-Child Policy, Chinese Official Says", CNSNews.com, 10/10/2014, [online] URL <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/penny-starr/400-million-lives-prevented-through-one-child-policy-chinese-official-says>. Accessed on 05/10/2019.

<sup>92</sup> People's Daily, "400 Million Births Prevented by One-Child Policy", *People's Daily*, 28/10/2011, [online] URL <http://en.people.cn/90882/7629166.html>. Accessed on 05/10/2019.

<sup>93</sup> The Economist, "The deepest cuts. Our guide to the actions that have done the most to slow global warming", *The Economist*, 20/09/2014, p. 21-23, [online] URL <https://www.humphreyfellowship.org/system/files/The%20Deepest%20Cuts.pdf>. Accessed on 05/10/2019.

### 3.2.2 Was the One-child Policy Necessary? Two Narratives Compared

When the debate over policy relaxation started at the beginning of the XXI century, the recurring themes discussed by scientists, officials, economists and all the relevant actors cited above were mainly population aging, a drastic decline in the working force, the distorted sex-ratio and, marginally, the 4-2-1 phenomenon and implications in the family equilibrium. The exponential growth of the elderly population severely mines at a pension system not fully developed and limited access to welfare for retirees; the decline in the working population is tightly connected with the sustainment of the elderly and represents a threat to the vitality of the Chinese economy; the distorted sex-ratio is not only a matter of “missing girls”, but it is especially a problem of social stability as there is fear that a large portion of men unable to find a spouse will cause discontent and social turmoil. The debate’s bone of contention was not whether end or not the one-child policy, but rather, concerned the *how* and the *when*. Since the first reform proposal in 2004, the advocacy group urged for a decisive action and a relaxation of the one-child policy to a two-child-per-couple policy. On the contrary, officials of the NPFPC were skeptical about the consequences of such a reform, and opted for a more gradual openness to two children, which definitively occurred just in 2015, fifteen years later the first instances of the Advocacy Group.

In the debate, the risks imposed by the policy mainly concerned China’s economic growth and financial uncertainty, due to the deep interconnection between population and economy. The neo-Malthusian narrative that triggered the tightening of population control in 1980 was based on the relationship population-resources and warned for environmental degradation. In the recent debate, the impact of population on environmental sustainability was more marginal. Indeed, China’s ecologic disaster of air, land and water to chase economic development weakened the validity of population control as a necessary measure to preserve natural resources from erosion.

The main narrative of the contemporary debate is thus more traceable to the Liu Zheng and the Marxian statisticians’ narrative, free of the ideological component. The focus is, once again, to find the right balance between population size and structure with

China's economy and society, in order to not to fall in a 'low fertility trap'.<sup>94</sup> Within the general narrative focused on the future scenarios of the Chinese population in terms of its relationship with the country's wealth and social stability, the two factions' object of debate was *when* and on *what extent* start a policy relaxation.

Facing the over-mentioned problems, scholars from the Advocacy Group, led by the demographers Gu Baochang, Wang Feng and Cai Yong expressed severe preoccupation and proposed to immediately relax the policy to allow two children for every couple, hoping for an increase in the TFR. According to the scholars, the reform couldn't cause a baby-boom because the desire of childbearing was already low among Chinese women who, for many different reasons were more willing to bear just one child or even not have any.<sup>95</sup>

On the other hand, officials of the NPFPC, eminent demographers with close ties with the establishment and top leaders didn't allow the relaxation of the policy because they feared a new baby-boom.<sup>96</sup> Beside the preoccupation for demographic consequences, the persistence of the government on keeping the one child restriction for so long had also political reasons: the status of the policy, its centrality and permanence for more than 30 years had been an hallmark of the CCP leading China out of backwardness. To declare that a strict family planning was no more necessary, or was maybe even harmful for China's development, is a position that needed long time to be acceptable, without the government "loosing its face" at the expense of a huge human suffering.

### **3.2.3 Two Narratives in Comparison: Different Looks on the Past Shape the Future of the Chinese Family Planning**

In the argumentation over issue framing, i.e. the public narratives carried on by different actors, a comparison of two official documents drafted from the interested

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<sup>94</sup> The 'low fertility trap' is a vicious circle of low fertility which is nearly impossible to alter. It goes as follows: lower fertility causes faster population aging and thus reductions in the welfare state, less job creation pessimism for the future; at the same time, aspirations for personal consumption are still on the rise. Combined together, these conditions will result in even lower fertility. Wolfgang LUTZ, Vedard SKIRBEKK, "Policies Addressing the Tempo Effect in Low-Fertility Countries", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2005, p. 702.

<sup>95</sup> ZHENG Zhenzhen, CAI Yong, WANG Feng, GU Baochang, "Below-Replacement Fertility and Childbearing intention in Jiangsu province, China", *Asian Population Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2009, p. 329-347.

<sup>96</sup> ZHAI, ZHANG, JIN, "Demographic Consequences of an Immediate Transition to a Universal Two-child Policy", op. cit.

parties can effectively outline similarities and differences among contending actors. The selected publications are respectively a report (报告 *baogao*) and a suggestion (建议 *jianyi*).

The “Report of the Research on the National Population Development Strategy”<sup>97</sup> (国家人口发展战略研究报告 *guojia renkou fazhan zhanlüe yanjiu baogao*), hereafter the Report, was drafted by the National Population Development Strategic Research Group. The scientists Song Jian, Jiang Zhenghua and Xu Kuangdi are the authors and acted as the main opponents to the Advocacy Group. The Report was published in January 2007, on the scientific magazine *Population Research* and consists in ten pages dense of graphs and schematic projections.

