

News Media Representation of China's Family Planning Policy in

China Daily: A Corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

ABSTRACT

China has implemented the universal two-child policy and three-child policy in response to the demographic challenges brought about by the aging population and low fertility rate. The newspaper representation of the policies plays a significant role in the publicity and interpretation of the policies. However, linguistic analysis, especially critical discourse analysis of news articles on China's family planning policy is still lacking, and corpus linguistic approach is seldom used. Therefore, the present study intends to conduct a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis by identifying the topics surrounding the news articles and unveiling the ideological implications embedded in the news articles. 1520 news articles from *China Daily*, the official English-language newspaper in China, were collected and analyzed through keyword analysis and concordance analysis. The findings reveal that three topics: national/regional entity, social identity, and social & economic matters exist in the news articles, with social & economic matters ranks first, followed by national/regional entity and social identity. It is also found that three ideologies, collectivism, gender-essentialism and economic development centered ideology are manifested in the coverage of China's family planning policy. This study sheds light on the ideological underpinnings of the reportage of the policies and how these policies are represented to address the population issues, offering insights into how social and political ideologies are reflected and reinforced in news discourse.

Keywords: family planning policy; corpus-assisted approach; critical discourse analysis; topics; *China Daily*

INTRODUCTION

Population is one of the most important factors affecting economic and social development. As the most populous country with a total population of above 1.4 billion (Office of the Leading Group of the State Council for the Seventh National Population Census, 2021), China has always been attaching great importance to the issue of population. After entering the new century, new population issues have emerged in China, including low fertility rate, skewed sex ratio, rapid population aging, shrinking labor force, etc. (Alpermann & Zhan, 2019). This population situation has become a major concern for the Chinese government (Yang et al., 2022). According to the National Population Census of China, the average annual growth rate of population has shown a downward trend in nearly forty years, from 2.09 in 1982 to 0.53 in 2020 (Office of the Leading Group of the State Council for the Seventh National Population Census, 2021). Besides, the total fertility rate of China has fallen to 1.3 children per woman (ibid, 2021), far below the replacement level (an average of 2.1 children per woman), threatening the sustainable and balanced development of population.

Faced with the tremendous pressures brought about by the low fertility and seriously worsening demographic structure, the Chinese government put an end to its three-decade-long birth control measure and made adjustments of its family planning

policy to the universal two-child policy in 2015 and the three-child policy in 2021 to mitigate the demographic and socioeconomic challenges. However, the implementation of these policies has neither received sufficient response from the public nor achieved expected fertility increase because of people's changing view of family and marriage and their low fertility willingness (Zhang, 2019).

As an important window for the public to get to know the national policy, news reports play a significant role in the publicity and interpretation of the policy and the expansion of the scope of policy transmission. However, news discourse does not represent social realities in a totally impartial way. Instead, what is presented in the news articles is based on certain values and aligns with certain interests (Kim, 2014). News discourse acts as a major channel for influencing, shaping and normalizing "public knowledge and information, beliefs, values and attitudes" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 468) and serve as an indispensable and influential channel for the public to know about the policy.

As the leading official English-language newspaper in China, *China Daily* serves as an important window for China to reach out to the world and for the world to know more about China (Jia, 2002), which is the top priority of English-language newspapers in China (Chen & Wang, 2020). As the most authoritative English-language publication in China, *China Daily* plays a vital role in conveying the political agenda and concerns and reflecting the ideology of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government (Song, Lee & Huang, 2019) to the global community. Therefore, the present study explores how the universal two-child policy and three-child policy are constructed and represented in *China Daily* by conducting a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis.

Corpus-assisted critical discourse studies integrate techniques from corpus linguistics and critical discourse studies to explore the linguistic patterns in large text datasets while applying a critical lens to uncover power relations and ideologies in the socio-political contexts. A corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis of the representation of China's family planning policy in *China Daily* can reveal what message is intended to convey to the audience and potentially offer valuable insights into the underlying ideologies and perspectives around the policy manifested in the news reports. With this in mind, this study intends to answer the following two research questions: (1) What topics are manifested in the news articles on China's family planning policy in *China Daily*? (2) What are the ideological implications of the news articles on China's family planning policy in *China Daily*?

