

Virtual Space for the Public
Social Media Discussions on the Chinese Two-child Policy

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THESIS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SNA	Semantic Network Analysis
RQ	Research Question
NHFPC	National Health and Family Planning Commission
CCP	Chinese Communist Party

SUMMARY

China's newly implemented two-child policy has profoundly affected every family in China as well as its population structure and economic development. It also created much heated discussion among Chinese citizens on social media. It is critical to understand China's reproduction policy making by exploring social media and the diverse opinions encouraged by this environment. The objective of this research is to explore how Chinese social media influences public discussion on the two-child policy by exploring various birth-control stakeholders' discourses online. With semantic network analysis, this study identifies various stakeholders, such as family members, gendered individuals and different social units, as well as interprets the stakeholders' complex relationships reflected in the discourses. The findings have three major indications: stakeholders' active discussions online challenge China's conventional policymaking process; tension revealed by the social media discourse indicates social diversification in China; social media has become an open space for public and private communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the world's most populous country, China's recent termination to its birth control policy has attracted much attention. Beginning in 2016, all married couples in China are now allowed to have a second child (Buckley, 2015), thus ending the strict family planning policy that had been in place for 35 years, which prohibited married couples from having more than one child (Goldman & Boehler, 2015). As a "relaxation of China's fertility control" (Qing, 2015), the two-child policy marked a change in China's "National Basic Policies" (Goldman & Boehler, 2015). Moreover, it profoundly affected every family in China as well as its population structure and economic development.

This policy change soon created much heated discussion among Chinese citizens on social media. While the media had played an indispensable role in the continuous promotion of the one-child policy implementation (Ye, 2014), which was called "bold," "arbitrary," and "radical" enforcement (Greenhalgh, 2005), social media has now brought to light diverse citizens' opinions in the public debate regarding the two-child policy, which may otherwise remain hidden in private conversations. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the effect of changing media landscapes and means of public communication on the cultural implications of the second-child policy. In this section, I will briefly discuss these aspects as well as the emergence of various participants in the two-child policy debate.

1.1 The Family Planning Policies

In the 1970s, Chinese leaders wanted to help the country recover from the economic destruction wrought by Mao. They believed the largest obstacle to economic development was China's rapidly growing population (Lee & Wang, 1999). Thus, the government established the one-child policy with a top-down strategy that was completely based on the

leadership's decisions (Greenhalgh, 2005). The implementation of this policy was widely criticized, mainly due to the government's blatant disregard of scientific evidence, the impracticality of enforcement and ignoring people's opinions during the policy's implementation process (Christopher, Murray, & Lopez, 1996; Jiang, Zhang & Shen, 2013). However, it is worth noting that the Chinese state-owned media was used by the government as a pivotal tool for promoting and facilitating the use of birth control (Greenhalgh, 1986; Hardee-Cleaveland & Banister, 1988; Greenhalgh, Zhu & Li, 1994). During this time of governmental suppression of dissenting opinions, little public discussion was allowed in mainstream media. Thus, opposing voices from the public were seldom heard, even though domestic scholars and international reporters had criticized the one-child policy which came about as a result of the leadership's untenable decisions (Deng, 2015).

However, the careful establishment and actual public opinion of the two-child policy could not be more different. In an attempt to reverse the aging population structure and increase economic performance (Guo & Gu, 2014), the government made a weighted decision on this national population policy. This time, the government was eager to consult scientific evidence about China's "aging population as well as the resulting labor shortage (Ji, Sun & McDonald)." They also piloted surveys about the two-child policy to obtain feedback from the people. In addition, social media became an important discursive space for public discussions regarding this policy (Idle, 2015). For example, China's most popular social networking site, Sina Weibo, witnessed an explosion of discussions on the two-child policy (Qing, 2015). According to the Weibo Data Center (data.weibo.com), only a few days after this policy was announced, not only did the number of Weibo posts increase but also people with dissenting opinions were unafraid to post on this platform. This is a sharp contrast to the days of the one-child policy, when the traditional media dominated by limiting public

discussion. However, little research has been done to examine the social media's role in the implementation of the two-child policy. The question remains as to what kind of space social media has created for the expression of public opinion with regard to such policies.

1.2 Emergence of Diverse Participants

Indeed, the implementation of the two-child policy (Idle, 2015; Hunt & Lu, 2015; Tatlow & Piao, 2015) has attracted many varied spokespeople such as mothers, children and employers (Bloomberg, 2015; China Daily, 2016). Many have actively participated in discussions about the benefits and problems on Chinese social media. Parents are expressing their concerns about changes to finances and possible health concerns, such as fertility concerns of raising a second child; children are posting their conflicted feelings of excitement and worry about having siblings; women of child-bearing age are weighing difficult choices between another pregnancy or furthering their careers; human resource executives are concerned that female employees' reproductive choices will hinder business production. In contrast to the government led one child policy, the emergence of the participation of civilians has become a new scenario in China's childbearing policy implementation.

The emergence of these new participants shows that the Chinese government can no longer dictate the policy process. The traditional role of the government is beginning to be contested by the emerging voices of parents, children, healthcare workers, women of childbearing age and employers, or those who will be directly affected by these policies.

Thus, it is essential to study their opinions about this policy, as well as the changing role of the government from a "top-down" "arbitrary" sole decision maker to just one voice in a chorus of others.

1.3 Main Focus

Discussions regarding the two-child policy taking place on social media cannot be ignored. It is critical to understand China's change of policy by exploring social media and the diverse opinions encouraged by this environment. The objective of this research is to explore how Chinese social media influences public discussion on the two-child policy by exploring various birth-control stakeholders' discourses online.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of social media has radically changed China in many complex ways. I will now attempt to explore this new environment. In this section, I will first introduce the changing roles of the government in implementing both the one-child policy and the two-child policy. Then, I will analyze the emergence of the varied participants in the social media policy discussion. Moreover, I will reflect on a research paradigm of viewing social media as a public sphere to explore a new perspective of considering the social media as both public and private space in which to study stakeholders' online discourse. Finally, I will highlight related research questions. To answer these questions, I will further discuss the research methods in the next section.

2.1 Roles of the State

The role of the state has changed significantly with regard to the policy making process. In contrast to the “coercive power” utilized during the implementation of the one-child policy (Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1990; Greenhalgh, 2005), the power of the state became diluted during the execution of the two-child policy, despite the fact that it is still the leading force in its implementation.

As previously stated, the first policy is an example of state-led policy making. Existing literature sheds light on this otherwise rather opaque process in two ways: First, the “coercive” implementation of the one-child policy was the result of the state’s ambition to achieve social and economic growth (Hesketh, 2003; Nie, 2014; Liu, Bao, et al., 2016). Before the 1960s, the Chinese leadership set economic development as a national “central task:” however this goal was interrupted by the unprecedented political chaos of the Cultural Revolution, in Mao’s era (Dernberger, 1972). During this time, the rural population was

encouraged to grow for political reasons, such as “class confrontation,” because Mao believed a larger socialist population means better odds in beating the capitalists (Dernberger, 1972). However, after Mao’s death, this rapid population growth became problematic (Yang & Chen, 2004), as the leadership attempted to clear obstacles to economic development. In fact, they targeted this rapidly growing population by blaming it for all past social and economic problems (Lee & Wang, 1999; Wang, Gu & Cai, 2016). Additionally, the leadership also believed that the population would slow the nation’s long-term development and exhaust financial resources (Yang & Chen, 2004; Woo, 2013). Their ambition reached a peak during the time of “four modernizations (四个现代化)”, (Greenhalgh, 2005; Woo, Kowk, Sze & Yuan, 2002). Under mounting pressure to ease population density and create favorable conditions for social and economic growth, the leadership agreed on a harsh birth control policy (Hesketh, 2003; Nie, 2014; Liu, Bao, et al., 2016).

The government set “birth control” as a basic national policy (Jing, 2013), followed by various rewards and penalties to reinforce it (Green, 1988). The reward for having only one child included a monthly stipend¹, housing benefits² and educational support³ to subsidize any financial difficulties incurred by raising a child (Green, 1988). In comparison, the penalty for violating the policy was severe. It included harsh fines that were often beyond the means of the violators to pay, layoff strategies that ensured public employees would lose their jobs, disciplinary sanctions for party members that could destroy their political lives, as well as other brutal strategies including forced abortions, kidnappings and destruction of property for those who refused to comply (Li, 2012; Jing, 2013; Mosher, 2013). In this way,

¹ Income reward is to provide one-child parents with a monthly stipend (Green, 1988).

² Housing benefit is to provide public housing for one-child family in urban areas (Green, 1988).

³ Education support include granting the one-child families prioritized opportunities for their children’s admissions to nursery, kindergarten and school.

the state maintained formidable control over the one-child policy implementation process. This led to an abundance of criticism from scholars who called it the “costliest lesson of misguided policymaking” (Wang, Gu & Cai, 2006).

This family planning policy was widely criticized for its arbitrariness (Whyte, Wang & Cai, 2015). In addition, researchers, such as Scharping, 2003; Li, Yi & Zhang, 2011, have studied the negative consequences of this state-led policy. These included preference for sons, which led to gender inequality and an imbalanced sex ratio at birth. Scharping (2003), for example, discussed how son preference in China was exacerbated under the one-child policy. He found that this deep-rooted preference was to blame for the murders of new-born girls and the existence of unauthorized children born without birth permits. According to Li, Yi and Zhang (2011), the combination of the one-child policy and the preference for sons distorted the sex ratio at birth, resulting in people using gender-selection technology more often. Bulte, Heerink and Zhang (2010) observed that the number of undocumented girls increased with the implementation of the one-child policy, which also added to the imbalance of the sex ratio. Fong (2002) reasoned that girls born in the cities benefited from the one-child policy because they were more valued and supported by their parents, as they are the family’s only child and don’t have to compete with brothers. Scholars have analyzed the effect of the policy on family size and women’s gynecological health (Wu & Li, 2012). Moreover, researchers have also evaluated the ethical implications of China’s strict birth control approach. Jing’s study (2013) shows that the consequences of China’s family planning policy included sex-selective abortions and forced sterilization. Thus, this policy has not only affected family planning but also impacted the country’s human rights protections, social equity (Jing, 2013) and other public issues illustrated above.

Moreover, researchers have challenged the ability of the policy to actually reduce the fertility rate in China (Hesketh & Xing, 2005). According to Hesketh and Xing's (2005) assessment, with the actual cause unknown, the drop in fertility rate after approximately 25 years of the one-child policy may have nothing to do with the actual policy.

Furthermore, many researchers have attributed the failure of the policy to the leaders' "wishful thinking" and "pat-on-the-head decisions"⁴ (Deng, 2015; Wang, Yang, Zhang & Chang, 2016). Scholars suggest that the policymakers should pay more attention to statistics and evidence gathered from the people, instead of biased leaders (Jiang, Zhang, Shen (2013); Liu et al. (2014). According to Jiang, Zhang and Shen (2013), people's voices have not been fully considered in health policy making processes. China should adopt "evidence-based" health policies with high-quality evidence obtained from the context and conditions that relate directly to the people (Jiang, Zhang & Shen, 2013). Additionally, Deng (2015) also stresses that more unbiased scientific evidence should be used to enhance scientific analysis of the Chinese population. Moreover, the coercive top-down one-child policy has not only been ineffective, it has been detrimental to China's long-term development.

Due to these reasons, the government has changed its policy making process. During the creation of the two-child policy, the government invited scientific justification in the decision making and implementation phases. Although, the government still retains its leadership role for China's economic development.

⁴ Deng, Yuwen (2015) "Why Birth Control is a Failed Public Policy"
<http://www.aisixiang.com/data/87931.html>

Similar to the one-child policy, the urgent need for economic development was the driving force behind the two-child policy. In the 1970s, China was still recovering from the damage incurred from the Cultural Revolution. Now, after three decades of development, China's total economy is ranked second in the world (Zheng, 2016). The Chinese government will spare no effort to maintain this progress. However, at this point, the demographic conditions for further development are alarming, as scholars have discovered that its population structure is trending towards a large aging population (Zheng, 2016). According to current research, low fertility and mortality rates under the one-child policy have shaped China's population structure into a top-heavy pyramid, in which aging seniors greatly outnumber the younger population, which means that the younger generation is under mounting pressure to emotionally and financially support the nation's elderly people (Zhan, 2013). Additionally, this aging problem challenges national security (Cai, 2013; Zheng, 2016) by causing intense labor shortages that hinder the development of the economy (Guo & Gu, 2014). Other problems, such as the demographic sex imbalance as a result of sex selective abortions during the one-child policy also contribute to the urgent need to restructure the population, without which the Chinese economy would suffer (Wang et al., 2016).

Thus, to solve the problems inherent in this population structure, scholars have proposed a two-child policy. According to Yang and Liao (2016), the Chinese economy could embrace 40 million new workers in 2050 if this new policy is implemented.

Unlike the previous situation, the Chinese government decided to implement the two-child policy at a slower rate than the previous one, although it is still playing a leading role in its enactment. In fact, government leaders took a full two years to prepare before fully

implementing the two-child policy. Initially, a partial relaxation of the policy was piloted in 2013 that allowed couples to have two children only if one parent was an only child (Wang et al., 2016). At the same time, multiple large-scale surveys were conducted by the government to examine the feasibility of an unconditional two-child policy (Attane, 2016). This led to the government's final decision to fully implement the policy in 2015 (Attane, 2016).