“Another Suggestion on Adjusting China’s Birth Policy”<sup>98</sup> (关于调整我国生育政策的再建议 *guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyu zhengce de zaijianyi*), hereafter the Suggestion, is the second policy proposal of the Advocacy Group, presented in January 2009 to the NPFPC and, through media exposure, to the public opinion. The nine-page proposal is signed by 26 scholars, researchers and local officials and is followed by extensive supportive materials, comprehending appendices on the analysis in Jiangsu and in the areas of the Experiment of eight million people.

Some similarities between the two documents make a valid comparison possible:

- Time frame: The two documents were published at close distance: the Report is from 2007 and the Suggestion is from 2009, thus they can be inscribed in the second phase of the debate, the one of amplification.
- Structure of the text: The two documents are quite balanced in length (around ten pages), number of paragraphs and topics discussed. The main themes that raged in the debate over population, such as the aging problem, the imbalances in the sex ratio and the changes in China’s population are touched by the authors.
- Signatories: both the documents are signed by several experts and they are the result of a teamwork rather than the work of a single scientist; both the groups were born in a similar period and were committed to propose a solution to similar issues in the same historical context.

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<sup>97</sup> SONG, XU, JIANG, “Guojia renkou fazhan zhanlüe yanjiu baogao”, op. cit.

<sup>98</sup> *Guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyu zhengce de zaijianyi*, op. cit.

- Receiver: Both the works have an official nature and they are targeted to a public of politicians and top officials, and not to the academic world.
- Coverage: Beside their circulation internally in the political hierarchy, both the works circulated also in the public sphere, published on magazines and reported on the media.

Differences concern the content and the style of the analysis: numbers and data should be aligned but the narration of them create two different stories and generates two different proposals for the future of family planning. Differences can be synthesized in four main points: evaluation of the past of birth planning; sensitive data; vision of the future; rhetoric.

### Evaluation of the Past of Birth Planning

The Report is opened by the sentence:

中国是世界第一人口大国。人口问题始终是制约我国全面协调可持续发展的重大问题,是影响经济社会发展的全局性、长期性和根本性的重大问题。

*[China is the most populous country in the world. Population has always been the key problem for China's sustainable development and it's a major, long-term and fundamental issue that affects social and economic development.]*<sup>99</sup>

Maintaining a traditional Malthusian narrative, the authors extensively praise and applaud the family-planning work. In the first paragraph, the accomplishments of the one-child policy are corroborated by data with a highly ideological connotation: the policy is said to have prevented 400 million births, *[dismantling the detonator of the population bomb]*<sup>100</sup> (拆除了 ‘人口爆炸’ 的引信 *chaichule ‘renkou baozha’ de yinxin*), delaying of four years the world population to reach 6 billion people and reducing the impact of population on environmental resources. The one-child policy has also improved people’s quality (人口素质 *renkou suzhi*) in terms of education, wealth and gender equality; it allowed 40 years of demographic dividend, boosting China’s economic development and finally constituted a valuable example for other developing countries in controlling population, giving an important contribution on the

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<sup>99</sup> SONG, XU, JIANG, “Guojia renkou fazhan zhanlüe yanjiu baogao”, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 2.

global level (是为世界人口与发展做出了重要贡献 *shi wei shijie renkou yu fazhan zuochule zhongyao gongxian*).<sup>101</sup>

The Suggestion reflects a more cautious point of view on the policy: first of all, the context in which the policy was adopted is radically changed and the reasons for its strict implementation, i.e. economic backwardness and pressure on environmental resources, are not anymore valid for a further execution of the policy. If economically China drastically increased its capacity, environmental problems that persist are not attributable to population, but rather to long-term extensive economy, technological conditions and style of consumerism.<sup>102</sup>

In the second place, the authors list the problems arisen from the one-child policy, starting from its costs on the state's resources (不能不看到它主要是通过强有力的行政措施, 付出了很大的政治代价与管理成本而取得的 *bu neng bu kandao ta zhuyao shi tongguo qiangyuli de xingzheng cuoshi, fuchule hen da de zhengzhi daijia yu guanli chengben er qudede*)<sup>103</sup>. Therefore, they outline the demographic shortcomings caused by the policy: low fertility level (1.33), aging population, reduction in the total population size, increase of the average age, shrink of working population. They then stress on its social-economic consequences and human cost: the percentage of only children is increasing and exacerbates the 4-2-1 family structure, the country's industry will lose competitiveness in the long term and 30 years of implementation of the one-child policy imposed a human cost to millions of families for the achievement of national interests (三十多年的独生子女政策使千千万万的家庭为了国家的振兴、经济的发展付出了代价 *sanshi duo nian de dushengzini zhengce shi qianqianwanwan de jiating weile guojia de zhenxing, jingji de fazhan fuchule daijia*)<sup>104</sup>. Dramatic episodes, such as the Great Wenchuan Earthquake (Sichuan), manifested the state of risk that single-child families suffer; to give a broader choice to families by allowing them to two children could alleviate the risks of losing the only child.<sup>105</sup> The human suffering is not mentioned by the Report.