The present study can enrich the study of news discourse from a linguistic perspective on the one hand, and extend the application scope of critical discourse analysis and expand its explanatory power by probing into public policy discourse on the other hand. Besides, the research can also contribute to establishing an equitable and balanced news discourse system in the international community in the era of globalization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, a brief introduction to corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis as well as previous studies on the representation of China's family planning policy in news

discourse are given.

CORPUS-ASSISTED CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The present study is situated within the corpus-assisted discourse study (CADS) (Partington, 2006) by integrating corpus linguistic approach and critical discourse analysis. The corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis characterizes the emphasis on the balanced synergy of methods and theories in corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis (Baker et al., 2008).

The incorporation of corpus linguistic methods into critical discourse analysis is not a new practice. It can be traced back to the mid-1990s, when Hardt-Mautner (1995) suggested integrating the corpus approach into CDA, highlighting its capability to uncover the intricate connection between discourse and power within social and cultural contexts and its potential in revealing how specific discourses, embedded in distinct sociocultural environments, shape social reality and social relationships. Later, the publication of Baker et al. (2008) and Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) marked a new phase in the development of research combining CL and CDA. In these two studies, Baker and his colleagues analyzed a 140-million-word corpus of British news reports about RASIM (refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants) spanning a duration of ten years (1996-2005), and argued for the usefulness of adopting corpus approaches in critical discourse analysis. Following Baker et al. (2008) and Gabrielatos and Baker (2008), a lot of research combining CL and CDA has been done and this methodological synergy has been applied to studies on different topics, such as air pollution (Liu & Zhang, 2018), COVID-19 (Nor Fariza & Adlyn Syahirah, 2020; Yildiz et al., 2022), climate change (Liu & Huang, 2023), etc.

It has been proven from previous studies that the integration of critical discourse analysis and corpus approaches benefits each other, as each compensates for the other's weaknesses. On the one hand, the use of corpus linguistic method enables computational calculations to be performed on collected data, thus ensuring fast and accurate discovery of linguistic patterns which would be hard or even impossible for human eyes to detect. At the same time, it "offers a high degree of reliability and validity to linguistic research" (Baker, 2010, p. 111) and provide entry points for further qualitative analysis (Bayley & Bevitori, 2009). On the other hand, CDA's theoretical foundation enables a thorough and detailed analysis that delves into the social context of discourse.

This study draws on Wodak's discourse-historical approach to critical discourse studies, particularly in its analytical focus on topics, its conceptualization of ideology, and its emphasis on historical and socio-political contexts. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), ideology is hidden in the discourse, and the main task of CDA is to reveal the ideological relations embedded in the discourse. While ideology originates from social structures and power relations, it also reinforces and reshapes the society. It is seen as "a perspective (often one-sided), i.e. a worldview and a system composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, values and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p.25).

CHINA'S FAMILY PLANNING POLICY IN NEWS DISCOURSE

With the change of demographic structure and social development, China's family planning policy has made corresponding adjustments. Researches on the family planning policy from the linguistic perspective are conducted mainly on discourses collected from social media (Yu, Chan & Huang, 2023; Wu, Liu & Yuan, 2021) or news reports (Zhao, 2019; Zhu, 2020), and different analytic methods are adopted to analyze the discourse. Based on the research methods adopted, previous studies on the news coverage of family planning policy can be categorized into three strands: framing analysis, content analysis, and (critical) discourse analysis.

Among the studies concentrating on the news frame of family planning news reports, some focus on one specific newspaper, such as *People's Daily* (Zhu, 2020), while others focus on the comparison of different newspapers (Zhao, 2019). Another category of study devotes attention to the content analysis of news reports on the family planning policy in China. For example, Dai and Jiang (2018) conducted a qualitative content analysis of news reports of two-child policy from three Chinese mainstream news media to show the manifestation of sociocultural and political views about the two-child policy in discourses, shedding light on health care services for women. From a critical perspective, Yang (2015) conducted a comparative critical discourse analysis of news reports on China's population issue in *Time* and *Beijing Review* from 2009 to 2013. Through a multidimensional analysis, it's concluded that differences in transitivity system and modality system as well as reporting mode and news sources existed between the reports in the two newspapers, and these differences were set deliberately to facilitate the ideological needs behind the news.