However, even after the two-child policy was implemented, many couples did not choose to have another baby. According to Dai (2015) and Zhang (2016), "Among the 11 million people who were eligible for the conditional two-child policy, only 1.69 million couples applied to give birth to their second child." For this reason, the government urged people to take advantage of the new policy. Though, unlike the previous case where the government employed direct political, economic and physical strategies to enforce the policy, the government's approach for advocating the two-child policy is rather implicit. First, in order to promote childbearing and discourage delayed parenthood, government leaders canceled the extended marital leave reward for couples who married later in life (Yan, 2015). Also, the government began to target single women by calling them "leftover women" on official media (Fincher, 2014; Ren, 2016). This situation was exacerbated, as researchers found that women who already have a child are less likely to desire a second (Sun, Gordon & Pacey, 2016). Then, the official media began to censure female students studying abroad for their single status ("More Female Students Who Study Abroad Are Returning to China," 2016). In addition to media strategies, the government has also put other incentives into place, such as providing more education opportunities and creating more convenient medical facilities to support the implementation of the two-child policy (Jiang & Liu, 2016). However, even though the government is continuously under pressure to restructure the

population to encourage economic growth and is obsessed with creating a social climate that favors marriage and reproduction, the people remain unconvinced.

Based on the above analysis, the Chinese government has played an essential, yet very different role in the implementation of both policies. In fact, currently, the government is not the sole actor that influences the implementation of policy. Instead, various actors have begun to participate in this process and have attracted quite a bit of attention from the media as well as researchers.

2.2 The Emergence of Multiple Participants

While public debates were absent during the creation and implementation of previous child-bearing policies, there has been gradual emergence of varied participants for the two-child policy. Existing literature has highlighted such actors including senior citizens, women, families, parents and children (Mitchell, 2013). While the government represents the interests of the state regarding the childbearing policy, these citizens are speaking out for their own interests. For example, women are directly affected by the birth control policy. According to a news report, women experience difficulties in the workplace due to the potentially extended maternity leave (Bloomberg, 2015). It has been reported that female employees' second maternity leave might frustrate their employers, who will be unhappy with the possibility that their company's normal operations will be interrupted by (Bloomberg, 2015). This will add to women's long-term inferior status in the job market. Some fear that women are becoming more vulnerable and are less likely to be employed than previously (Bloomberg, 2015; Xinhua News Agency, 2016; China Daily, 2016). However, even though the tension that women face as a result of the two-child policy was covered on the news, these reports failed to identify women as important actors in this policy process.

Other groups affected by the one-child policy implementation include senior citizens. According to Mitchell (2013), who studies the elderly pension crisis caused by the one-child policy, the elderly members of a family may suffer from heavier financial burdens because they have fewer young bread winners to support the family. In other words, China's pension system is out of line with the new population structure, and it negatively affects the interests of elderly people. However, although Mitchell (2013) perceives the pension system as a side effect of the one-child policy, he does not highlight how it has hurt the elderly. Instead, he only focuses on seniors' perceptions of negotiating with regard to national policies, family relations and personal financial interests.

Similarly, scholars have also discussed how families are negatively affected by the two-child policy (Cao, Cumming and Wang, 2015). For example, when the government creates favorable environments to welcome more children, young couples feel pressure to have a second child due to possible increasing financial burdens (Pang, 2015). For example, raising a second child means extra educational investment, which is very expensive for many parents (Li, 2013; Philips, 2015). As a result, this reduces couples' willingness to have a second child (Philips, 2015). Thus, the new child-bearing policy causes dissonance between the state and poorer families. However, these previous studies do not explicitly analyze the interests of the participants, or their reactions to the implementation of this policy.

Still, other scholars focus on the social conflicts brought about by the two-child policy. For example, many children have grown up as the center of their family's attention and are unwilling to share their parents' love with any potential siblings (Fishwick, 2015; Zagorski, 2015; Dasgupta, 2016; Gong, Xu & Caine, 2016). Some extreme cases include children threatening to commit suicide if a second child is born (Zagorski, 2015; Dasgupta,

2016; Gong, Xu & Caine, 2016). In fact, as these children were so used to the exceptional family support without competition from siblings, it is possible that the two-child policy may have triggered the rebellious sense of children who have grown up in the one-child environment (Fishwick, 2015). While taking notice of the effects of diverse actors on the policy making process, existing studies have failed to identify and evaluate their roles (Hyder et al., 2010; Tambor et al. 2012).

In this study, emerging policy participants are conceptualized as “stakeholders” (Fisher & Strandberg-Larsen, 2016). According to the stakeholder theory, a stakeholder is an essential part of an interest group whose development relies on the participation and consensus of the members (Freeman, Wicks & Parmar, 2004). Even though this perspective is derived from business theory (Freeman, Wicks & Parmar, 2004), researchers have expanded its application to more fields of studies, such as organizational and governmental management (e.g. Voinov & Bousquet, 2010; Bosse & Coughlan, 2016). Particularly with regard to governmental health policy making (e.g. Maguire, Potts & Fletcher, 2012; Sabbe, Oulami, Zekraoui, etc., 2013; Fister & Strandberg-Larsen, 2016), scholars utilize the stakeholder perspective to investigate the conflicts and consensus of stakeholders’ interests in this process (e.g., Hepburn & Healy, 2007; Tambor, Pavelova, Golinowska, et al., 2012). Therefore, developing a thorough understanding of stakeholders’ concerns is beneficial for more effective health policy decision-making and implementation (Hepburn & Healy, 2007; Hyder et al., 2010; Varvassovszky & Brugha, 2000; Tambor et al. 2012; Lee, 2015). The frequently negative two-child policy stories on the mainstream media, including how potentially extended maternity leave might worsen women’s inferior status in the job market (Bloomberg, 2015), shows the importance of articulating and analyzing the interests of stakeholders. Additionally, this technique may provide scholars with a new and efficient

research perspective. Thus, it is essential to include the stakeholder perspective in relation to the two-child policy by analyzing their interests in order to provide new findings for future policy changes. In this way, policy makers can make further scientific adjustments to the birth control policies. Also, when scholars can better understand the stakeholders' interests, future birth control plans can be more successfully implemented due to better consensus. Hence, the first research question is shown below:

RQ1: What types of stakeholders are represented in China's media discourse?

As introduced above, social media has brought diverse social participants and opinions to light in the public debates of the two-child policy, when analyzing stakeholders' representation in media discourse, I mainly focused on the discourse taking place on social media.

2.3 Social Media and Stakeholders' Interests

Allowing people's attitudes toward the two-child policy to be expressed, social media is where random individuals' voices accumulate into potent opinions (Hon, 2016; DeLuca, Lawson & Sun, 2012). It is a desirable channel for manifesting stakeholders' participation in the policy process (Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012; Saxton & Waters, 2014). Therefore, it is critical for researchers to observe stakeholders' interests and opinions presented on social media.

This technology has provided opportunities for researchers and policymakers to observe stakeholders' opinions that may not have been considered in the era of traditional media. In this section, I will continue to address the importance of social media as a venue for observing stakeholders' interests and attitudes. The reason for this is threefold.

First, social media, as a product of Web 2.0, enables people to disclose their “private thoughts to the public” (Throne, 2015). Especially, for observing social conflicts and controversial issues, social media is preferable for displaying people’s opinions than traditional media (McCluskey & Hmielowki, 2011). While the later selectively presents original opinions through news production and gatekeeping processes, social media avoids this editorial selecting process to create a space for discourse accumulation (King, Pan & Roberts, 2013; Veenstra, Lyer, Park & Alajmi, 2014).

Second, social media is more efficient than traditional media for facilitating critical and relatively unrestricted debates (Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2015). As there are many different communities and various stakeholders involved in the birth control process, tensions may rise among them. However, traditional media reports cannot cover all these conflicts. Social media, in contrast, allows varied opinions to be voiced on one topic at the same time. In this way, the massive number of participants can debate over a common concern (Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2015). Regardless of their social and economic statuses (e.g. married couples, parents, only children, employers, employees, etc.), Chinese people can express their opinions on the trending issue via social media as the government’s reproductive policy changes. Furthermore, while people’s diverse interests are having an increasingly greater impact on governmental regulations, social media becomes more important because people’s interests are well articulated on this platform (Napoli, 2015).

Third, since the dominant traditional media in China muted opposing voices as a show of authority in the late 70s and early 80s, voices protesting the one-child policy on mainstream media cannot be found (Mosher, 2006; Nie, 2014). According to Mosher (2006), in traditional media, such as newspapers, opinions disagreeing with the one-child policy were

deleted. Mosher (2006) and Nie (2014) attribute this action to the government's media propaganda. Similar to the political intentions behind the "harmonious society," the reason why the dissenting opinions are restricted is that the government wants people to accept and obey the state's rules (Delury, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of the mainstream media propaganda in China was to justify the tough implementation of birth control, as well as to convince the public that bearing fewer children at a later age would be beneficial for the nation (Mosher, 2006; Yi, 2007).

To summarize the differences between China's social and traditional media, according to Xu (2012), while traditional media outlets are mouthpieces for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Chinese social media is a virtual platform for the free expression of ideas. Additionally, since social media in China is corporatized through cultural and economic reforms (Li & Liu, 2009), it is less restricted by governmental regulations than most of the state-owned media. Thus, social media is different from the traditional media in the way that it empowers varied voices to create a space for potential social change (Xu, 2012).

Therefore, the advantages of social media have set the standard for further exploration of stakeholders' expression of opinions. In fact, previous empirical research on public health policy has illustrated the significance of policy stakeholders' online discussions (e.g. Hepburn & Healy, 2007; Hyder et al., 2010). Furthermore, when it comes to media and online opinion, researchers have tended to refer to the term of *public sphere*. According to Habermas (Habermas, 1991), the *public sphere* is a space that empowers people to openly debate over social problems. Contrasting the power of authority, of state and governmental administrations, Habermas (1991) emphasizes the power of the general public due to the fact

that their expression of opinions in the private realm will encourage political action and participatory democracy. Scholars have connected the empowerment of the public sphere to the development of social media and mass media platforms, such as television, newspapers and the internet have contributed to democracy and political change (e.g. Dahlgren, 1995; Shirky, 2011). However, when researchers extensively relate to the concept of *public sphere* as they discuss social media (e.g., Mazali, 2011; Michailidou, 2011; Lee, So & Leung, 2015; Johannessen, Sæbø, & Flak, 2016), they usually conveniently draw the conclusion that social media has become a public space without having comprehensively examined the original component from Habermas's (1987) conceptualization, such as the level of the media's *inclusiveness* and the media expression's *rationality* in the media environment (Wu, 2007, p.104), leading to an untenable and overoptimistic conclusion that social media may equal a public space that has defined an advanced level of civil discussion as a sign of a burgeoning democratic society .

Though, many contemporary researchers have realized the importance of public opinion to policymakers in the creation and enactment of public policy (e.g. Page and Shapiro 1983; Burstein 20 Cohen 1997; Soroka and Wlezien 2005). By considering public opinion, government officials can obtain valuable and detailed information for strategic decisions (Druckman and Jacobs, 2006). Also, public opinion is powerful. Not only can it directly influence government policy making processes (Burstein 1998; Manza and Cook 2002; Jacobs and Page 2005; Soroka and Wlezien 2005; Druckman and Jacobs 2006; Okamoto, Buffington, Cloum, et al., 2011), it can also support social justice and democracy (Chopra & Lintelo, 2011; Tomz & Weeks, 2013). Researchers in the field of public health also point out the essential role of public opinions in public health policy making (Abelson, Giacomini, Lehoux and Gauvin, 2007; Okamoto et al., 2011). For example, Abelson,

Giacomini, Lehoux and Gauvin (2007) illustrate how public participation within the health policy decision-making process can contribute to more informed policies and assessment. Furthermore, scholars in various countries have also focused on the local collective attitudes towards health policy and public care (e.g., Jacobs, 1993; Soroka & Lim, 2003; Seo, Chun, Newell and Yun, 2015). For example, Jacobs and Mettler (2011) address how enhancing health policy evaluations and reforms via social media can facilitate public the expression of opinions, especially those that are conflicting and polarizing.

Social media is a unique public sphere that now allows scholars to analyze public opinion in China (Song, Dai and Wang, 2016; Ye, Xu and Zhang, 2016). In examining discourse of food safety issues online, Song, Dai and Wang (2016) found that the social media platforms are creating a “networked public space”, enabling the expressive political discussion. Based on the concept, such networked public space now serves as an alternative for the traditional media to provide a platform for civic activities. They further argue that social media supersedes traditional media in creating public forums (Song et al., 2016). According to Choi (2014), who studies the features of social-media-based public forums, live and synchronous political discussions and more users contribute to the potential of social media to function as an interactive public space. Thus, scholars conclude that social media has encouraged the free exchange of ideas and brought about new progress to China’s public sphere (Ye et al., 2016).

However, focusing on the public sphere is only one aspect of studying the social media environment. Originally, the notion of “public forum/space” came about because Habermas (1974) envisioned the public space as a place for unlimited critical public dialogues over common interests between the state and society (Bohman, 2004; Song et al.,

2016). Thus, public interests, instead of private issues, are emphasized in this space, leading to a gap in the study of private issues. Therefore, when scholars (Dong et al., 2016) emphasize the critical role of social media in facilitating people's online discussions of public affairs, it demands us to explore its role in enhancing the discussions of childbearing issues that can be classified as both public and private topics. Therefore, when analyzing such discussion, it can be problematic to simply apply the theorization the space as a public sphere to a study on the stakeholders' online opinions about the policy. Furthermore, to expand the scope of previous social media researches, the purpose of my study is to investigate the impact of Chinese social media on the stakeholders' expression, by not simply limiting people's online discussion to "public" discourse.