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>102</sup> *Guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyu zhengce de zaijianyi*, op. cit., p. 1-2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem.*

Finally, the Suggestion underlines a direct connection between the so-called “1.5 policy” (一孩半政策 *yihaiiban zhengce*) and the unbalanced sex ratio (一孩半政策 [...] 导致我的出生人口性别比持续大范围地偏高 *yihaiiban zhengce [...] dao zhi woguo de chusheng renkou xingbiebi chixu da fanwei de piangao*)<sup>106</sup>, while the Report essentially point at traditional beliefs as the main cause of sex selection, and suggest a stronger propaganda on gender equality, without including the policy as a cause of the problem.<sup>107</sup>

### Sensitive Data

While the Suggestion is a mainly discursive work and calculations are presented in an appendix, the Report rich in graphs and data over the course of narration. One of the numbers reported is the TFR, a crucial indicator in the demographic discourse. Curiously, in the two documents the TFRs are different, showing a discrepancy on a particularly sensitive data in population control.

The TFR is the average number of children per woman in a certain period of time. It is calculated by totaling the age-specific fertility rates for every fertile age (women aged 15 - 49). Age specific fertility rate measures the annual number of births to women of a specified age per 1000 women in that age group. It is computed as a ratio, where the numerator is the number of live births to women in a given age group during a period of time, and the denominator is the number of women in that given age group during the same period of time. Data are collected from three sources: censuses, sample surveys and civil registration systems, deemed the best source of information on age-specific fertility rates.<sup>108</sup>

In studies on population growth, the TFR is the most important factor to place a country in a “fertility category” and to compare its fertility with other countries. Generally speaking, a high fertility country has a TFR above the replacement level of 2.1 and its population is expected to grow; on the other hand, a low fertility country has

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> SONG, XU, JIANG, “Guojia renkou fazhan zhanlüe yanjiu baogao”, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>108</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *Age specific fertility rate*, “un.org”, [online] URL <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/dataset/fertility/age-fertility.asp> Accessed on 15/01/2020.

a TFR below replacement level and its population is expected to decrease.<sup>109</sup> Among low fertility countries, the 1.5 TFR is set as a dividing line: above 1.5, fertility is moderately below replacement level and population is considered in a “safety zone”; under 1.5, fertility is very low and action should be taken by governments to reverse the trend.<sup>110</sup>

The Report estimates a TFR for China of 1.8, while the Suggestion’s figure is of 1.33. This number has implications on the whole content of the dissertations because, according to the Report, China is in a condition of moderately low fertility that should be kept stable (要求把总和生育率继续定为 1.8 左右 *yaoqiu ba zonghe shengyulü jixu dingwei 1.8 zuoyou*)<sup>111</sup>, while, according to the Suggestion, China is in a situation of critic very low fertility that should be reversed.

What’s the reason of such a divergence?

As the TFR results from demographic data, there must be a discrepancy among the figures used by the two groups. In the paper “Below-Replacement fertility and childbearing intention in Jiangsu province, China” (2009), the authors Zheng Zhengzhen, Cai Yong, Wang Feng and Gu Baochang (Advocacy Group) state that:

On the one hand, the government emphasizes the great success of its birth-planning policy [...]. On the other hand, it does not trust its own statistics, which consistently indicate that the country’s TFR is far below replacement.<sup>112</sup>

The official position that China’s national fertility rate is ‘around 1.8’ is sustained also in the *White Paper on Population in China*<sup>113</sup> but, according to the demographers, is an outdated figure that refers to the early 1990s, broadly rejected by scholars. In the Suggestion is stated that in 1997 the TFR was already under 1.5 and in 2005 was around 1.33, according to a sampling survey on 1% of total population.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Natalie SMOAK, “Fertility Rate”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 12/05/2016, [online] URL <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fertility-rate>. Accessed on 15/01/2020.

<sup>110</sup> Peter MCDONALD, “Low Fertility and the State: The Efficacy of Policy”, *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2006, p. 485–510.

<sup>111</sup> SONG, XU, JIANG, “Guojia renkou fazhan zhanlüe yanjiu baogao”, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>112</sup> ZHENG, CAI, WANG, GU, “Below-Replacement Fertility and Childbearing intention in Jiangsu province, China”, op. cit., p. 330.

<sup>113</sup> State Council of China, *White Paper on Population in China*, 2001, [online] URL <https://www.cpirc.org.cn/en/whitepaper.htm>. Accessed on 15/01/2020.

<sup>114</sup> *Guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyu zhengce de zaijianyi*, op. cit., p. 2.