While these studies have enriched the understanding of news reporting on family planning policies, insufficiencies do exist. First, the data analyzed by some studies are very limited in quantity. Therefore, the results are limited to some extent as the analysis of a small number of text or text fragments cannot be expected to reveal helpful patterns or insights into their frequency or distribution (Stubbs, 1997). Second, among studies which have selected a relatively large number of data, corpus linguistic method is seldom used. As is known, with the support of corpus linguistic analytic tool, computational calculations can be carried out on the data, allowing researchers to quickly read, search and manipulate the texts (McEnery & Hardy, 2012). Therefore, the adoption of corpus linguistic method is useful in conducting the research on family planning issues in news reports.

METHODOLOGY

The current study was posited within corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis to explore how China's family planning policy were presented in *China Daily*, the leading official English-language press of China. It synergized the quantitative corpus linguistic methods and qualitative critical discourse analysis to discover the salient topics revolved around the family planning policy related news articles and reveal the ideologies embodied in these news articles. This section gives a detailed explanation of the research data and procedures.

RESEARCH DATA

To analyze how China's family policy is represented in news discourse, *China Daily*, as the official and most widely-circulated and authoritative English language

newspaper in China (Duan & Takahashi, 2017), was chosen as the source of corpus. *China Daily* serves as a significant source of reflecting the ideology of the Chinese government and the Communist Party of China as well as China's national policies (Song, Lee & Huang, 2019). The target readers of *China Daily* are mainly English-speaking audiences and well-educated elites (Chan & Yu, 2023). News articles on China's family planning policy in *China Daily* are collected from the LexisNexis database, a well-known database involving wide resources ranging from law cases, newspapers, magazines, academic journals to enterprise information. The following search terms were used to query the data within the time span from 29th October, 2015 to 31st December, 2023.

family planning policy OR fertility policy OR child policy OR birth policy OR childbirth policy OR demographic policy OR reproduction policy OR population policy OR childbearing policy OR one-child OR two-child OR three-child OR second child OR third child OR fertility rate OR birth rate OR childbirth OR population growth OR population increase OR population decline OR population decrease OR demographic change OR demographic challenge OR demographic shift

Through searching the above terms, news articles related to China's family planning policy in *China Daily* were collected and a specialized corpus named CFPPC (China's Family Planning Policy Corpus) was built accordingly. The time span was set from 29th October, 2015 because it was on this day that the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee declared the comprehensive implementation of the universal two-child policy, allowing all married couples to have two children without any restriction. This announcement of the universal two-child policy marked the beginning of changes in family planning policies on the national level under the new demographic dynamics. The time frame ended with the date of the author's data collection. The time frame covered the implementation of the universal two-child policy and three-child policy in order to see how the family planning policies under the new demographic landscape was represented in the newspaper reports. The corpus of this study consisted of 1520 news articles, with a total of 35,498 word types and 1,161,282 word tokens, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. General Information of the Data

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of News Articles	130	335	207	129	146	93	171	125	184
Types	8467	15235	14228	11856	12985	7692	10264	9932	10377
Tokens	86148	202433	173864	125472	153285	66754	119849	102751	130726

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

During the data pre-processing stage, all news articles were further scrutinised to ensure

that they were related to the universal two-child policy and three-child policy after being downloaded from the LexisNexis database. Irrelevant or duplicate materials were removed manually. These data were then converted into plain text (.txt) files for the corpus analytic tools to read. Then the unwanted information, such as the publication date, author's name, copyright, byline, length, publication type was removed by the researcher, leaving only the title and body of the article. Subsequently, a tagging process was conducted using TagAnt (2.0.5), a simple freeware tagging tool which can assign part-of-speech (POS) tags to input texts by tagging each word in the news articles with its part of speech, such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc.

After data pre-processing, the data was uploaded to the Antconc software (4.2.0), a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordancing and text analysis. The keyword list tool was used to obtain the keywords. Keywords are words which are “statistically significantly more frequent in one of these datasets when compared against another” (Baker et al., 2013, p. 27), which means that keywords are identified through a comparison of the target corpus and the reference corpus. This comparison is based on an examination of the frequency of words in the target corpus relative to that in the reference corpus to identify statistically salient use of words in the studied corpus. In this study, the British National Corpus (BNC) Baby Edition was chosen as the reference corpus. The BNC Baby Edition is a scaled-down version of the British National Corpus, which is designed to offer a balanced representation of both written and spoken English. The BNC Baby Edition covers fiction, news, academic as well as demographic data, retaining the diversity of genres and registers of the original BNC while being more manageable with about four million words. It is suitable for the current study in that it is balanced, representative yet manageable when considering the fact that CFPPC is a relatively small corpus with a little over one million word tokens.