Thus, as social media facilitates random individuals' voices to be accumulated into potent opinion frames (Hon, 2016; DeLuca et al., 2012), I utilized frame theory as the theoretical framework to study the Chinese social media discourses about the two-child policy, and examine if the Chinese social media qualifies as a "public sphere" conceptualized by Habermas (1987).

Theoretically, framing is a process through which people define, interpret and evaluate social problems by managing the ways of articulation (Entman, 1993). It has been conceptualized and applied as a media framing research paradigm to explore the important issues found in discourses (Scheufele, 1999). Especially in social media research, social constructions of reality, social problems in particular and attitudes toward these problems, can be unfolded from media content through adoption of framing analysis (Scheufele, 1999; Pfhol, 1977; Lecheler, Vreese & Slothuus, 2009). Thus, to study the general public's

opinions about the two-child policy, I examined how people collectively framed the issue on social media platform in China.

Prior studies suggest that the media framing research paradigm focuses on the articulation of the related issues can be useful in finding significant problems within the media discourses. In retrospect, framing research has focused on political coverage in newspapers, such as the reporting of the presidential elections and the wars against terrorism (e.g. Miller, Andsager & Riechert, 1998; Kioussis, 2004; Ryan, 2004; Gan, Teo & Detenber, 2005). By focusing on journalistic selection and the emphasis of facts, these studies highlight the media's intent to concentrate on the public's attention using certain political frames. Additionally, more recent framing research on print media has shifted focuses from political coverage to a wider variety of topics, such as medical treatment (e.g. Walsh-Childers & Braddock, 2014), portrayals of women in the media (Everbach, 2017), energy use (Kim, Besley, Oh & Kim, 2014) and military power (Aram, Premnivas & Ramya, 2014). Thus, by scrutinizing the dominant discourse on certain topics in newspapers, researchers reveal the prevailing political and cultural implications, as well as the underlining ethical values, on all sorts of complex trending topics.

Moreover, while framing analysis has been mainly adopted to discuss prominent topics of traditional news reporting, the adaptation of this paradigm for social media research is also effective in terms of uncovering the public's views of current affairs (including private sentiments and individual opinions). Thus, this type of research has explored how the online political sentiments, such as diagnosis of opinions or social stability levels, has been uncovered by individuals' frames on social media. For instance, many social media researchers have studied the online discourses of all types of presidential campaigns to

discover how the media and other related factors affect people's political perceptions (e.g. Han, Chock & Shoemaker, 2009; Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013; Hawthorne, Houston & McKinney, 2013).

Additionally, scholars have also observed how social movements can be ignited by individuals who frame their intentions with political actions. For example, Al-Rawi (2015) and Hoyle (2016) study the ways in which online individual opinions affected the Arab Spring protests. Other scholars have also explored social media framing as various types of social engagement in different countries, such as China (Zhang & Kramarae, 2014), France (Snow, Vliegenthart & Catherine Corrigan-Brown, 2007) and Canada (Corrigan-Brown & Wilkes 2011). In this way, the public's framing of social media manifests both its public and private interests. In this way, the framing effects have the potential to blur the boundary between people's public and private spheres (Papacharissi, 2010).

More importantly, recent researchers (e.g., Meraz & Papacharissi, 2016; Bennet & Segerberg, 2012) dive further into social media engagement to uncover nuances of the participatory nature afforded by this space. According to Meraz and Papacharissi (2016), with the crowded-centered gatekeeping and framing, public participation online empowers social media users to challenge the controlling power of the traditional media. Originally, gatekeeping and framing are predominately top-down. Gatekeeping is a method of message selection conducted by gatekeepers (Shoemaker & Vols, 2009, p. 11). Framing is a process through which people define, interpret and evaluate social problems by managing the ways of articulation (Entman, 1993). Contrasting the traditional power in controlling gatekeeping and framing processes, the sharing and commenting functions of social media enable dissemination of marginalized voices and collaborative news production of the mass and

elites, which is a pluralized and bottom-up mediation created by the crowd-centered network (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2016).

Due to the similarities regarding sharing and commenting features between Chinese and Western social media, the participatory nature of social media also applies to the Chinese context. Prior literature has already explored the complexity of the citizen participation in China's social media. For example, focusing on the emergence of controversial discussions on the Chinese internet, Wallis (2015) points out the collaborative content generated by Chinese social media users reflects a participatory culture in support of a grassroots democracy. However, as China's online participatory culture and the nature of Chinese social media being a developing field, researchers need further investigation to fill the gap in China's connective participation literature.

Despite the advance of social media literature on participatory framing and gatekeeping, current research on China's social media space and public policy making has focused primarily on the public sphere. Thus, more attention must be paid to the various commenting of individuals regarding the two-child policy. As the emergence of social media facilitates a distinct combination of public and private frames to uncover general public's attitudes about the two-child policy, it is essential to distinguish the public frames of the policy from the random comments by individuals on social media that may not represent commonly held perceptions. Hence, the second research question for my study is shown below:

RQ2: What are the main themes of stakeholder's opinions, as expressed in social media discourse?

Furthermore, as discussed above, since preceding research on social media expression is mainly focused on how this platform, as a public sphere, has enhanced public opinion, in our study, I argue that the current research can be furthered if scholars keep an open mind by not limiting their view of social media as only a space for the public. Hence, I must determine whether or not social media has created open platforms for public expression regarding China's birth control policy implementation. Thus, based on the essential role media plays in the implementation of China's childbearing policy, as well as the exploration of the perceptions of on the policy stakeholders, I evaluate the role of social media amidst the discursive online dialogues regarding the two-child policy in China. Therefore, the third question answered in this study is shown below:

RQ3: What is the role of social media in the two-child policy discourse?

3. METHODS

3.1 Semantic Network Analysis

Preceding research on China's childbearing policies has mainly used critical analysis (e.g., Lu, 2014; Hesketh, Zhou & Wang, 2015; Fong, 2002) and secondary data analysis (e.g., Ding & Hesketh, 2006; Hesketh, Lu & Xing, 2005; Ebenstein, 2010). Prior research in public opinion towards China's childbearing policies is scarce, whereas survey research is seemingly a suitable method to explore people's opinions toward the policies. However, due to the lack of funding, time and primarily the detailed composition of stakeholder population, this study does not adopt survey method. Instead, with the abundance of social media messages conveying people's expressions on the childbearing policies, this study employs semantic network analysis (SNA) to analyze stakeholders' social media discourses of the two-child policy. I aim to 1) identify various stakeholders' perspectives, 2) interpret their positions embedded in the discourses, and 3) interpret their complex relationships reflected in the discourses.

SNA is an efficient technique in textual analysis for media research. It is based on the cognitive association of words (Doerfel, 1998). By recognizing frequencies and co-occurrences of words in a text, this method can identify meaningful contents in the text, often with the assistance of an automatic analytical program (Graaf & Van der Vossen, 2013; Van Atteveldt, 2008). In this research, SNA is helpful in mining large amount of texts and identifying diverse opinions in social media discourse (e.g., Chewning, 2014; Lim, Berry, & Lee, 2016).

3.2 Research Questions

With research questions identified in the former section, this study has three aims: 1) to identify what types of stakeholders are represented in the text; 2) to examine different opinions on the two-child policy on social media; 3) to discuss how Weibo, as a new media platform, may affect how people express their opinions.

RQ1 identifies different types of stakeholders. The author conducted a frequency analysis among nouns that characterize stakeholders' roles, such as people's social roles (e.g., mother, father, or child), gender roles (e.g., man, women) and social entities' categories (e.g., the government, hospital systems). Instead of getting information directly from people's social media profiles, I identify stakeholders from their discourse. Additionally, because of the anonymity of social media, it is only possible to identify stakeholders from the social media discourse.

RQ2 explores the themes of the Weibo posts for the two-child policy, which helps to understand the overall social media discourse on this issue. To answer this question, this study employed software assisted clustering analysis to study the thematic dimensions of the social media expressions. This process grouped the co-occurring words in the discourse into meaningful semantic clusters that contains thematic meanings. By studying these clusters, the author was able to detect the topics from the general two-child policy discourse. Furthermore, the author explored stakeholders' interests by consulting the original social media posts.

For RQ3, I measured the extent Weibo can affect opinion expression. The author argued that an open media platform should contain diverse discussions from multiple

perspectives⁵, and vice versa. Thus, if the notions of these perspectives are all contested in the two-child policy related Weibo posts, this media platform can be viewed as a space that tolerates different voices. Otherwise, it may be inadequate to be considered an open platform.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analytical process included the following: data preparation, analysis, and visualization. Data preparation included data collection, cleansing, and tokenization.

The social media website Weibo (<http://www.weibo.com/>) is designated to be the source for data preparation because of it is a representative example of the Chinese social media. Though still being censored by the Chinese government, Weibo has been considered a forum for the public, and for empowering challenging voices to the government's official media agenda (Nip & Fu, 2016; Sullivan, 2013). The popularization of Weibo has also reinforced its status as an open forum for public opinion (Sullivan, 2013). According to the Weibo Data Center (data.weibo.com), the number of active Weibo users per month in 2016 was 2.97 hundred million. The total number of Chinese Internet users in 2016 was 7.31 hundred million⁶, which shows that two of every five Chinese Internet users use Weibo. Thus, a significant portion of Chinese Internet users are expressing their opinions on Weibo. As people can access Weibo on portable devices, they can write on their personal page anytime they want to express an opinion. Moreover, similar to posts on Twitter, a popular international social media platform, those on Weibo are searchable and downloadable, which qualifies this platform to be feasible for study.

⁵ Such as the perspective of individuals, families, and the nation.

⁶ The total number of Chinese Internet users reached 7.31 hundred million in 2016, according to the 39th "Statistical Report on Internet Development in China" of China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC).

Furthermore, Weibo posts containing the phrase “second child” (in Chinese, ‘二孩’/‘二胎’) between January 22nd - February 22nd, 2017 were collected. January 1st, 2017 is the first anniversary for the implementation of the two-child policy, and there is a notable trend that people are reflecting on this policy after initial progress on the implementation has been made. Thus, Weibo posts from January to February can reflect active discussions on the two-child policy. With the keyword search, I obtained a total of 14,531 Weibo posts, which was a population of the available data.

Then, a cleansing process to remove irrelevant contents from the Weibo posts was conducted. These contents included punctuation, symbols, emoji, and modal particles, such as “eh” (呃). Additionally, posts listing only meaningless hashtags were removed from analysis. The following is an example:

*#JayChow'sSecondChild##LetsLove#... #LaLaLand#... #TheWeatherIsMood#
(#花式比心##周杰伦二孩##我们相爱吧#...#爱乐之城#...#天气即心情#)*

Thus, after data cleansing, there were 14,501 Weibo posts remaining for further analysis. For tokenization, the author used Jieba (<https://pypi.python.org/pypi/jieba-rpc/0.0.4>), a Chinese word tokenization module to explore meaningful terms and filter text noise. Tokenization is a way in which researchers retrieve information from short and imbalanced text (Zhou & Zhang, 2002; Zuo, Zhao & Xu, 2015). As Chinese words are a combination of different characters, to distinguish certain meaningful words one needs to take extra effort to segment text into a series of words. Jieba has enabled researchers to discover meaningful Chinese words in supervised text mining research (e.g., Peng, Cambria, & Hussain, 2017; Tse, 2016; Zhang, Zhao & LeCun, 2015). In order to maintain the accuracy of tokenization, the author also set a customized dictionary, which included newly formed vocabularies that are not automatically recognized in Jieba. For example, “the second child”

(二胎) is not traditionally considered a word in Chinese. Thus, this new word was put in the customized dictionary to guarantee that it would be processed exactly in its existing form. With this tokenization process, the Weibo posts were ready for analysis.

Data analysis in this study included frequency and cluster analysis. As explained earlier, a frequency analysis of nouns was used to explore the most mentioned stakeholder roles in the Weibo discourse (RQ1). In other words, frequently appeared nouns that represent stakeholders' roles were selected. First, an exploratory list of stakeholders was created from the nouns mentioned more than 10 times in the text. Then, a computer program, WORDij (<http://wordij.net/index.html>), was employed to calculate the frequency of the words. This program was also used for the cluster analysis in this study.

Furthermore, cluster analysis determined various dimensions of meaning embedded in the two-child policy discussions (RQ2). This method has been conducted by scholars (Yuan, Feng, & Danowski, 2013) to comprehend complicated social media text. Additionally, I used two analytical programs to assist this process. One was WORDij, a semantic network analysis program for detecting the frequency and co-occurrence of words. The author used this program to process the result of the tokenization to find co-occurring words and their aggregated frequencies. Then, NodeXL (<https://nodexl.codeplex.com/>), an open-source program was used to analyze and visualize clustered semantic networks. This program can automatically detect sub-structures of networks by calculating its hierarchical agglomerative clustering (HAC) algorithm⁷ (Munoz-Leiva, Porcu, & Barrio-Garcia, 2015).

⁷ Different HAC algorithm offers flexible options to process different types of data (Lung & Zhou, 2010). This study employs Wakita and Tsurumi's (YEAR) hierarchical agglomeration algorithm in NodeXL to find theme structures in the two-child policy discourse.