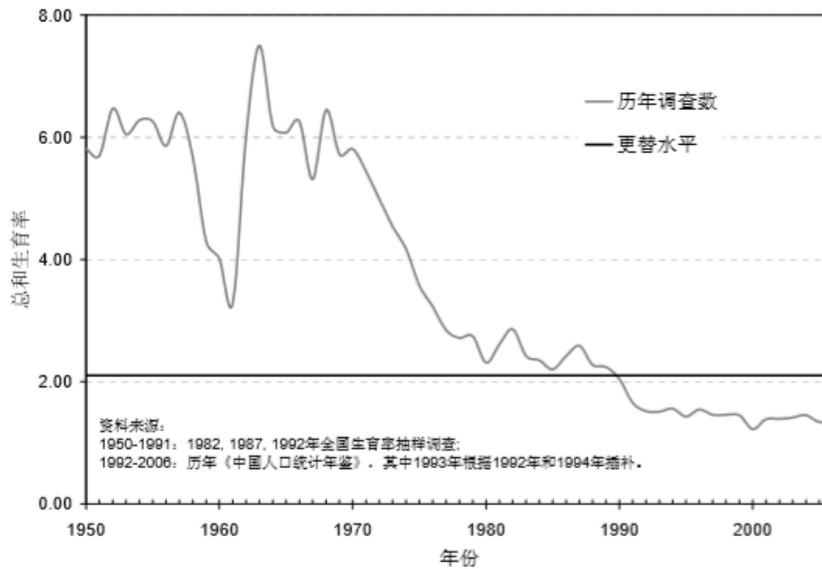


图 1. 1950-2006 年全国总和生育率变化趋势

Figure 12: China's TFR from 1950 till 2006. Appendix of *Guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyu zhengce de zaijianyi* 关于调整我国生育政策的再建议 (Another suggestion on Adjusting China's Birth Policy), Beijing, 2009, p. 12, [online] URL <http://china.caixin.com/upload/2009jianyishu/2009jianyishu.pdf>. Accessed on 04/05/2019.

The UN Population shows a different number as well: the TFR in 2005 is set at 1.612<sup>115</sup>. Going through many sources that mentioned this representative number, TFR fluctuates from 1.22 to 1.8.<sup>116</sup> The figure varies because, since the early 1990s, when TFR went below replacement level, there was a widespread conviction among officials that births were underreported and that the number should had been rounded up. If it is difficult to define a precise TFR, due to oversight during the registration process, it is important to highlight that two groups of scientists relied on a critical data that, in function of the proposal it sustained, did not match.

### Vision of the Future

Two very much discordant visions of the past and of the role of the one-child policy, together with a discrepancy in the most significant variable to look at population

<sup>115</sup> Fertility Rate, total (births per woman) – China, “The World Bank”, [online] URL <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=CN>. Accessed on 15/07/2019.

<sup>116</sup> WANG Feng, “Can China Afford to Continue Its One-Child Policy?”, *Asia Pacific Issues*, N.77, 2005, p. 7. Also, GU, WANG, GUO, ZHANG, “China’s Local and National Fertility Policies at the End of the Twentieth Century”, op. cit., p.144-145. Also, ZENG Yi, “Options for Fertility Policy Transition in China”, *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2007, p. 218. Also, WANG Feng, “The Future of a Demographic Overachiever: Long-Term Implications of the Demographic Transition in China”, *Population and Development Review*, No.37, 2011, p. 176.

growth (TFR), couldn't but generate two distinct visions of the future for China's population policy.

Both the papers end up with some suggestions to the government: five given by the Suggestion and six by the Report. Due to the informative nature of the two documents, both addressed to the government for a renovation in population management, this part could be considered the core message of the two factions. What is the future of population for the Advocacy Group? It is a complex and problematic future, where China, by the end of the century, will have to cope with one quarter of population aged over 65, an average age of 45, a shrink in working force starting from year 2030, and a progressive aging of this same working force.<sup>117</sup> The best response to this situation, according to the Advocacy Group, consists in five points:<sup>118</sup>

1. To strengthen research on low fertility and further scientific development.
2. To gradually loosen birth planning in urban areas with consolidated low fertility and gain experience in adjusting the policy.
3. To consider extending policy relaxation also in less developed areas according to their specific condition.
4. To improve statistical methods and work for population data.
5. To expand research in areas that have had two-child policy for years and learn from their experience of 'opening to two, avoiding many, realize a reasonable, supportive and well managed family planning'. (放开二孩、防止多孩，实现 ‘把计划生育政策建立在合情合理、群众拥护、干部好做工作’ *fangkai erhai, fangzhi duohai, shixian 'ba jihua shengyu zhengce jianli zai heqingheli, qunzhong yonghu, ganbu haozuo gongzuo*).<sup>119</sup>

These points not only are necessary but are also sustainable, because the main cause of China's low fertility are socio-economic transformations and not the policy limitations. A leverage of the policy, thus, would not result in uncontrolled population growth.

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<sup>117</sup> *Guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyu zhengce de zaijianyi*, op. cit., p. 5-7.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 8-9.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 9.

The six pieces of advice of strategic measures and policies (战略措施和政策建议 *zhanlüe cuoshi he zhengce jianyi*) exposed by the National Population Development Strategic Research Group are much more redundant but suggest no real changes. In particular, they don't mention the possibility of a two-child policy. The *jianyi* are the following:<sup>120</sup>

1. To keep stable the low fertility level reached in 30 years with innovative methods.
2. Increase population's quality, health, education and develop human resources.
3. To solve the problems of population structure by improving the social security system and services for the elderly and deepening "Care for girls initiatives" (关爱女孩行动 *guanai nühai xingdong*) to effectively stop rising sex ratio at birth.
4. To plan at the district level a coordinated development for a rational distribution of migrant population.
5. To strengthen international exchange and cooperation in the field of population development.
6. To strengthen the system and sustain the people in charge of population development.

Basically, the status quo should remain unaltered in its rules and just implementation should improve to better fit in a transformed society. This proposal is coherent with the tone of the Report, according to which birth planning has played a crucial role in improving the Nation's economy and people's lives, the low level of population growth is not worrying, and the working population is still very big. On the other hand, to phase out the policy poses the risk of a baby-boom because in less developed areas, like the countryside and the western regions, the desire for childbearing is high and the family planning work is particularly hard.<sup>121</sup>

#### Rhetoric

Both texts include standard formulas peculiar to the political discourse, empty in meaning most of the time, but full of ideological references that are part of the

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<sup>120</sup> SONG, XU, JIANG, "Guojia renkou fazhan zhanlüe yanjiu baogao", op. cit., p. 8-10.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 5.

mainstream CCP's rhetoric. Just like the choice of data, the use of these formulas is not random, but reflects the different point of view of the two groups, who reinforce their argumentations also through selected political slogans.