By using the keyword list tool, the keywords were put together into a keyword list based on their keyness values. According to Scott and Tribble, keyness is “a quality words may have in a given text or set of texts, suggesting that they are important, they reflect what the text is about” (2006, p. 64-65). The higher the keyness score, the more salient the word is. The keyword list offers “a measure of saliency” (Baker, 2006, p. 125) and helps researchers to identify statistically salient lexical items that deserve further analysis. A keyword analysis not only helps identify the aboutness of the target corpus, but also provides insight into the underlying ideologies (Scott & Tribble, 2006). In this study, keyness was measured by the log-likelihood test, with the threshold being set at $p < 0.01$ (6.63 with Bonferroni), as suggested by Gabrielatos (2018), stating that “the threshold is usually $p = 0.01$ at the most” (p. 13). This indicated that there was less than a 1% probability of the results occurring by chance. Another parameter determined was the cutoff point for the minimum frequency of keywords. The set of this parameter was to avoid including words that were identified as key only because of their absence or infrequent occurrence in the reference corpus. The minimum frequency threshold was set at 10 because it was common to set the minimum frequency threshold at 10 (Culpepper, 2009). When describing the frequency of words appearing in the corpus, the study used normalized frequency because it allowed the findings to be presented in a clear and standardized way, thus enhancing the credibility and interpretability of data

and providing a consistent basis for analysis. The base of normalization, in this case, was set as 1,000 words, meaning that the frequency of any word in the corpus was normalized per 1,000 words.

After obtaining the keywords, stop words such as prepositions, determiners, pronouns, question words, etc. (Anis Nadiyah et al., 2021), which carried little semantic meaning and punctuation marks were removed manually, leaving only content words in the corpus. The identification of stop words was based on the default stop word list used for MyISAM search indexes in the MySQL open-source database. Then the top 100 content keywords were collected, based on Pojanapunya and Todd's review which showed that the average top N keywords selected by researchers was about 100 (Pojanapunya & Todd, 2016).

However, relying solely on keyword analysis without considering the context may lead to partial or even incorrect conclusions about their usage or meaning. Therefore, concordance analysis was used to complement the keyword analysis. A concordance shows the "instances of a word or cluster in its immediate co-text" (Baker et al., 2008, p. 279). The qualitative concordance analysis allows researchers to refer to the larger context and incorporate contextual information into analysis, thus enhancing the understanding and interpretation of the data. Besides, an analysis of the concordances of keywords also contributed to the categorization process of keywords into different domains, as the contextual information from the surrounding co-text helped reveal how the keywords were used. Therefore, the examination of keywords, together with concordance analysis, were used to provide useful indications of the topics covered in the news articles and the ideologies behind them.

RESULTS

Based on the analytical procedures explained in the previous section, this section focuses on the analysis of keywords and their concordances for the identification of topics of the news articles on China's family planning policy. This section is divided into two main parts. The first part outlines the findings from the keyword analysis, and the second part presents the categorization of topics and sub-topics through keyword analysis and concordance analysis.

KEYWORDS IN FAMILY PLANNING POLICY NEWS ARTICLES

Following the parameters outlined in the previous section, the top 100 keywords were obtained. Table 2 shows these keywords, ranked by their keyness scores. From Table 2, it can be seen clearly that the word with highest keyness score is *china*, which stands as a proper noun. At the same time, it is also the most frequently occurring word in the corpus. This is not surprising, as these news articles are talking about China's policies and they're collected from the English-language newspaper in China. As a result, it makes sense that the word *china* has the highest saliency and frequency. Through examining its context, the word *china* is mostly used to talk about China's population situation, China's policies, China's socio-economic development, China's initiatives to cope with demographic and socio-economic issues, etc.

