

## **Understanding the Transforming Biopolitics:**

### **Shifts and Continuation in the Official Discourse of Birth Planing in China, 1956-2003**

The birth planning project in China has been probably the world's most striking case of applied biopolitics, a field of politics concerning "the administration and optimization of the processes of life" (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005, p. 7). China's birth planning project deserves scholarly attention from a biopolitical perspective -- not only for its notable and profound intervention in the lives of the largest human population on earth, but also because it has evolved in tandem with China's gradual and momentous transition from socialism since the late 1970s. Hence, the transforming biopolitics embedded in the evolving birth planning project epitomizes and reflects the broader historical, political and sociocultural changes that have unfolded in contemporary China.

While most studies on China's birth planning project concentrate on the demographic changes and social ramifications brought about by the project (Bulte, Heerink and Zhang 2011; Fong 2002; Li, Yi, and Zhang 2011; Peng 1991; Scharping 2003), few researchers have examined the shifting political dynamics within or underlying the evolving population policy (White 1990; Winckler 2002; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). Among this small body of literature with a political perspective, Greenhalgh and Winckler's work (2005) creatively combines a regime capacity approach and a biopower perspective under the analytical framework of governmentalization. Based on analyses of the official documents, ethnography and intensive interviews with core officials, professionals and population scientists, Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005) skillfully chart the broad shifts in the governance of population from a spectrum of variants inherited from Leninist biopolitics to a mixed mode incorporating a neoliberal approach.

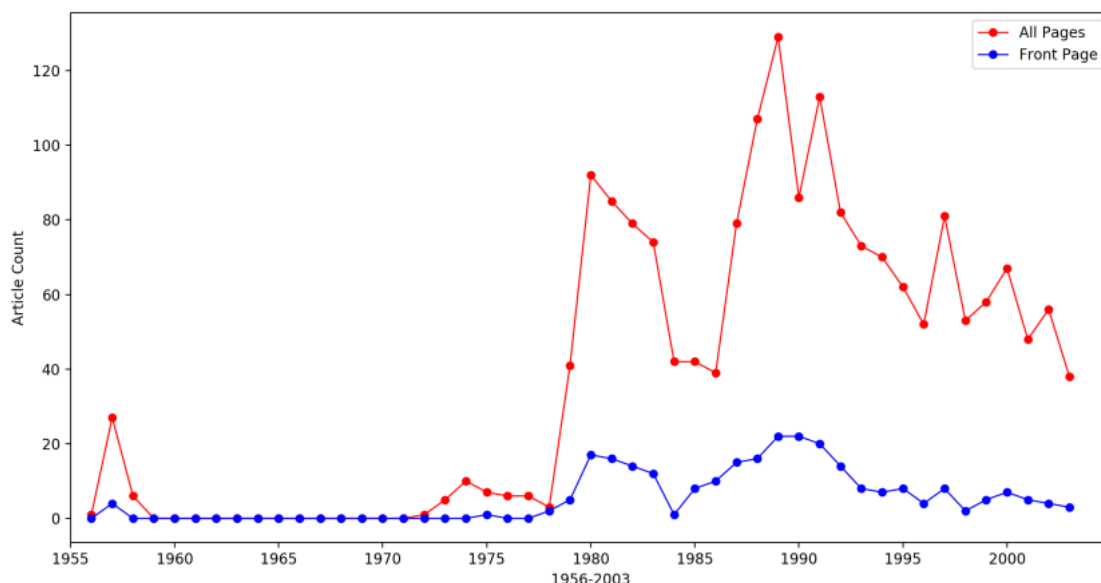
Inspired by Greenhalgh and Winckler’s work, I plan to empirically extend their effort with a specific focus on discourse, the distinctive emphasis of the Foucauldian approaches to modern power. I would document, chronicle, and analyze the shifting major discourses appropriated by the Chinese state to frame and rationalize its reproduction policy. In doing so, I seek to address the following questions: What is the nature and transformative agency of biopower governing reproduction and population in China? What broader historical, political and sociocultural dynamics have shaped this biopolitics?

To examine these questions, I would combine computational and qualitative in-depth text analyses of a corpus containing all articles on birth planning that were published in *People’s Daily (Renmin ribao)* during 1956-2003. As the mouthpiece of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), *People’s Daily* serves to transmit messages from state to society (Wu 1994). Bearing the function of “propaganda, organization, mobilization and control” (ibid., p.194), *People’s Daily* is an important analytical material for studying Chinese politics.

My interpretation of data is framed and founded on Foucault’s (1978) theory of biopower, biopolitics and discourse. Biopower operates via the regulation of the population. Biopolitics, accordingly, refers to the politics of governing vital human functions (e.g. fertility, genetic quality, etc.) “in the name of optimizing individual or collective life, health, and welfare” (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005, p. 27). Discourses are ways of constituting

	Article Count	Word Count
Front Page	260	95968
Other pages	1561	484488
Total	1821	580456

**Table 1: The Composition of the Corpus**



**Figure 1: Temporal Distribution of Articles in the Corpus, 1956-2003**

“historically specific bodies of knowledge that structure how things can be said” (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005, p. 27; see also Weedon 1997, p.105). Being politically productive, discourses not only reflect but also constitute politics and power itself.

Specifically, I plan to use supervised learning method (Grimmer and Stewart 2013) to classify articles into different categories of discursive framings. The discourse categories and their corresponding coding schemes are constructed on the basis of previous empirical findings and will be iteratively developed amid my qualitative interpretation of a randomly-selected training set. I will visualize the temporal trends of the discourses and select typical texts as cases for presenting in-depth qualitative interpretation to better illustrate each branch of discourse. Finally, I hope to discuss the possible mechanisms underlying the shift and continuation of the official discourse of the birth planning project identified in the computational analysis part.

## References

- Apter, David E., and Tony Saich. 1994. *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bulte, E., Heerink, N., and Zhang, X. 2011. "China's one-child policy and 'the mystery of missing women': Ethnic minorities and male-biased sex ratios." *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 73(1): 21-39.
- Chris Weedon. 1997. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fong, Vanessa L. 2002. "China's One-Child Policy and the Empowerment of Urban Daughters." *American Anthropologist*, 104(4): 1098-109.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *History of Sexuality. Vol. 1: An Introduction*. New York: Random House.
- Greenhalgh, Susan and Winckler, Edwin A.. 2005. *Governing China's population : from Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Grimmer, Justin and Stewart, Brandon M.. 2013. "Text as Data: The Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts." *Political Analysis*, 21 (3): 267--297
- Li, Hongbin, Yi, Junjian, and Zhang, Junsen. 2011. "Estimating the Effect of the One-Child Policy on the Sex Ratio Imbalance in China: Identification Based on the Difference-in-Differences." *Demography*, 48:1535–1557.
- Peng, Xizhe. 1991. *Demographic Transition in China: Fertility Trends Since the 1950s*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Scharping, Thomas. 2003. *Birth Control in China, 1949–2000: Population Policy and Demographic Development*. London: Curzon.
- White, Tyrene. 1990. "Post-revolutionary mobilization in China: The one-child policy reconsidered." *World Politics*, 43(1) : 53–76.
- Winckler, Edwin A. 2002. "Chinese reproductive policy at the turn of the millennium: Dynamic stability." *Population and Development Review*, 28(3): 379–418.
- Wu, Guoguang. 1994. "Command Communication: The Politics of Editorial Formulation in the People's Daily." *The China Quarterly*, 137: 194-211.