At first glance, it is possible to notice that the overall style of the works is different: the Suggestion is synthetic and clear, since the first sentence the reader can understand the final message of the paper, the few data reported are part of the argumentation and are easily understandable and many clear examples help the reader in accessing the thesis of the authors.

On the contrary, the Report is longer and denser, divided in many paragraphs, interrupted by seven graphs and filled up with numbers that literally stand out looking through the pages. Despite the concentrated narration, contents are few and repeated many times with well-structured and complex periphrasis. The argumentation is not sustained by examples, but by mathematic tools that are not easily accessible by outsiders in population studies.

In the Suggestion, the recurring ideological concepts are “to put the men at the center” (以人为本 *yirenweiben*)<sup>122</sup>, to promote a “scientific concept of development” (科学发展观 *kexue fazhanguan*)<sup>123</sup> and to build an “harmonious society” (和谐社会 *hexie shehui*)<sup>124</sup>. These are core slogans of the Hu-Wen administration, i.e. the current administration when the Suggestion was drafted. They recur in the document, to highlight the importance of a humanistic approach to population and to show how relaxing the policy would be coherent with the political discourse. Once again, a scientific proposal over population control is basing its legitimation also on CCP's ideology, especially in its more humanistic externalization.

The Report leaves space to a much richer ideological apparatus: since the second paragraph, “Strategic Thinking” (战略思路 *zhanlüe sixiang*), a comprehensive ideological base is explained.<sup>125</sup> The proposal is guided by the theory of Deng Xiaoping; the “Three Represents” (Jiang Zemin); the “Scientific Concept of Development” (Hu Jintao); the construction of Socialism and of a harmonious society; the idea of “men at

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<sup>122</sup> *Guanyu tiao zheng woguo shengyu zhengce de zaijianyi*, op. cit., p. 4; 8; 29.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 2; 4; 8.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 2; 8; 29.

<sup>125</sup> SONG, XU, JIANG, “Guojia renkou fazhan zhanlüe yanjiu baogao”, op. cit., p. 1.

the center” (Hu Jintao); and institutional innovation. The same formulas are repeated at the end of the paragraph as the base of the great results of family planning.<sup>126</sup>

In respect to new population problems, China should persist with the Marxian theory of population combined with Chinese reality and adapted to the needs of a Socialist market economy, according to “Chinese characteristics”, under the guide of the Party-state. The second section of paragraph 4 is entirely dedicated to the three generations of leaders of the CCP that established a “population ideology with Chinese characteristics” (形成了中国特色的人口思想体系 *xingcheng le zhongguotese de renkou sixiang tixi*). It goes through Comrades Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, extensively listing their vision of population.<sup>127</sup> The standardized sentences are quoted several times in the text and, differently from the Suggestion, they range from Mao’s era to the present days, including all the narratives on population in the history of the CCP.

### 3.2.4 Articulation and Amplification

In 2009, the Advocacy Group presented a new proposal for a two-child policy to the government. In 2009, the Advocacy Group presented a new proposal for a two-child policy to the government. At the same time, it disclosed the proposal to the media and involved new actors in the debate to create broader awareness.<sup>128</sup> The issue framing they stood for weakened the role of the policy in lowering fertility and identified social and economic transformations as the main drivers for smaller families.

Before amplifying their ideas, how did scholars of the Advocacy Group articulate them and how did they do it differently?

By articulating how an issue is described, entrepreneurs link together and assemble events in order to establish a natural and persuasive narrative, offering a fresh, alternative perspective on the issue in question.<sup>129</sup>

The overmentioned Suggestion is a valid evidence of how demographers of the Advocacy Group explained in a convincing way their hypothesis. The tool they

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 2.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 6.

<sup>128</sup> This thesis, ch. 3, par. 3.1.4.

<sup>129</sup> MERTHA, “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0...”, *op. cit.*, p. 998.

employed was particularly powerful, because scientifically valid and rhetorically convincing. This tool consists in referring to examples, proofs in support of their ideas.

In the Suggestion, three examples sustaining the feasibility of a two-child policy are narrated. The first is the ‘Experiment of Eight Million People’; since the formation of the Advocacy Group, demographers gathered on-site data in the areas of Jiuquan, Chengde, Yicheng and Enshi, to study demographic trends and social implications of the two-child policy, in place since 1985. They found out that the results of the ‘late marriage and late births plus spacing’ policy were positive in all the four localities: population increased gradually and under control, the number of one-child families rose, sex ratio at birth was within regular parameters, family planning cadres and citizens enjoyed better relationships and younger generations showed a low fertility desire.<sup>130</sup>

These results constitute a proof of how China’s population would have evolved without a strict population policy, they demonstrate that “to allow two-children per couple does not imply that population will be out of control” (允许一对夫妇生育两个孩子事实上并没有造成人口的失控 *yunxu yidui fufu shengyu liang ge haizi shishishang bing meiyou zaocheng renkou de shikong*)<sup>131</sup>.