Another keyword that is found in the list with no surprise is the word *population*. It ranks second in terms of both keyness value and frequency. It is not difficult to understand that the population situation and issues are discussed in the news reports on

family planning policy. After examining its concordances, it can be observed that the population situation of the country as a whole and in specific provinces or cities are talked about. Besides, the population structure, such as the elderly population, working-age population, migrant population and newborn population, as well as the demographic issues, such as aging population, shrinking population, negative population growth are also discussed to prove the necessity of the implementation of the universal two-child policy and three-child policy.

The word *family* is seen to co-occur with planning, policy and policies which also appear in the keyword list to refer to the family planning policy/policies adopted in China. This also explains the importance of *planning*, *policy* and *policies* appearing in the keyword list. Besides, *family* and *planning* also collocate with words such as *law*, *regulation* and *rule* to refer to the policy itself, as well as with words like *officials*, *authorities*, *staff* and *workers* to denote those involved in the family planning related work.

National, appearing in its two forms, as a proper noun and as an adjective, is observed in the keyword list. When functioning as a proper noun, *national* appears in organization names including *National Health and Family Planning Commission*, *National Health Commission*, *National Bureau of Statistics*, *National People's Congress*, *National Development and Reform Commission*, etc. These organizations or institutions are involved either in the formulation or implementation of the family planning policy and its supplementary measures or in the enumeration of population census. This shows that *national* as a proper noun is used to emphasize the governance and authoritativeness associated with the family planning policy. When *national* serves as an adjective, it usually co-occurs with words like *census*, *security* or *development* to highlight affairs at the national level.

TABLE 2. Topic and sub-topics in family planning policy news

Topics and sub-topics	Keywords	Total normalized frequency
National/Regional Entity		30.867
▪ Area/Country	china, beijing, country, province, cities, rural, xinjiang, shanghai, areas, national, nation, countries, urban, global	19.534
▪ Governance	policy, government, planning, policies, national (NNP), measures, party, xi, system, authorities, commission, cpc, development	11.333
Social Identity		22.601
▪ Age/Sex	child, children, women, elderly, babies	9.279
▪ Family/Relationship	couples, family, families, parents	5.105
▪ Ethnicity/Race/Nationality	chinese, chinese (NNP)	2.401

▪ Profession/Expertise	experts	0.35
▪ Group	people, public, residents	4.369
▪ Individual	wang, zhang, li	1.097
Social & Economic Matters		53.949
▪ Economy/Finance	economic, labor, yuan (NNS), market, economy, income, yuan, enterprises, consumption, products	7.055
▪ Social Services/Welfare	services, education, care, health, medical, maternity, healthcare, leave, demand	7.488
▪ Development & Initiatives	growth, development, reform, improve, efforts, promote, innovation, increase, opportunities, new, quality	10.357
▪ Social Issues	social, challenges, rights, marriage, society, resources, poverty	4.599
▪ Population & Demographics	population, fertility, aging, birth, demographic, age, births,	8.868
▪ Technology & Digital Practices	online	0.306
▪ Documentation	report	0.712
▪ Social & Economic Metrics	percent, year, second, years, high, sector, decades, number, rate	14.564

TOPICS IN FAMILY PLANNING POLICY NEWS ARTICLES

Topics represent what a discourse is written or spoken about (Wodak, 2011) and embody the most important information of a discourse (van Dijk, 2001), meaning that topics represent the thematic focus or core subject based on which discourses are organized. Through examining their concordances, the 100 keywords were grouped into different categories and three topics: *national/regional entity*, *social identity*, and *social & economic matters* were identified. It should be mentioned that the categorization in this study draws on the categorization distinguished in Baker et al. (2013). However, due to the differences in the subject matter of news articles, some categories are not applicable for the current study and other categories need to be introduced to align with the current study. It also should be noticed that the categorization of topics in this study relies more on the contextual meaning of the words rather than their dictionary meaning. The three topics and their sub-topics, together with their related keywords are listed in Table 3. The left column shows the topics and their respective sub-topics; the middle column lists the specific keywords corresponding to the topics shown in the left column; and the right column contains the total normalized

frequency associated with the topics and their sub-topics. Table 3 shows that the topic *social and economic matters* ranks first, followed by *national/regional entity* in second place, while social identity ranks last in terms the frequency of keywords associated with the topic. Regarding the sub-topics, the top 6 are *area/country*, *social & economic metrics*, *governance*, *development & initiatives*, *age/sex*, and *population & demographics*. The sub-topics along with their respective percentages are illustrated in Figure 1. What follows is a discussion of the topics.