To answer RQ2, NodeXL was used for defining the importance of words in the semantic networks of the discourse. In this process, I examined nodes closely to determine if a node was closely related to other nodes in the network (Opsahl, Agneessens, & Skvoretz, 2010), or the degree of connection. Essentially, “degree” refers to the number of nodes that a certain node can connect with. In this research, a node with a higher degree means this word was more central and important in defining topics in the two-child policy discourse (RQ2).

Based on the word filtering and frequency analysis for RQ1, as well as the cluster analysis for RQ2, the author diagnosed whether Weibo has empowered the Chinese public discourse (RQ3). Finally, through the steps above, the author presents the results of the study in the following section.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Frequency Analysis

Forty-eight potential stakeholders have been identified (see Table I). They include family members, professionals and specialists, public figures and institutions, as well as different countries and regions. Countries such as “Japan” (日本), “the United States” (美国), “Singapore”(新加坡), are mentioned as comparative examples and references. Although they were not directly involved in the domestic policy making process, they are mentioned in the Weibo context as indirect stakeholders:

“A national wide promotion for reproduction is about to happen. Facing the problem of the population, a ban on birth control is not enough, not to mention the two-child policy. In fact, birth rates of those countries that belong to the Chinese cultural circle, such as Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Macao, are among the lowest of all the countries.” (全面鼓励生育蓄势待发 面对如此之大的缺口，别说二孩，就是完全全面放开生育都远远不够。实际上，同属中华文化圈的台湾、新加坡、香港、澳门的家庭平均生育率... 处于全球最低之列)

Among them, “children”(孩子) is the most frequent stakeholder, while “Macao” (澳门) is the least frequent appeared stakeholder. Overall, the frequencies of stakeholders range from 22 to 4225.

Table I Frequency analysis: a list of stakeholders

Label	Chinese	N	Label	Chinese	N
Children	孩子	4255	Editor	小编	301
Family	家庭	3507	Teachers	老师	287
Weibo	微博	2946	Men	男性	282
Sina	新浪	2644	Younger brother	弟弟	276
Jay Chow	周杰伦	2541	Leftover men	剩男	255
Women	女性	2133	Journalist	记者	243
Doctors	医生	1802	Media	媒体	242
China	中国	1715	Father	爸爸	196
Country	国家	1377	Husband	丈夫	194
Girl	姑娘	1242	Younger sister	妹妹	180
People	人民	1091	Elder brother	哥哥	175
Parents	父母	992	Scholar	学者	116
Daughter	女儿	896	Hong Kong	香港	99
Mother	妈妈	843	Mother-in-law	婆婆	96
Twins	双胞胎	662	The United States	美国	94
Married couples	夫妻	608	Grandmother	奶奶	92
Son	儿子	575	Grandfather	爷爷	60
Legal press	法制报纸	509	Nurse	护士	40
Government	政府	442	Leftover women	剩女	39
Hospital	医院	431	Professors	教授	37
Wife	妻子	396	Taiwan	台湾	37
Elder sister	姐姐	384	Baby-sitter	保姆	29
Japan	日本	337	Singapore	新加坡	24
Relatives	家人	332	Macao	澳门	22

These shareholders seemed to belong to three distinct analytical dimensions: *family*, *gender*, and *social units*. Although these dimensions may not be mutually exclusive, many stakeholders may belong to more than one dimension. For example, “mother” may belong to the stakeholder group of women, as well as the stakeholder group of family members.

First, various stakeholders represent *family* (see Table II). “Children” and “family” rank the first and second, respectively, among the stakeholders. This shows people tend to discuss the two-child policy in the context of family, with a focus on children. While a variety of family members are mentioned, however, those stakeholders typically representing nuclear family members (e.g. “parents” and “daughter”) are more frequently mentioned than those who are considered extended family (e.g. “mother-in-law” and “grandmother”). Thus, the idea of *family* is emphasized by the representation of its members, whereas the idea of *nuclear family* is highlighted in the discussion of *family*.

Table II Stakeholders representing members of a family

Label	Label in Chinese	Frequency
Children	孩子(老大, 老二)	4255
Family	家庭	3507
Parents	父母(家长)	992
Daughter	女儿	896
Mother	妈妈	843
Twins	双胞胎	662
Married couples	夫妻	608
Son	儿子	575
Wife	妻子	396
Elder sister	姐姐	384
Relatives	家人(亲戚)	332
Younger brother	弟弟	276
Father	爸爸	196
Husband	丈夫	194
Younger sister	妹妹	180
Elder brother	哥哥	175
Mother-in-law	婆婆	96
Grandmother	奶奶(姥姥)	92
Grandfather	爷爷	60

Second, gender plays a significant role in public discussions of the second child (see Table III). It is evident that female stakeholders are more frequently presented, although not necessarily represented, than male stakeholders, indicating that female roles are more often emphasized. Also, comparing the frequencies of such pairs as “women” and “men,” or “mother” and “father,” the female category in each pair is also more frequently mentioned than the male category. However, “younger sister” and “leftover women” are less mentioned than “younger brother” and “leftover men⁸,” respectively. This may loosely indicate people’s different emphasis on gender and marital status. Overall, female roles played a more central role in childbearing discussions.

Table III List of stakeholders by gender roles

FEMALE			MALE		
Women	女性	2133	Son	儿子	575
Girl	姑娘	1242	Men	男性	282
Daughter	女儿	896	Younger brother	弟弟	276
Mother	妈妈	843	Leftover men	剩男	255
Wife	妻子	396	Father	爸爸	196
Elder sister	姐姐	384	Husband	哥哥	194
Younger sister	妹妹	180	Husband	丈夫	194
Grandmother	奶奶 (姥姥)	92	Elder brother	哥哥	175
Leftover women	剩女	39	Grandfather	爷爷	60
Mother-in-law	婆婆	96			
TOTAL		6301			2207

Third, in this discourse, different social units are represented in four dimensions (see Table IV): *country*, *family*, *individual*, and *society*. For the *country* dimension, words representing China (e.g., “China,” “country,” and “people”), as well as words for other

⁸ Similar to “leftover women,” “leftover men” is an alternative term for “single men.”

countries or regions (e.g., “Japan,” “the United States,” and “Singapore”) are included, indicating a mixed influence of domestic and international stakeholders. For the dimension of *family*, it includes family members (e.g., “children,” “family,” and “parents”), as have been analyzed above. For the dimension of *individual*, it includes gendered roles (e.g., “women,” “girl,” “men,” “leftover men,” and “leftover women”), as illustrated above.

Table IV List of stakeholders in social units

Country			Society			Family			Individual		
Label	Chinese	N	Label	Chinese	N	Label	Chinese	N	Label	Chinese	N
China	中国	1715	Weibo	微博	2946	Children	孩子	4255	Women	女性	2133
Country	国家	1377	Sina	新浪	2644	Family	家庭	3507	Girl	姑娘	1242
People	人民	1091	Jaw Chow	周杰伦	2541	Parents	父母	992	Men	男性	282
Japan	日本	337	Doctors	医生	1802	Daughter	女儿	896	Leftover men	剩男	255
Hong Kong	香港	99	Legal press	法制报纸	559	Mother	妈妈	843	Leftover women	剩女	39
The United States	美国	94	Hospital	医院	431	Twins	双胞胎	662			
Taiwan	台湾	37	Editors	小编	301	Married couples	夫妻	608			
Singapore	新加坡	24	Teachers	老师	287	Son	儿子	575			
Macao	澳门	22	Journalists	记者	243	Wife	妻子	396			
			Media	媒体	242	Elder sister	姐姐	384			
			Scholars	学者	116	Relatives	家人	332			
			Nurses	护士	40	Younger brother	弟弟	276			
			Professors	教授	37	Father	爸爸	196			
			Baby-sitters	保姆	29	Husband	丈夫	194			
						Younger sister	妹妹	180			
						Elder brother	哥哥	175			
						Mother-in-law	婆婆	96			
						Grandmother	奶奶	92			
						Grandfather	爷爷	60			

Furthermore, the dimension of *society* is characterized by specialized stakeholders, such as those in the fields of media (e.g., “Weibo” and “Sina”), medicine (e.g., “doctors” and “nurses”), academy (e.g., “scholars” and “professors”), the public (e.g., “Jay Chow”) and care providing (e.g., “baby-sitters”). Similar to the indirect stakeholders of various countries, though not directly regulated by the two-child policy, they are highlighted by the discourse, as they hold socially-valued expertise in each of the fields. Many of them tend to be opinion leaders with professional insights into the two-child policy discourse. For example, stakeholders from the field of medicine and the academy advocate the implementation of the two-child policy due to China’s low birthrate, whereas a public figure, Jay Chow, is recognized as a great exemplar of having two children:

“The population only increased for about 1.31 million from 2015 to 2016, and any scholars believe that this unhealthy growth of population is inevitable. Thus, they urge the government to relax the birth control as soon as possible.”
(2016 年新增人口仅比 2015 年新增人口多 131 万，诸多学者认为人口颓势难以避免，政府应尽快放开生育)

“Jay Chow has become a father again! Take a look at celebrities’ second-child era!” (周杰伦再当爹！看明星们的“二胎时代”)

Representing stakeholders in multiple categories and dimensions, this discourse indicates diverse stakeholders’ discussion participation of the two-child policy on social media. Thus, in the next part, the author continues to unfold this discourse with clustering analysis.

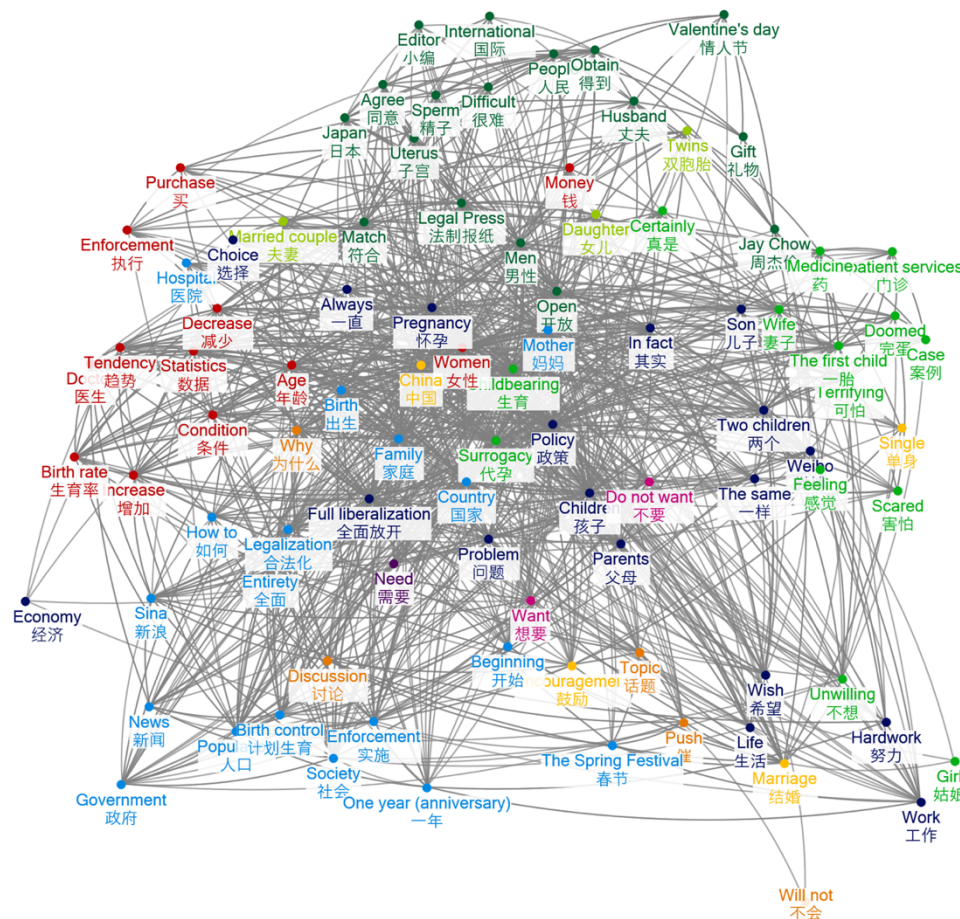
4.2 Clustering Analysis

The overall network is comprised of 96 nodes (see Figure 1), and the density of it is shown by the extent the nodes are connecting other nodes. For example, the network around “childbearing” (生育), “women” (女性), and “mother” (妈妈) are more dense as these nodes

appear to be more connected to other nodes in this network; the network around “will not” (不会) and “girl” (姑娘) are more sparse due to fewer node connections.

After omitting the groups with one or two words⁹, altogether eight clusters were identified. In this section, following the sizes of the clusters, the author discusses each cluster by analyzing the centralities and the contextual meanings of the words. More importantly, the differences of stakeholders’ opinions and their varied positions on the relevant issues are highlighted in these contexts.

Figure 1. The semantic network of two-child policy discourse on Weibo¹⁰



⁹ A group with two words, “do not want” (不要) and “want” (想要), and another with one word, “need” (需要), were omitted.