Another example quoted in the Suggestion comes from the two counties of Changyang and Wufeng, located in the poor and mountainous area of Yichang (Hubei); a two-child plus spacing policy had been implemented in these areas for some years and a rebound in fertility did not occur.

长阳、五峰的实践表明，即使在经济欠发达地区，只要继续认真做好计划生育工作，实行宽松的生育政策也可以实现低生育水平的稳定。

*[The examples of Changyang and Wufeng clearly show that, even in scarcely developed areas, by carrying on birth planning conscientiously, also a more relaxed policy can ensure stable low fertility levels.]*<sup>132</sup>

The third example is quite the opposite: it describes the situation of the economically prosperous Jiangsu province. Having confuted the probability of a baby

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<sup>130</sup> RILEY, *The Experiment of Eight Million People*, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>131</sup> *Guanyu tiaozheng woguo shengyu zhengce de zaijianyi*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 6.

boom in disadvantaged localities, demographers proved that, also in wealthy areas, fertility would have remained low, despite policy lifting.

Jiangsu's population had been governed under extremely tight conditions: together with Sichuan province, it was the only place where the one-child policy was enforced also in the countryside, without the 1.5 exception. Due to this restriction, implemented for more than 20 years, only children accounted for a large proportion, up to 90% in some areas.<sup>133</sup> When demographers conducted the survey in Jiangsu, a reform to the policy was in place. Couples with agricultural household, where at least one partner was an only child had the permission to have two children, while couples with a non-agricultural household could apply for a second child only if both partners were only children.<sup>134</sup>

Demographers focused on the consistent group of beneficiaries of this reform and carried on surveys and interviews in six selected counties. Aim of the study was to investigate

The role of individual choice versus government policy in affecting reproductive intention and behavior in China.<sup>135</sup>

The results of the investigation were of an ideal TFR of 1.46 and an intended TFR of 1.31<sup>136</sup>; during the interviews, at the question of why one instead of two children, most of the respondents (73.9%) answered that "one child is enough"<sup>137</sup>. These data demonstrate that new fertility norms influence families in their reproductive choices more than governmental restrictions. Moreover, Jiangsu's fertility culture is a product of economic development and spectacular social changes happened in the region.

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<sup>133</sup> ZHENG, YONG, WANG., GU, "Below Replacement Fertility and Childbearing Intention in Jiangsu Province", op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 344.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem.* p. 344-345.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem.* p. 340, Table 3.



Figure 13: Advocacy Group members (above from left) Zhang Erli, Xie Zhengming, Guo Zhigang, Wang Feng, and Gu Baochang in Jiangsu province. Mara HVISTENDAHL, "Has China Outdrawn The One Child Policy?", *Science*, Vol.329, Issue 5998, 17/09/2010, p. 1461.

If compared with the debate of the Chengdu Conference, in 1979, the contemporary debate is innovative because articulated through concrete and scientific examples. Demographers of the Advocacy Group studied and valorized these cases, exploiting the fragmentation of the birth planning legal provisions and administrative practice. In opposition with the Cybernetics' approach of the past, the Advocacy Group integrated statistical data and mathematical projections with China's local experiences. Through investigations at the individual level with interviews, demographers articulated an ex-post analysis of China's 30 year-long family-planning and built on surveys' results to suggest future steps in population management.

The proposal of a one-child-for-all policy, by Song Jian, was framed with a drastic narrative: a Malthusian crisis of overpopulation fixable with the tools of Western science and technology. Song's articulation consisted in mathematizing population and displaying its numbers on graphs, tables and schemas.<sup>138</sup>

After 30 years, the Advocacy Group revived the population debate, with a different issue framing and an innovative way of articulating it. Scholars approached China's population in a humanistic way and with a local-oriented focus. Real examples proved to be not only demographically reliable, but also significant, easy to comprehend and of great experimental value in understanding future trends of China's population.

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<sup>138</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one Child*, op. cit., p. 125-168.

## CONCLUSIONS

《人太多了! 》 *Ren tai duole!*

This sentence is common sense in China, it means ‘Too many people!’ and can be heard on the metro at rush hour, when stuck in traffic, in line for a touristic attraction, or when buying plane tickets for Chinese New Year. It is used so often that has become a standard formula to complain in particularly crowded situations. The assertion that ‘Chinese are too many’ has been rooted in China and spread also outside the country. Indeed, different waves of Chinese migration and a public opinion’s emphasis on the gargantuan size of China’s population, have made of this expression a dogmatic truth worldwide. The fact that ‘too many people’ constituted a problem, and not a resource, has not such a long tradition in China: launched by Malthus in 1798 and ‘detonated’ in the USA in 1960s, the *Population Bomb* exploding in the third world countries touched China only at the end of 1970s, when scientists made of population the main source of the country’s deficiencies. The problematization of population not only legitimizes, but also requires the state to take action to fix the disproportion.

Population problematizations such as these are powerful things because they do not simply reflect a reality that exists in nature; instead, they may actively constitute a new reality by shaping *what is thinkable* in the domain of population. A fresh and compelling problematization can radically reorient thinking about the nature and the scope of a social problem, making people see the matter in completely new ways. If it gets embedded in the public policy and bureaucratically enacted, a powerful problematization can remake the world we live in.<sup>139</sup>

A controversial and drastic measure, like the one-child policy, needed a powerful problematization: its extremist nature was a necessary condition to overcome an urgent and massive problem. This rhetoric has been lasting for many years, mathematically justified by scientists, forcefully implemented by politicians and dramatically stated by means of propaganda.