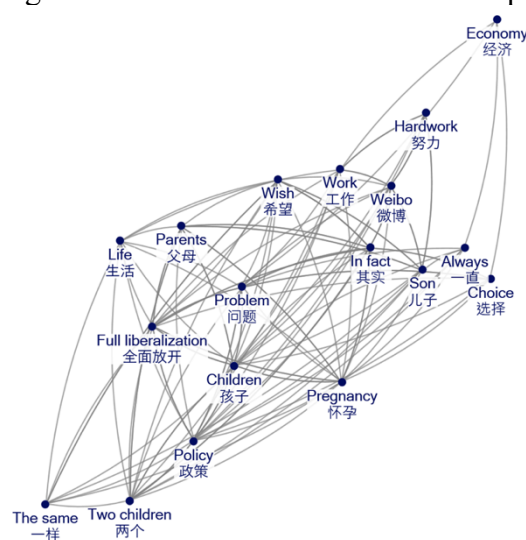
¹⁰ Different colors represent different groups.

A. Group 1

Table V presents the words and their degree centralities in Group 1. The group's network is shown in Figure 2.

Table V List of words in Group 1		
Label	Label in Chinese	Degree
Children	孩子	69
Policy	政策	68
Pregnancy	怀孕	55
Full liberation	全面放开	49
Problem	问题	39
Two children	两个	33
Parents	父母	26
The same	一样	24
Son	儿子	24
In fact	其实	23
Wish	希望	23
Weibo	微博	22
Life	生活	21
Work	工作	21
Always	一直	19
Choice	选择	17
Hard work	努力	10
Economy	经济	5

Figure 2 The semantic network of Group 1



First, “children” (孩子) is centralized among the policy related terms, such as “policy” (政策), “pregnancy” (怀孕), and “full liberation” (全面放开). This sketches the general context of the second child policy. The following post is an example:

“It has been almost one year since the two-child policy was approved in our country. So, have you had your second child? Wish everybody would love to have their second child!” (我国去年新的政策全面二孩到现在都得一年了，你是否也生了第二个孩子了？希望大家都愿意和喜欢要第二个孩子吧！)

Second, the mentioning of “parent” (父母) and “son” (儿子) suggests the interaction between different generations in this discourse. It is also worth noting that even though “daughter” (女儿) is mentioned in some particular discussions, it is not as visible and central as “son” (儿子) is in this group’s discourse:

“One of my acquaintances had a son with her ex-husband, and she has a son with her current husband. Lately, she gave birth to her second child. Her husband had been taking care of her elder son before. Now as his has another daughter with his current wife, he leaves his son to his parents.” (有一个熟人跟前夫生了个儿子，跟现在的丈夫又生了个儿子，最近又生了二孩。前夫先还养着儿子，后来跟后妻生了女儿就不养儿子了，丢给父母。)

“Having a son and a daughter is achieving the ultimate happiness as traditional parents in China. According to Bahaism, the sex of a child depends on serendipity. However, for seniors, it is only son that would be worthwhile.” (儿女双全似乎在传统的中国人眼中是为人父母最大的福分了。照佛家所说，子女性降生也是要靠缘分的，但对于老人家来说，似乎只有儿子才是真正“值钱”的。)

More substantively, terms related to family life, such as, “life” (生活), “work” (工作), “hard work” (努力), and “economy” (经济) raise attention to the potential “problem” (问题) and tensions within family. Hence, on one hand, increasing concerns for childbearing exist; but on the other hand, economic pressure has contributed to the tension in families:

“As the two-child policy has been fully implemented, many parents are worried about the limited chances of their children’s getting into kindergartens.” (随着全面二孩政策实施，不少父母担心紧张的幼儿园学位更稀缺)

“None of my colleagues wants a second child, no matter whether they are men or women. Some of them could not let their wives suffer, others could not give up their job.” (我同事没有一个要二胎的...无论男女，有舍不得老婆遭罪的，有舍不得自己工作的)

“As the two-child policy has been issued, a lot of problems have emerged. My job becomes unstable again. Every day, I am uneasy because I have no idea when might I lose my job.” (二胎来了，好多要解决的问题，工作又变成悬而未决的事情，每天在不安中渡过，不知道哪天工作就不是你的了)

“I have two housing loans to pay for and two children to take care of. At the age of 38, I am laid off and cannot make my ends meet. Is it because I am not working hard enough?” (两套房贷两个娃，38岁被迫辞职入不敷出，是我不够努力么?)

The textual and contextual meanings of words in Group 1, as well as their center and periphery positions in the network, provide evidence that the public policy as well as realistic issues in private life have been heightened by the two-child policy. In other words, while the two-child policy encourages another child for families, it also brings new economic anxieties and relationship modes between parents and children.

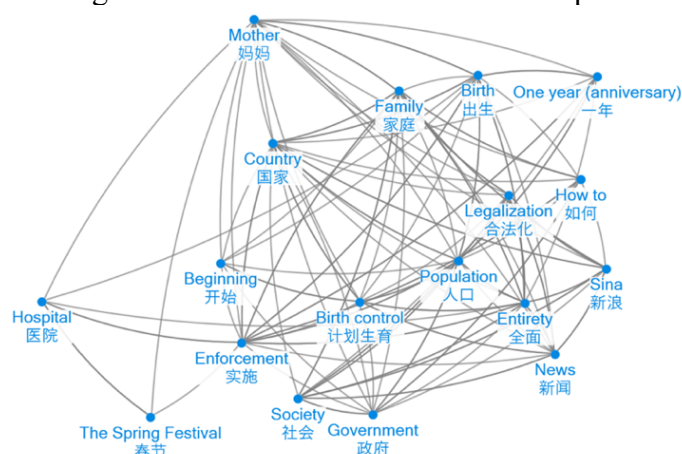
B. Group 2

The degree centralities (see Table VI), words positions (shown in Figure 3), and the contextual meanings of the words in Group 2 show the foci of this cluster.

Table VI List of words in Group 2

Label	Label in Chinese	Degree
Mother	妈妈	71
Country	国家	58
Family	家庭	56
Population	人口	32
Entirely	全面	31
Birth	出生	29
Enforcement	实施	26
Society	社会	25
Birth control	计划生育	25
Legalization	合法化	24
Beginning	开始	22
Government	政府	22
Sina	新浪	21
How to	如何	19
News	新闻	19
One year (anniversary)	一年	18
Hospital	医院	13
the Spring Festival	春节	10

Figure 3 The semantic network of Group 2



Primarily, the centralization of “mother” (妈妈) among “family” (家庭), “birth”(出生), and “the Spring Festival” (春节) underlines the centralization of women’s fertility issues in family.

“More than half of the families in this country have trouble in reproducing. So, it becomes a question whether a mother in an advance age can have a second child.” (全国家庭一半 难怀上 高龄妈妈能否要二孩?)

“Being pregnant with a second child, the mother faces new problem, even though she has some experience in this... We have to admit that people are not as strong as they were young.” (孕育二胎时, 孕妈妈虽说多了些经验, 但又会遇到不少新问题... 但不得不承认, 年纪大了, 身体确实不如从前。)

Furthermore, the peripheral words, such as “entirety” (全面), “enforcement” (实施), “birth control” (计划生育), and “beginning” (开始), “one year” (anniversary) (一年), and “hospital” (医院) indicate the actual impact of the two-child policy implementation. For example, original Weibo posts show that a boosted birth rate in China is reflected by the increasing demands for medical services:

“It has been one year since the implementation of the two-child policy, and the obstetrics departments become the toughest and busiest departments in hospitals.” (开放二胎一年多, 各大医院的产科变成了全院最苦最累的科室)

“After the implementation of the two-child policy, she successfully transferred her embryo in May, 2016. During this Spring Festival, she delivered a son in hospital.” (全面二孩政策实施后，她于2016年5月胚胎种植成功，春节期间在医院诞下一子)

Second, the data show the significance of the issue of surrogacy. Specifically, “legalization” (合法化) indicates the call for the legalization of surrogacy to battle infertility among women. Words such as “Sina” (新浪), “how to” (如何), and “news” (新闻) indicate that the media’s participation has made the topic popular on the social media. It appears that people’s debate over the legalization of surrogacy increases the tension between women’s status and the country’s population policy. It signifies the negotiation between women’s fertility and the country’s need for population increases.

“Why do I strongly oppose the legalization of surrogacy... Women has a lot of pressure since the implementation of the two-child policy, but they still brought up this. What do they think women are?” (我为什么坚决反对“代孕”合法化...本来二胎政策开放，女性压力就够大了，还提出这出，把女性都当什么了)

“According to Sina news, surrogacy could not easily be legalized. Since the implementation of the two-child policy, infertility has become the most worrisome problem in families. Thus, some doctors suggest that surrogacy should be legalized and attract people’s attention to this field.” (新浪新闻：对代孕不能轻言“放开”：二孩政策全面放开以来，不能生育成为想生育二孩家庭的最大心病。对此有医生提议“代孕合法化”，将人们的目光再次带入代孕这个领域)

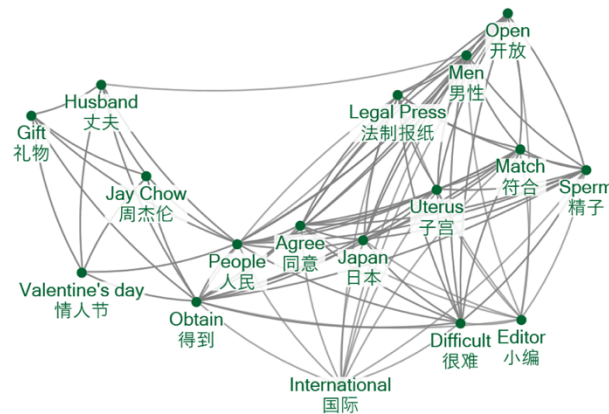
“I’m oppose to the legalization of surrogacy. I belong to the lowest social class, and I am done with the son preference. If surrogacy were legalized, women would become childbearing machines, and their status would be even lower.” (我是反对代孕合理化的，生活在最底层，已经受够了重男轻女，结果一代孕合理，女性又变成了子宫工具，只会让女性地位更加低下。)

Considering the semantic meanings and geographical locations of words in Group 2, as well as the original Weibo related to this word group, the discourse of Group 2 is focused on the negotiation between women’s fertility, their status, and the nation’s population goal in increasing birthrates.

C. Group 3

Figure 4 shows the word cluster of Group 3, and Table VII presents the degree centralities of words in it.

Figure 4 The semantic network of Group 3



First, terms such as “men” (男性), “husband”(丈夫), “match” (符合), “uterus” (子宫), “sperm” (精子), “difficult” (很难), and “obtain” (得到) suggest challenging biological conditions in reproduction. Words such as “legal press” (法制报纸) and “editor” (小编), signify a media participated dialogue over whether the sperm bank should be legalized to solve the problem of infertility in men. These most centered words in this network show the positions of men and their attitudes regarding reproductive issues. Second, the word of “Japan” (日本) is also included in this dialogue, as people constantly used other countries as reference points when debating over the legalization of sperm bank. Thus, the tension between men and family with children seems to be established through discussions and references.

Table VII List of words in Group 3

Label	Label in Chinese	Degree
Open	开放	59
Men	男性	40
Match	符合	35
Legal press	法制报纸	32
Uterus	子宫	22
Japan	日本	20
Sperm	精子	20
Agree	同意	20
Difficult	很难	19
Obtain	得到	19
People	人民	19
Husband	丈夫	19
Editor	小编	12
International	国际	12
Jay Chow	周杰伦	11
Valentine's Day	情人节	8
Gift	礼物	7

“One of comments is right that it is better to legalize the sperm bank than surrogacy... nearly 90% of men over 45 have fertility problems.” (有句评论说的好，全面放开代孕不如全面放开精子库... 45 岁以后近 90%男性不举早泄)

“Three hundred million men who have sperms do not have uteruses. So, do you want to provide your mothers’ to them? A hundred million women can hardly use high-qualified sperms. So, do you agree to open an international sperm bank? The resource in Japan cannot easily meet the need of its people. So, do you want them to move to China? Several million of ‘leftover’ men cannot have physical satisfaction. So, do the editors want to provide their ass to them? @Legal Press: half of those families that can raise second children cannot successfully reproduce.” (三亿有精子的男人没子宫，你同意把你妈送给他们用吗？一亿女人很难用上优质精子你同意开放国际精子库吗？日本岛地理很难满足人民的生存你同意他们搬来中国吗？几千万剩男很难得到生理满足小编同意献上自己的屁眼吗？@法制报纸：9000 万符合生育二孩的家庭“一半人”很难怀孕)

In contrast to the rather depressing discussion of male fertility, “Jay Chow” (周杰伦), a popular Chinese singer announced the news of his second child on “Valentine’s Day” (情人节), claiming the child was his best “gift” (礼物). Jay Chow seems to serve as an example of a successful man with a perfect life, envied by many men. He sets a model for men about how to achieve ideal family life and how to be successful as a man. Some posts from the original Weibo are listed to support this idea:

“Here comes the first thing that people might feel envy about on Valentine’s Day: Jay Chow is going to have a second child. Congratulations to his wife. Little Chow is going to have a new pal.” (情人节第一把狗粮出来啦, 周杰伦二胎。恭喜昆凌成功怀二胎, 小周周有了新玩伴。)

“A Valentine’s Day’s gift for the public ‘national husband’: it has been announced at midnight that Jay Chow is going to have a second child. This makes single people envy.” (国民老公的情人节礼物: 虐狗节的一天, 凌晨发布周杰伦二胎。)

The discourse in this group is concerned about the relation between men and the concept of the ideal family. Primarily, both tensions and visions in this relationship are displayed in this network. Particularly, the tensions are centered on the issue of “sperm bank,” while visions are focused on the discussions over public figures’ family lives.

Evidence from the word network along with its related Weibo posts indicate that Group 3 highlighted the tensions and visions in men’s relationships with their families. On one hand, the discussions over the legalization of sperm banks indicates fertility problems from the men’s perspective. On the other hand, people’s admiration for Jay Chow’s family life shows their vision about how a man can develop a happy family by having more children.

D. Group 4 and 5

Since Groups 4 and 5 have similar topics, the author analyzed them together. Figures 5 and 6 show the networks of Groups 4 and 5 respectively, whereas Table VIII and IX show the degree centralities of words in the two groups correspondingly.

Figure 5 The semantic network of Group 4

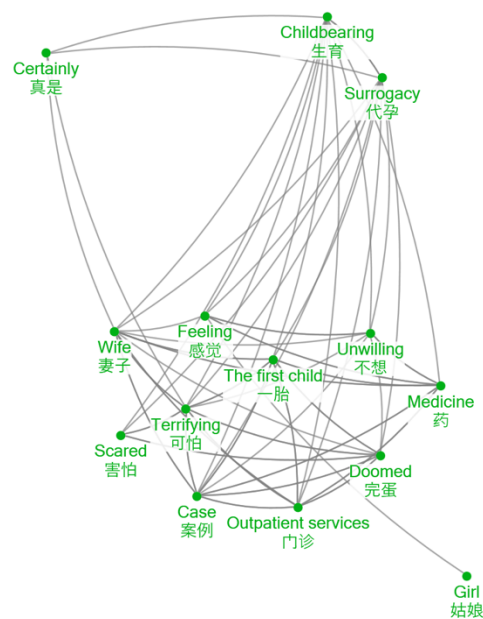


Table VIII List of words in Group 4

Label	Label in Chinese	Degree
Childbearing	生育	80
Surrogacy	代孕	70
Wife	妻子	29
Unwilling	不想	23
Terrifying	可怕	21
Feeling	感觉	20
The first Child	一胎	20
Certainly	真是	19
Medicine	药	16
Doomed	完蛋	14
Case	案例	13
Outpatient services	门诊	12
Scared	害怕	11
Girl	姑娘	3

For Group 4, the most centered words, “childbearing” (生育), “surrogacy” (代孕), and “wife” (妻子) describe the topic of childbearing and fertility. These words may be related to the official media influence on this issue. In fact, it was frequently mentioned in the Weibo text that *The People’s Daily* (人民日报) initiated a discussion with an article titled, “Infertility becomes a problem. Do we need surrogacy legalized?” (不孕不育成难题，代孕是否可全面放开). Additionally, the *People’s Daily* once posted¹¹:

@The People’s Daily: #Two-child law amendment# Draft amendment of the Family Planning Law: may lift the ban on surrogacy (@人民日报: #二孩修法# 计生法修正案草案最新修改: 拟删除禁止代孕条款)

However, many people expressed emotional comments concerning surrogacy. Words, such as “unwilling” (不想), “terrifying” (可怕), “feeling” (感觉), “the first child” (一胎), “certainly” (真是), “medicine” (药), “doomed” (玩蛋), “case” (案例), “outpatient services”

¹¹ This content was captured in data collection. However, at the time of this writing, this context does not exist on *the People’s Daily* Weibo.

(门诊), and “scared” (害怕) indicate a cloud of fear over this topic. Even though it was only a discussion on a hypothetical policy that has not been officially implemented, the expression of fearful sentiment reveals a tension between people’s childbearing preferences and the nation’s policymaking.

“Today’s implementation of the two-child policy, as well as the lifting of surrogacy ban, is too terrifying. I do not dare to think it through.” (太他妈可怕, 现在的开放二胎政策, 取消代孕禁令, 真是不敢细想)

“I have to say a lot regarding being against surrogacy. I am certainly terrified. If people are not resisting this thing, it may be proceeded as the two-child policy. So, we would struggle as we can. If someday our struggle comes to an end, I will be really afraid of the simple and brutal crowd violence.” (反对代孕合法化的事情刷个屏, 我是真害怕, 要是探口风反抗不激烈, 没准就和二孩政策一样了。能挣扎的时候至少挣扎一下, 等不能挣扎了.....真的很害怕简单粗暴的群体暴力)

Interestingly, amidst the sentiment over this discussion, the Weibo of People.cn¹² (人民网) posted an announcement from the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) that defined surrogacy as illegal:

“NHFPC: Surrogacy is illegal and will still be banned.” (国家卫计委: 代孕违法违规将继续严厉打击)

Thus, considering the structure of the network along with the situated context of the words, the discourse of Group 4 has been focused on emotional comments on childbearing and surrogacy. It indicates people’s opposition to this issue, along with the administrator’s role in considering people’s opinions in policymaking. Primarily, the official started conversations over a possible policy. Then, related bureaus made reactions according to the public opinion. This implies the government may be unsure about legal strategies for population control.

¹² An online version of the *People’s Daily*. It is also an official media outlet in China.

Shown in Figure 6 and Table IX, the network of Group 5 is also focused on the negotiation of people's private sphere and the country's public policy.

Figure 6 The semantic network of Group 5

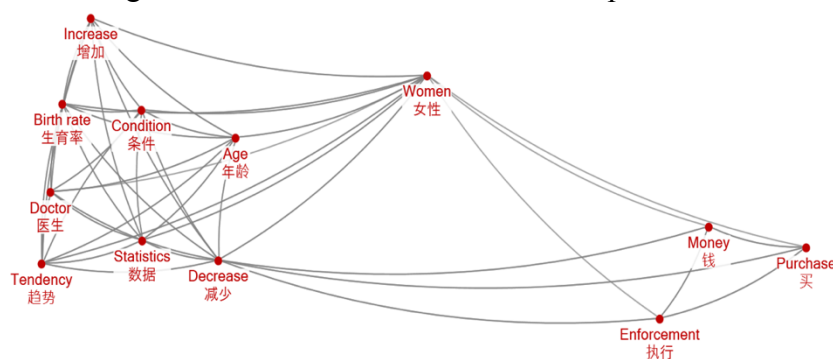


Table IX List of words in Group 5

Label	Label in Chinese	Degree
Women	女性	75
Age	年龄	33
Condition	条件	25
Decrease	减少	24
Increase	增加	24
Statistics	数据	24
Birth rate	生育率	22
Doctor	医生	21
Money	钱	19
Tendency	趋势	19
Enforcement	执行	14
Purchase	买	12

Additionally, the most centered word in Group 5 (see in Table IX) is “women” (女性). Words, such as “doctor” (医生), “enforcement” (执行), and “purchase” (买) show aspects of daily life. Also, statistical discussion is very frequent in this group. This is shown

by the comparatively high centralities of data related vocabularies, such as “age” (年龄), “condition” (条件), “decrease” (减少), “increase” (增加), “statistics” (数据), “birth rate” (生育率), “money” (钱), and “tendency” (趋势). Further referring to the original posts, this statistical discussion in Group 5 highlights the issue of women’s (in)fertility and the country’s consideration of population restructuring. Similar to Group 4, this discourse also emphasizes the issue of surrogacy:

“In they age, women are becoming less capable in reproduction. However, despite the fact that the two-child policy has been implemented, many women who want second children in their 40s and 50s are disappointed by their health condition.” (随着年龄的增加, 女性的生育能力逐渐减少, 而近两年国家的二胎政策也逐渐放开, 这让很多想要二胎的 60、70 后, 蠢蠢欲动又担心身体不堪重负。)

“Statistics show that among the women in 900 million families that meet the standards for having second children, 60% of them are above the age of 35, and 50% of them are above the age of 40. The rate of fertility drops as a higher age. So, doctors suggest the proper legalization of surrogacy.” (数据显示, 全国符合生育二孩条件的 9000 万左右家庭中, 60% 的女方年龄在 35 岁以上, 50% 在 40 岁以上。随着年龄增加, 生育率呈明显减少趋势... 医生建议适当放开代孕准入)

However, different from the Group 4 discourse, the opinions in Group 5 are more mild in emotion, focusing on the rationality of necessity in legalizing surrogacy.

To take Group 4 and 5 as a whole, they center on different aspects of childbearing, fertility, and surrogacy. Group 4 expresses emotional comments, while Group 5 establishes statistical analysis. Altogether, Group 4 and 5 suggest the society’s internal tension and negotiation regarding a population policy. Additionally, while there exist voices for and against surrogacy, the government shows flexibility in adjusting policy-making strategies.

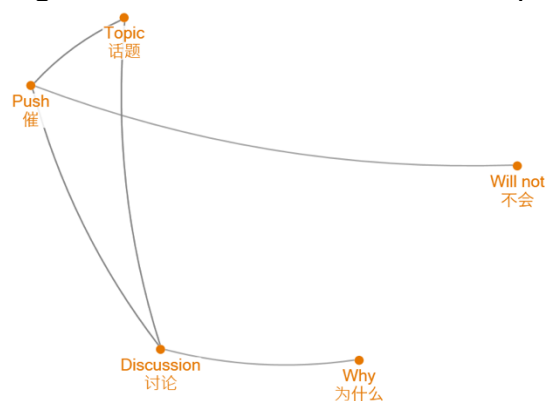
E. Group 6

As shown in Figure 7 and Table X, Group 6 has a comparatively simpler network than the previous groups. Four words included in this network, such as “why” (为什么), “discussion” (讨论), “topic” (话题), and “will not” (不会) suggest an on-going discussion among people over the two-child policy. Furthermore, since “push” (催) is a word frequently used by Chinese parents to pressure their children to get married, it indicates that the topic of people’s discussions may be centered on family related issues. In fact, original Weibo posts support this assumption.

Table X List of words in Group 6

Label	Label in Chinese	Degree
Why	为什么	24
Discussion	讨论	21
Topic	话题	18
Push	催	13
Will not	不会	2

Figure 7 The semantic network of Group 6



“The most popular topic during the Chinese Spring Festival is the second child’s alimony.” (过年家里讨论最多的还是二孩的抚养费问题)

“#Does your mother push you to get married during the Spring Festival# No, my mother wouldn’t push me for now.” (#过年你妈催你结婚了吗# 没有呀, 老妈暂时不会催啦。)

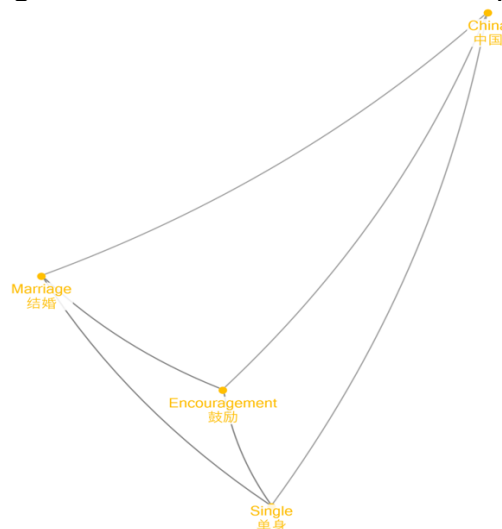
Thus, similar to Group 1, this network is basically focused on conversations concerning family issues. However, aside from the realistic and economic tensions emphasized in Group 1, the discourse of Group 6 centers on the tension between different generations over issues, such as childbearing and marriage. This further demonstrates the importance of family in the Chinese context.

F. **Group 7**

Shown in Table XI and Figure 8, Group 7 contains four words. Among them, “China” (中国) is the most central, with a degree centrality of 69, much higher than “marriage” (结婚), “encourage” (鼓励), and “single” (单身). The degrees of the less central words range from 11 to 23. As indicated by the face meanings of the words, this group may show a discourse on country–civil relationship.

Table XI List of words in Group 7		
Label	Label in Chinese	Degree
China	中国	69
Marriage	结婚	23
Encouragement	鼓励	19
Single	单身	11

Figure 8 The semantic network of Group 7



While the country's need for newborns is made explicit by the implementation of the two-child policy, people express much unwillingness to comply by criticizing the policy. From the original text, there are many rebellious voices about the negative attitudes regarding marriage and childbearing. Also, these voices often co-act with some social sentiment against “leftover women,” which the country has been ashamed of in its official media:

“Before I was unwilling to get married. Now, even though childbearing became legalized for single people, I do not want any child at all.” (我以前只是不想结婚，现在即使开放单身生育我都根本不想生孩子)

“The change in policy makes me feel that I will be thrown in jail if don't get married and have children immediately.” (政策的变化常常让我觉得我再不结婚生子就要被拉去判刑了)

“Who are they fooling? They promote the two-child policy, but they deny the risk of childbearing as well as the expense of child rearing at the same time!” (一边鼓励二胎一边否认女性生育风险、无视育儿成本——忽悠谁呢?)

Thus, combining the textual and contextual meaning of words in Group 7, it shows Chinese people may be aware of the country's intension behind the implementation of the two-child policy, since a growing sense of individualism among them is challenging the idea of childbearing. Additionally, while the government is urging single people, especially

women, to get married, the obverse sentiment become evident to criticize the state for being mindlessness in dealing with people's marital and life issues. Overall, the discourse of Group 7 centers on the tension and mistrust between China and its citizens.

G. Group 8

There are three words in Group 8: “daughter” (女儿), “married couple” (夫妻), and “twins” (双胞胎). Very similar to the discourse in Group 1 and 6, this group also focuses on Chinese families' inner struggles amid the implementation of a new childbearing policy.