Greenhalgh (2008) emphasizes that it’s much more difficult to plant the seeds of doubt in a well-articulated idea, rather than to question data and numbers. The recent debate analyzed in this thesis reconfirms this assertion. Till today, scholars have had

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<sup>139</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p. 10.

divergences on what is, at least in the eyes of non-experts, the most representative and easily understandable figure of population growth, the total fertility rate (TFR). From this research emerged that China's TFR could fluctuate from a scientific paper to another, in a range that goes from 1.8 (moderately low fertility) to 1.3 (alarmingly low fertility).<sup>140</sup> Such a mismatch of numbers is indicative in the discourse of scientific policymaking: it implies that data are presented, schematized, contextualized and even modified according to the problematization they are sustaining. A practical example of this *modus operandi* in the population discourse was presented in Chapter 3, with the comparison of two official proposals addressed to the Chinese government in 2007 and 2009, by two contending groups in the population debate. Despite the authors of the two proposals wrote in the same historical context and could presumably access similar data sources, the outcomes were very different. This comparison was useful to epitomize what Greenhalgh (2008) sustained: the point is not what is true or what it isn't, but what results more credible and what it doesn't.<sup>141</sup>

In 2012, the successful businessman, co-founder of the travel platform "Ctrip" James Liang published a book with the demographer Li Jianxin (2012) entitled: *Zhongguoren tai duole ma? 中国人太多了吗? (Too many people in China?)*,<sup>142</sup> This title requires a special attention for the witty and clever way it literally 'questions' the notorious, over-used sentence that opens this section. A question mark, and not a negative form that openly confutes, could exemplify the core message of a group of scholars advocating for policy relaxation from 2000 to 2015.

How Could a Debate Be Possible, Given the Sensitivity of the Topic and the Status of Basic-state Policy (基本国策 *jibenguoce*) of Family Planning?

In 2014, during an interview, James Liang replied to a similar question. His answer explains the conjunctural situation of the population debate:

This is a sensitive subject till even two years ago, so this book actually is the first to directly criticize the one-child policy, but even two years ago this book has to be revised in many ways, to avoid some sensitive issues. But in the last two years, I think that the public

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<sup>140</sup> This thesis, ch. 3, par. 3.2.3.

<sup>141</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p.

<sup>142</sup> LIANG, LI, *Zhongguoren tai duo le ma?*, op. cit.

opinion has changed quite a bit and this is right now not a sensitive subject anymore. At least if you don't do it from a very vocal human rights point of view.<sup>143</sup>

Despite the area of debate is quite opened, boundaries are set to limit the space of discussion and the human rights discourse remains outside these limits. Like in the well-known case of the 'bare-foot' lawyer Chen Guangcheng, activists' voice has been often repressed. Despite Chen's grievance was completely legitimate – indeed coercion and any form of harassment have always been condemned by the government – his petition was rejected. This thesis argues that the angle he looked at the problem and the straightforward modality he used to speak out were inadmissible in the debate. To better understand what were the conditions that opened the debate to some actors, the whole structure of the one-child policy, especially in its bureaucratic apparatus, has been considered.

From the legislative point of view, it emerged that the commonly used definition of 'one-child policy' is not appropriate. Indeed, the term is just an empty label for a wide set of prescriptions imposed from the center to localities and characterized by a high degree of variety. Instead of a fixed entity, the policy should be considered as a gradual process in time with a multifaceted execution in space. While the government has always retained an ideological approach in sign of continuity, family planning's concretization on the territory has been characterized by a high degree of fragmentation.

This thesis focused on the decentralized nature of family planning and contextualized it within the framework of Fragmented Authoritarianism (FA). Characterized by broad adaptability to various areas of Chinese policymaking, this theory has never been directly applied to the family-planning bureaucracy. Extensive literature has proved FA to be especially fitting when tangible resources are at stake, for example in the case of major investment projects, especially in the energy sector<sup>144</sup>. The flexibility of the theory though, has been explored by a consistent and authoritative literature as well: Lieberthal and Lampton<sup>145</sup> investigated the role of bargaining in bureaucracies lacking an explicit economic vocation. The authors concluded that

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<sup>143</sup> On the Level, "China's Two-Child Policy? - James Liang. OTL 14003", op. cit.

<sup>144</sup> LIEBERTHAL, OKSENBERG, *Policymaking in China...*, op. cit.

<sup>145</sup> LIEBERTHAL, LAMPTON, *Bureaucracy, Policy and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, op. cit.

To be sure, some bargaining characterizes the dynamics of every functional system, but the differences of degree suggested here are substantial and important. Bargaining behavior evidently requires at least that tangible resources be at stake and that substantive policies permit leeway in implementation. These conditions are not met in significant measure for much of China's bureaucratic behavior.<sup>146</sup>

Given that China's family planning policy doesn't generate resources, but rather absorbs them and allows a very limited margin of eluding implementation, it was particularly problematic to look at it under the lens of FA. Yet, recent evolutions of the theory adapted it to even more areas of policymaking<sup>147</sup>, including technical science as a matter of bargaining<sup>148</sup>, and reconfirmed its validity under Xi's regime. At the same time, updated research on family planning revealed that, in specific cases, its structure allowed a certain degree of autonomy from the state<sup>149</sup>. One fundamental externality of this fragmentation was the Experiment of Eight Million People (hereafter Experiment), implemented as a pilot project under the pressure of few top leaders who personally believed in it. The Experiment constituted an incredibly convincing argument in the following debate over the feasibility of a two-child policy. Its power was to concretely represent a "parallel China", where a selected number of people enjoyed a two-child policy, while in the rest of the country local officials implemented a stricter one. A new generation of scholars heralded the positive results of the Experiment in front of the NPFPC. They demonstrated that, if modified, the policy wouldn't have brought an out of control increase of population.