“I have a five-year-old daughter now, but my mother-in-law has always been expecting a grandson. Since the two-child policy was implemented, she has been pushing me to have a second child.” (我现在有个五岁大的女儿，但婆婆一直喜欢男孩儿，加上二胎开放，她就一直催我生二胎)

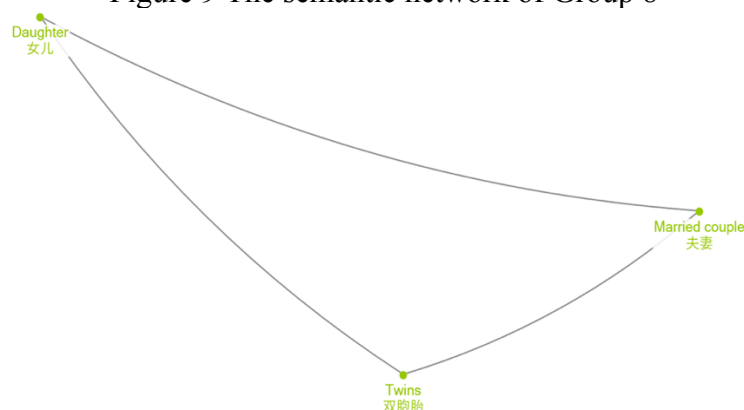
“Especially for those married couples above their 40s, they really want to seize the last chance to have one more child.” (特别是40岁以上的大龄夫妻，渴望能抓紧最后的机会再生一个孩子)

“Childbearing is troublesome. Many people would think: it would be good to have twins directly.” (生娃本就是麻烦事儿，肯定很多人都在想：如果能直接生个双胞胎就最好了)

Table XII List of words in Group 8

Label	Label in Chinese	Degree
Daughter	女儿	23
Married couple	夫妻	19
Twins	双胞胎	14

Figure 9 The semantic network of Group 8



4.3 Summary

Overall, the eight semantic networks have mainly highlighted three types of tensions in the two-child policy discussion: 1) tensions within family; 2) tensions regarding gender issues; 3) tensions between the public and private sphere.

Similar to the categorization of stakeholders in the frequency analysis, these three types of tensions shown in the two-child policy discourse are not mutually exclusive. In fact, tensions overlap as the stakeholders' concerns interact with one another.

First, Groups 1, 6, and 8 reveal the tensions within family. Group 1 centers on the family's economic pressures in raising a second child. When the two-child policy brings a new form of relationship between the young and older generations, one significant and realistic issue they face in private life is how families can financially sustain themselves through difficulties in life and work. Group 6 features the tensions between generations over marriage and childbearing issues. This tension resulted from generational disagreement. Relating to China's Confucius tradition, as well as the aging problems in the current Chinese

society, the elderly may lack financial and emotional support from their children, while younger generations are not meeting their parents' expectations for early marriage and childbearing due to realistic issues, such as lifestyles and economic constraints. Group 8 overlaps with Groups 1 and 6 in that they all focus on familial relational issues. This also suggests that a new form of family relationship may form from the implementation of the two-child policy. Considering the discourses of Groups 1, 6, and 8, one can see that economic, marital and relational issues contribute to various types of tensions within families under the two-child policy.

Second, Groups 2 and 3 feature tensions regarding gender issues. Group 2 centers on the tension between women's (in)fertility and the country's plan for population increases. While women's social worth has been culturally tied to their age, now, their fertility problems have also been linked to age. Consequently, since the state is urging childbearing among the society, women's status is at greater stake than previously because women are being tagged as old and infertile. The discussions about legalization of surrogacy underlines this controversy: the state may legalize surrogacy to solve women's (in)fertility problems due to age. Meanwhile, Group 3 focuses on the tension between men's (in)fertility and the country's population plan. Unlike the discourse in Group 2, which pays more attention to women's inferior status under tension of reproduction, Group 3 focuses more on men's vision of a successful life, which inspires the desire for marriage and childbearing. The discussion around the issue of "sperm banks" reinforces this idea: people bring up this issue to fulfill men's desire in marriage and reproduction. In this discourse, men's tensions with fertility problems are tied more to their visions of establishing ideal families and having children. Thus, comparing the gender related tensions in Groups 2 and 3, women's related tension is more likely to increase their disadvantages in society, while men's related tension may be

less intimidating. Facing (in)fertility problems at the same time, men and women may experience the policy differently in the Chinese context.

Third, Groups 4, 5 and 7 shed light on the tensions between private and public spheres. Facilitating people's emotional expressions, Group 4 focuses more on the private sphere. It generates opposing voices against potential legislation of surrogacy. In this discourse, people not only reveal their private attitudes to the public, but also influence the public agenda by expressing their fear for a hypothetical legislation about surrogacy. In fact, the government's timely media reply to the public clarifying the prohibitive status of surrogacy reflects an influence of the private on the public sphere. Meanwhile, Group 5 focuses more on the tensions in public. Emphasizing on the statistical analysis of people's fertility problems, the discussions in Group 5 suggest a legalization of surrogacy to solve the tensions between the public population plan and low fertility among people. Group 7 features the tension between the state and its people. As people's private intentions do not go along with the state's call for newborns, the state uses public media strategies to target women's private sphere, say marital status, which further sheds light on some gender dynamics that were discussed in Groups 2 and 3. This way, it becomes noticeable that the tensions between the private and public sphere interact with one another in the discourse of the Chinese two-child policy.

Therefore, the two-child policy discourse reveals various types of tensions in Chinese society. It shows that the population policy may not only affect China with the world's largest population, but also involve stakeholders with various interests. The expressions of these interests provide insights into the gender, relational, familial, and societal dynamics of Chinese society; in turn, these dynamics shape the online policy discussions into expressions

that involve both the public and private sphere. On one hand, the constant active social media interaction maintains the implementation of the two-child policy as a heated topic. On the other hand, discussions evolve as people's concerns shift from the state's policy to more nuanced private aspects of their personal lives, such as health, marriage, work, and family.

Thus, the discussion over various tensions shown in the two-child policy discourse further leads to the answer to RQ3, which looks for the role that social media had during the policy's implementation.

Summarizing its representation of multiple categories of stakeholders at familial, gender, and social levels, as well as the different facets of the tensions of stakeholders, social media has been an open forum facilitating public expressions toward the policy.

Moreover, as previous scholars have extensively quoted Habermas (1974) to define online interactions as a sign of a burgeoning democracy and social integration derived from a public media space (e.g. Page and Shapiro 1983; Burstein 2000; Cohen 1997; Soroka and Wlezien 2005), in this study, I used an empirical approach to investigate public expression and analyze the openness of social media. Referring back to RQ3, whether or not social media in China can be considered an open public space, is a question that can be answered based on the analysis above. However, after an examination of the types of stakeholders and the thematic tensions of their opinions expressed on social media, this space must be evaluated further to determine its actual role. According to Habermas (1991), the "public sphere" is a space that empowers people to openly debate about social problems. This space disregards authority and emphasizes the power of the general public due to the fact that their ability to express their opinions in the private realm will encourage political action and

participatory democracy. In order to break this conceptualization down into various elements for study, Wu (Wu, 2007, p.104) summarizes the nine features that define the public sphere: inclusiveness, accessibility, autonomy, rationality, interactivity, criticalness, commonness, privacy and social integration. Although these terms may not exhaustively capture the extent of Habermas's concept, providing a description of these dimensions is an effective way to determine if the current Chinese social media serves as an open space for the public.

Upon closer inspection, the first feature, inclusiveness, was used to determine if the space is equally welcoming to all types of participants, no matter their status or ideas (Wu, 2007, p.104). According to the stakeholder analysis, social media is inclusive to both direct and indirect stakeholders in the two-child policy. For instance, family members, scholars, and healthcare professionals were equally included in this discourse study. Moreover, controversial ideas that are commonly debated, such as the state's eagerness to increase the population and the resulting economic burdens on families to raise another child, as well as the younger generations' hesitation to marry versus familial pressure on them to start raising families sooner were also explored. Thus, one can see that Chinese social media has enough inclusiveness to be considered a public sphere.

The second feature, accessibility, means that everyone has equal access to this space (Wu, 2007, p.104). According to the Weibo Data Center (data.weibo.com), the number of active users per month reached 2.97 hundred million in 2016. However, only a few days after the second-child policy was announced, the number of related Weibo posts increased by 0.55 million¹³. In addition to government workers and the official media regular citizens, such as healthcare providers, are able to go on this platform to express their sometimes conflicting

¹³ According to Weibo Data Center (data.weibo.com).

ideas. With that being said, Weibo, the Chinese social media platform, shows a sufficient level of accessibility to contribute to an online public sphere.

Autonomy, the third measure, denotes that people can express their opinions on their own without being influenced by any economic or political power (Wu, 2007, p.104). Although, I did not consider the intentions behind people's posting of ideas in this study, the government and official media did not seem to have interfered with people's expression as might have occurred in the era of traditional media. On the contrary, the interests of the government and various other stakeholders, although relatively divided, seemed to co-exist well. Thus, the social media sphere does in fact appear to encourage autonomy.

Rationality, the public's use of reasoning in their discussions (Wu, 2007, p.104), is the fourth element. According to the social media discourse, participants clearly used reasoning, which can be seen in Group 5, in which people emphasized statistics to argue that surrogacy should be legalized. However, irrational appeal was also present in other discussions, such as the ones in Group 4, which mostly generated strong negative feelings, instead of providing reasonable arguments against the idea of legalizing surrogacy. Thus, social media may not be a typical public sphere, as it also facilitates irrationality.

The fifth feature, interactivity, indicates the interchangeability of ideas from different actors (Wu, 2007, p.104). Based on cluster analysis, it became evident that contrasting ideas and interests from various stakeholders were in opposition to each other in the grouped discourses. For example, the government's intention to test the popularity of legalizing surrogacy met with strong opposition. Referring to the previous analysis of this study, other contrasting viewpoints came from older and younger generations regarding views on children

and marriage as well as the disputes between state officials and citizens that centered on whether or not to have a second child. Thus, the enthusiastic exchange of conflicting ideas between various stakeholders clearly shows the interactivity of this social media space.

Criticalness indicates that users are able to challenge authority in the social media setting (Wu, 2007, p.104). With regard to childbearing and policy making, the authority figures and the state can be seen as the parents, as their traditional roles within Chinese society are to guide these types of life decisions. However, they have both been challenged in the discourse of the two-child policy. For example, in Group 7, there was much tension between the people and the state regarding compliance with marriage and childbearing. Evidently, people were against the state's decision to institute the second-child policy, which not only suggests a growing sense of individualism but also implies a challenge to the state's patriarchal authority over their life decisions. Thus, the social media meets the criteria of criticalness to be an open public sphere.

The seventh feature, commonness, refers to a "common concern" about the public's critical attention (Wu, 2007, p.104). Generally speaking, the topic of childbearing is the overarching concern in the discourse of the two-child policy, as it leads the other debates about issues such as marriage, legalization of surrogacy and establishment of sperm banks. However, even though these issues are related to childbearing, they also affect family relations and the ideal perceptions of a successful man's life. Thus, when people discuss the two-child policy, they are not necessarily talking about one single topic, because they have multiple specific concerns related to various facets of childbearing. Hence, the social media space has emphasized but is not limited to the feature of commonness.

Privacy refers to people's public discussions in new forms of interpretations of their private spheres (Wu, 2007, p.104). According to the group discussions analyzed above, people seemed to always consider the two-child policy by relating it to their own opinions and personal experiences. This reflects Papacharissi's (2013) argument that online public discussions are manifestations of private spheres. Thus, with regard to the public expression of individual concerns and privacy, the Chinese social media is a public space.

The last feature, social integration, refers to the potential of public discussion to unite people in solidarity (Wu, 2007, p.104). Based on the two-child policy debates, people are focusing on certain issues about which they agree, such as the economic pressure of raising children and familial pressure of getting married sooner. However, they do not appear to be coming together regarding this discourse. With obvious tensions between individual's personal lives and the state policy, people have become more fragmented into their own spaces, because there were no clear conclusions regarding what actions responsible citizens should take. Thus, since the tensions in the discourse have not been transformed into a sense of unity, the social media may not be a public sphere when it comes to social integration.

Therefore, Chinese social media can be seen as a public space in terms of inclusiveness, accessibility, autonomy, rationality, interactivity, criticalness and privacy; however, it does not meet the criteria for a public space with respect to commonness and social integration. Based on these findings, the current research provides a new empirical investigation on social media as a potential public space. Unlike previous researchers that arbitrarily tie social media space to the notion of the public sphere and online democracy by merely focusing on the features of criticalness and social integration (e.g., Wang, 2016; Bohman, 2004; Song, Dai and Wang, 2016), in this study, I have established a new way to

comprehensively reassess the contemporary role of social media by placing it in the context of public policy making, as well as by paying attention to the contrasting opinions of individuals.

Furthermore, as public opinion is essential for helping policymakers to create and enact public policy (e.g. Page and Shapiro 1983; Burstein 2005; Cohen 1997; Soroka and Wlezien 2005), the Chinese government should continue to take public opinion into consideration by more frequently consulting discussions found on social media. In this way, not only can government officials obtain valuable information for more effective strategic population restructuring (Druckman and Jacobs, 2006) they can also encourage public participation within the health policy decision-making process to facilitate more informed policies and assessment (Abelson, Giacomini, Lehoux and Gauvin, 2007). Additionally, a greater number of opinions expressed on social media platforms will enhance the space's openness and publicity. Thus, when social media is perceived as an extended public domain compared to the old print media, its potential as a virtual online space should be further explored by future researchers.