#### Who Are the Most Influential Voices in the Debate and How Are They Interconnected?

The political entrepreneurs of the debate were demographers, economists, businessmen, intellectuals, officials and, in part, activists. They mainly came from universities, research institutes or institutions. Despite numerous and from different backgrounds, they can be inscribed in the broad category of "scholars". Their status of experts allowed them to communicate with the establishment. The majority of them

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>147</sup> BRØDSGAARD (edited by), *Chinese politics as Fragmented Authoritarianism*, op. cit.

<sup>148</sup> Louise L. G. HANSEN, "Bargaining science: negotiating earthquakes", op. cit.

<sup>149</sup> MERLI, QIAN, SMITH, "Adaptation of a Political Bureaucracy to Economic and Institutional Change Under Socialism...", op. cit.

was connected to the so-called Advocacy Group<sup>150</sup> and they shared opinions through conferences, exchange of papers and during the drafting of policy proposals. In doing this, they acted within the system, in a constant dialogue with the political leadership and never openly against it. In promoting their ideas, they mobilized the media and the public opinion to amplify their issue framing, acting like ‘policy entrepreneurs’.<sup>151</sup>

### What New Narratives Have They Been Articulating and to What Extent Have They Challenged the State Narratives?

In several papers published by members of the Advocacy Group, bargaining is not simply over policy relaxation, but consists in an overall re-evaluation of the one-child policy. The core message is that the policy was a non-necessary imposition on the Chinese population. Evidently, scholars didn’t openly declare that the carefully constructed and vigorously propagandized problematization behind the one-child policy did not subsist. Rather, they used the neutral language of science to carry on their advocacy, arguing with data, interviews and surveys from the areas of the Experiment. The Advocacy Group reconsidered the impact of the policy on China’s low fertility and attributed a greater importance to economic and socio-cultural transformations, in shaping the family size. By demonstrating this, scholars undermined the whole being in place of the policy.

If China’s below-replacement fertility was mainly an outcome of China’s birth-control policy, as the argument goes, China’s below-replacement fertility would not be sustainable in the absence of its one-child policy. [...] Contrary to the earlier argument that the one-child policy is critical for maintaining low fertility, studies have pointed to other, and perhaps more important, forces that are keeping fertility low in China. [...] In sum, the structural, institutional and cultural changes that have brought about fertility decline to below-replacement levels in other countries are also prevalent in China.<sup>152</sup>

The ‘problematization on the problematization’ carried on by the scholars of the Advocacy Group constitutes a new issue framing on the past of China’s fertility policy and has inevitable consequences on the vision of population’s future. This scientific approach tough, was different from the one that Cybernetics had when they applied

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<sup>150</sup> This thesis, ch. 3, par. 3.1.1.

<sup>151</sup> MERTHA, “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0: Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process”, op. cit., p. 996-998.

<sup>152</sup> ZHENG, CAI, WANG., GU, “Below Replacement Fertility and Childbearing Intention in Jiangsu Province”, op. cit., p. 321.

control theory to population<sup>153</sup>, because it was connected with real Chinese experiences of alternatives to the mainstream policy. The use of examples deriving from pilot projects' observation was an important rhetorical innovation in the language of science, because easily comprehensible and rooted in a territory highly ignored by the makers of the strict one-child policy: the countryside.

### In Conclusion, What Was the Impact of the Advocacy Group Proposals on the Policy Outcome?

Aim of this research was not to demonstrate a direct connection between the last proposal, signed by 38 members of the Advocacy Group, and the effective reform, announced by Xi Jinping at the end of 2015. On the contrary, it outlines that, during 35 years of implementation, the policy has been extensively adapted by the government and, consequently, a universal two-child policy might have been already in CCP's plans. Nevertheless, the alignment of the third proposal (2015) with the government actual decision, the recent involvement of demographers of the Advocacy Group to governmental studies and the acceleration of policy reforms in Xi's government are facts of significant importance. If the role of the Advocacy Group is not directly conductible to the policy outcome, this research demonstrated that it was fundamental in broadening the debate over a hypersensitive policy, even though 'barriers to entry' are still there when addressing the human right violations in its implementation.

After the policy was relaxed, the assertions of social scientists have been corroborated by demographic outcomes that coincided with their hypothesis. Since 2015, not only a baby-boom didn't occur, but instead, fertility has been decreasing year after year, so much that in 2019 the number of births was the lowest since the foundation of the New China (1949) and the percentage of population over 65 has increased to 12,6%<sup>154</sup>.

At this point, the question mark after the sentence: "Too many people in China" is getting more and more questioning.

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<sup>153</sup> GREENHALGH, *Just one child*, op. cit., p.

<sup>154</sup> "China's birth rate sinks to lowest level on record, with just 14.65m newborns in 2019", *Bloomberg*, *The Straits Times*, 17/01/2020, [online] URL <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinas-birthrate-sank-to-lowest-level-on-record-last-year>. Accessed on 25/01/2020.

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