Moreover, the findings of the current study concur with previous research in that social media supersedes its precedents in creating public forums (e.g., Wu, 2007; Song, Dai and Wang, 2016). As a public forum with accessibility, autonomy and rationality, social media further provides scholars with a unique lens from which to view the public articulation of important social issues and analyze the sometimes divisive public opinion in China (Song, Dai and Wang, 2016; Ye, Xu and Zhang, 2016). Currently, even though there are many social reforms taking place in this developing country, along with shifting power relations between the country and its people, researchers can still find ways to uncover the intertwined

dynamics in this country by exploring the interactivity, accessibility and rationality of the public space of social media.

Thus, by determining its roles in policy discussion, as well as its potential to enhance public opinion, the role of social media in the two-child policy discourse becomes clear. A promising platform has opened up as a public space for the country and its people.

In the next section, I will discuss the implications and limitations of this study.

5. DISCUSSIONS

To learn more about the Chinese two-child policy and explore the role of the new media environment, the current study uses semantic network analysis to identify the policy stakeholders, their related interests and the roles of Weibo, a popular Chinese social media, in the two-child policy discourse. The result shows the existence of multiple stakeholders in the policy discussion. Additionally, eight topics that focus on public and private spheres are detected by cluster analysis of frequent co-occurring words in the discourse, suggesting various types of tension across the Chinese society.

Based on the analysis, the Chinese two-child policy is beyond a relaxation of its preceding policy. While the previous one-child policy remains a historical move in birth control, the significance of the two-child policy has been unfolded by stakeholders' discussions on social media. First, stakeholders' active discussions challenge the conventional policymaking process. Second, tension revealed by the discourse indicates social diversification in China. Third, social media has become an open space for public and private communication.

Thus, in this section, the author discusses the perceived social realities and media development in contemporary China.

5.1 The Role of the State in Policymaking Process

The governance in China is “state-led” (Ye, 2014) that the state has central control over its policy making and implementation, in which stakeholders in other non-governmental sectors may not have a say. However, this top-down policy making model started to be challenged as the opening reforms in China took place. In retrospect, one of the state's most

influential policy, the one-child policy, was intensely criticized by the international community. Voices targeting the leadership put that the policy was a “pat-on-the-head decision”¹⁴ that was resulted from a wishful thinking. Thus, scholars suggest that the government should stop its unscientific way of top-down policy making to use more unbiased strategies to conduct birth control (e.g. Deng, 2015; Wang, Yang, Zhang & Chang, 2016). The emergence of stakeholders and their active conversations in the two-child policy discourse show a change in China’s policy making process. The conventional state-led model has been interrupted and challenged in this process. Contrary to the past when the state overshadowed other non-state actors in the policy process, the emergence of multiple stakeholders in the two-child policy empowers their diverse speech online. With this diversification and amplification of voices on social media, the country’s once strong bureaucratic power has been challenged. The state may no longer stand as the sole decision maker in the country’s policy making, when other stakeholder’s opinions are taken into account.

The discussion of “the legalization of surrogacy” is an example of this. With the existence of stakeholders’ expressions online, the state took two steps to consider different interests related in this process. The first step was asking for opinion. The official media, the People’s Daily initiated a discussion over the legalization of surrogacy, with a rational appeal to the people that women’s infertility may hinder population growth. In this way, instead of making decisions by leadership, the state tried to ask for opinions among the society. Furthermore, when online voices showed strong opposition to this initiative, the state made a second move. In February, 2017, the website of China’s State Council reposted a news article

¹⁴ Deng, Yuwen (2015) “Why Birth Control is a Failed Public Policy?”
<http://www.aisixiang.com/data/87931.html>

from *the China Daily*¹⁵, emphasizing that surrogacy was still prohibited (Wang & Shan, 2017). More importantly, it is clearly mentioned in the article that this article is a response for a “recent public discussion” on surrogacy (Wang & Shan, 2017). This is significant because the public participation in the surrogacy issue has led to government’s attention and reaction. In fact, the way in which the internet opens opportunities for opinion expression and political participation has been recognized by media scholars (Yuan, 2010; Lewis, 2013). Social participation online may play an important role in facilitating policy making in China (Yuan, 2010). Kluver and Banerjee (2005) also point out that the Chinese government has been practicing to be to “more responsive with the population.” As the increasingly diverse and expressive online media provides support for people’s social participation, the two-child policy has become a reflection of how China’s policymaking shifts from a *top-down* model to a more *consultative* model that considers stakeholders’ voices.

Furthermore, as Post (2011) argues, “when who are subject to law believe that they are also potential authors of law,” democracy can be achieved. However, aside from public policy discussion, the stakeholders’ conversations about private issues show a more complex nature of the online discourse. Beyond a manifestation of growing public democracy, the expressions online give us insights into the diversification of the current Chinese society, which is led by a mixture of dynamics in both public and private sphere.

5.2 Multiple actors in society

Research shows that China is under rapid change (e.g., Xu, 2013; Liu, Trubek & Wilkins, 2016). In line with this result, the present study reveals that the Chinese society is becoming increasingly pluralized, as multiple dynamics come into play.

¹⁵ 中国日报, China’s famous official media

The changing dynamics between the country and its people is fundamental in the pluralization. Through the lens of the discourse over the Chinese two-child policy, the once bounded country–citizen relationship becomes more detached. It is not only because the online expressions have challenged the authorities’ policy making, but also, the changing economic condition is creating a new environment for the country and its people to renegotiate their relations.

On one hand, the country’s ambition in continuous economic growth leads to a revision to the population policy to encourage reproduction; on the other hand, people’s improved economic conditions increase their choices and mobility in life, contributing to their indifferent attitudes toward reproduction. As a result, this shows the state’s control over its people is no longer as effective as before. What Adam Smith (1776) called as “invisible hand” that the Chinese government successfully used to manage social production for public good has fallen short in controlling people’s private sphere that is now empowered by their enhanced economic status. Thus, the change in the state–citizen dynamic driven by the economic force contributes to the trend of pluralization in China.

Besides the changing dynamics between the state and its people, at a cultural level, the changing dynamics between individuals and their families also adds to the pluralized climate in the Chinese society. Traditionally, the relationship of the Chinese families and family members are based on patriarchy, which is an ideological system with hierarchical power structure. Thus, family holds power over its members, whereas the family members are obligated to their family (Zuo, 2009). In fact, this patrilineal structure perpetuates and maintains power control over family members even after China’s socialist transformation in 1949 (Zuo, 2009).

However, similar to how people digress from the state control with the empowerment of economic status, the changing dynamics in the familial domain may also be attributed to economic reason. Shown by this study, the disobedience people expressed against familial patriarchy that encourages birth and marriage is a challenge to the deep-rooted filial ideology. When people gain more access to social resource and support, they are more likely to detach from the preindustrial patriarchal system (Zuo, 2009). Thus, even though the familial patriarchy may still exist, the changing dynamics in China's patrilineal ideological system contributes to the pluralization in the Chinese context.

Additionally, the changing gender dynamics provides another perspective to perceive the pluralization in the Chinese society. Shown by the current study, though women's inferior status is clearly reflected in the two-child policy discourse, the noticeable online critique on men's infertility problem indicates a change in China's gender relations. Basically, the socially rooted inferior status of women is greatly represented in the targeted discourse in three ways. First, while age is seen as an indicator of women's social desirability (Perlini, Bertolissi & Lind, 1999), it is also frequently perceived in the two-child policy discourse as a main reason for women's reproductive problems. Also, women's professional capability and economic status are undermined when the discourse focuses on the disadvantages the two-child policy brings to women. They are seen as being incapable in balancing work and childbearing. Thus, when the biased social judgement and denial toward women is observable, the discourse shows that women's inferior status is still profound in China.

However, while women's status is undermined, men's problems are also criticized in the two-child policy discussions. The frequent call for legalization of sperm bank is an

example. Additionally, since this criticism is a major theme in the policy discourse, it reflects equal possibilities for men and women to be blamed for biological problems in reproduction. Thus, this phenomenon of not discriminating women from men can also be comparatively seen as an empowerment of women. Hence, considering women's improved economic status, as well as a growing media space that allows their expression, the shifting gender dynamics reflect a pluralization of gender power in society.

5.3 Social Media as Public Discursive Space

Besides the changes in policy making and power dynamics, the current study also shows a change of diversification in the Chinese society, as well as media environment. Through the lens of media, this diversification in society becomes noticeable. The emerge of 41 main stakeholders in the two-child policy discussions online implies Chinese people's diversifying representation of different roles and interests. Back in the past, the Chinese society once experienced a lack of diversification, as it was divided by the official into "working class" and "ruling elites" to establish dichotomized "class confrontation" for political reasons in the 1950s (Lee, 2017). However, with decades of political and economic reforms since the 1970s, a more diversified society has established, allowing various stakeholders to negotiate their interests in different forms. Thus, in turn, exposing the diverse negotiations among the two-child policy stakeholders, the media environment in China also becomes a diverse space that is more open and tolerant than in the past.

Several scenarios contribute to an open media environment of China. Primarily, this openness is achieved by the online representation of conflicting views. As shown in this study, the exposure of a countrywide disputation over the legalization of sperm banks and surrogacy, the societal leveled discussion over women's childbearing and professional

capacity, as well as the familial conflict over marriage and economic issues show the tolerance of the media that it facilitates various discussion on different levels that involve diverse stakeholders, such as men, women, children, family, specialists and other opinion leaders.

Furthermore, the existence of conflicting voices adds to the media's openness for conversations. Though, the Chinese media had a history of avoiding conflicting voices. In other words, different from it is now, under a state ownership, the Chinese traditional media system in the past supported top-down, linearized communications that work for the government. In fact, referring to the previous literature, before corporatizing of the media units, China's media system was solely state-owned and designated as a channel in disseminating the ruling party's ideology (Lei, 2006; Hearn-Branaman, 2009). Fitted into the administrative system (Li & Liu, 2009), the state-owned media system delivers official voices to its audience for information and education. This one-way communication lack interactions and sufficient participation from audience.

However, after the *Reform of Cultural System* (文化体制改革) that took place in late 2005, some corporatized media emerged in the private sectors as business enterprises (Li & Liu, 2009). For instance, China's most popular social media, such as Weibo, Baidu and QQ are examples of this process. They mainly profit from advertising revenues. Hence, instead of assisted by the government, they belong to the private side of the economy (Li & Liu, 2009). Thus, in terms of ownership, the new media in China are no longer public enterprises as in the old system before reforms (Fuchs, 2016).

Other than being private enterprises, the social media in China has also become a space for the private. Considering the various stakeholders' interests explored in this study – men and women's fertility issues, women's working problems and social status, and the relational issues between different generations – the discourse is involved with private expressions. Does that mean the social media space is now exclusively for private expression? In fact, public discussions are still included in this discourse. For example, the legalization of surrogacy and the sperm banks, as well as the discussions on birthrate after the implementation of the two-child policy, belongs to the public sector of expression. Thus, this study shows that even though the mass media, especially the new media are being honored as public forums for the common good (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016), it is evident that it has now become a space for both the public and the private.

In sum, this study explored the social media discussion on the Chinese two-child policy. The results showed an emergence of diverse stakeholders and their expressions. This discourse has the indication in the Chinese society at policy making, social diversity levels. It also shows that the social media has become a space for the public and the private. Moreover, political and economic reasons may be the ultimate force that drives the changes in social dynamics and virtual spaces.

For future research, the media effect of an open space that is made for both public and the private.

5.3 Limitations

Furthermore, this study mainly has two limitations. The first lies in the search for stakeholders. This study employs semantic network analysis to examine the relationships

between various notions, including the notion of stakeholders, in the two-child policy online discourse. To find the representation of stakeholders, the author has searched the related word nodes in the network. However, this network cannot display all the notions of stakeholders because it is comprised of words of high frequencies. Words of low frequencies that might represent types of stakeholders may not be shown in the network. Thus, it is conceivable that the result of RQ1 does not include all the possible stakeholders. Additionally, while a more accurate way to distinguish different types of stakeholders is to analyze the profiles of the social media users who participate in the policy discussions. However, because of the anonymity of the Weibo platform, it is not likely that researchers can obtain all correct profiles of its users. Therefore, this limitation in the search for stakeholders is restricted by the method used, as well as the anonymous feature of the social media.

The second limitation lies in the data collection. It is preferable to collect all the two-child policy related Weibo posts since the policy's implementation to maintain a higher accuracy of the result. However, the Weibo users' constant manipulation of their posts, as well as the restriction of time and budget in this study has limited the amount of data collected. Consequently, the result of this study might be affected. Thus, future scholars may continue to expand the scope of the data to be collected to enhance the reliability of research. Moreover, even though a few limitations exist, the unique stakeholder perspective, as well as the new model of China's child-bearing research on social media in this study is worth further exploration.

The third limitation is this study's indirect exploration of the stakeholders' opinions via semantic network analysis. Admittedly, survey might be a more straightforward method accessing opinions. However, due to the time and funding constraints, as well as the

unavailability of the stakeholder components, a survey research is not realizable in this study. Though, future research can fill this gap by revisiting a similar topic with surveys and other potential methods.

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