TOPIC: NATIONAL/REGIONAL ENTITY

The topic *national/regional entity* includes two sub-topics: *area/country* and *governance*, with a total percentage of 28.74%. As has been mentioned, the sub-topic *area/country* ranks first among all sub-topics, which suggests that prominence are given to the demographic situation, the implementation of the family planning policy, and other affairs of the country as a whole as well as those of specific areas, such as *beijing*, *shanghai* and *xinjiang*.

Example 1: *Maternity leave in Hainan and Henan provinces has increased to 190 days , and women in Heilongjiang and Gansu provinces are expected to enjoy 180 days of leave. Female workers in Beijing, Shanghai and some other provincial regions are entitled to have 128 days off when giving birth. (N_20170710_01)*

This excerpt discusses how the maternity leave is extended in different areas in China after the introduction of the universal two-child policy. As major metropolises in China, Beijing and Shanghai often play a leading role in policy implementation and, as a result, obtain greater attention, which can explain the saliency of these two words in the corpus. From this excerpt, it can be seen that the report introduces the extension of maternity leave as one of the supporting measures of the family planning policy to encourage women to have a second child.

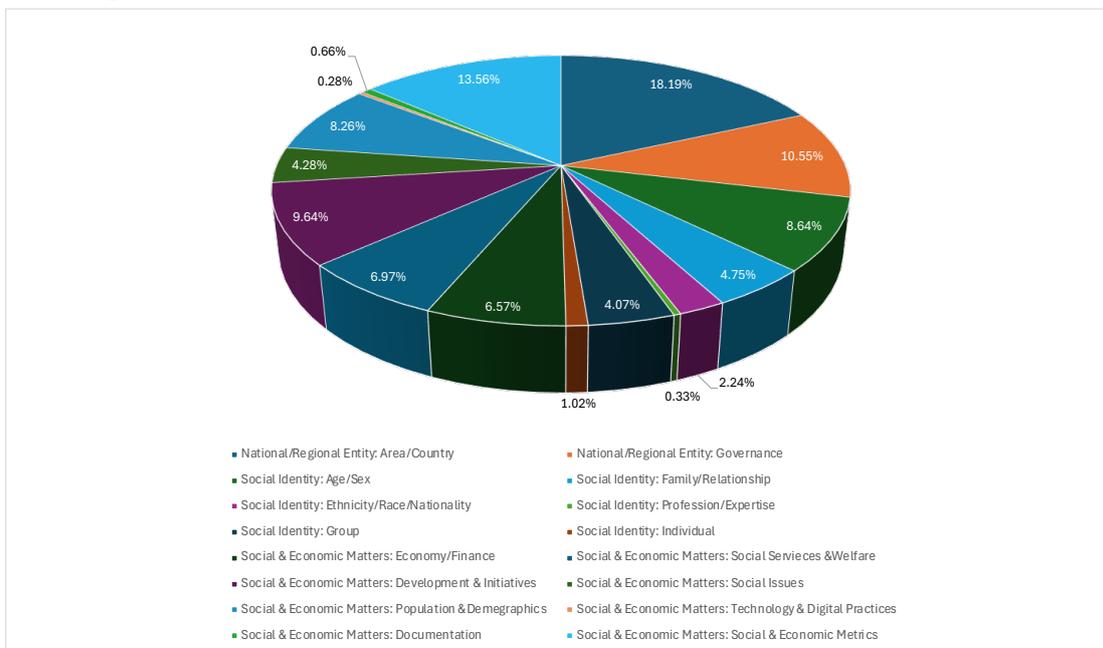


FIGURE 1. Distributions of sub-topics in family planning policy news

Example 2: *Xinjiang was among the regions leading China’s population growth*

over the past decade. According to the regional bureau of statistics, Xinjiang's population increased from 21.8 million in 2010 to 25.8 million in 2020, and in that period the population of members of the Uygur ethnic group rose from 10 million to 11.6 million. (N_20220718_01)

In this excerpt, the population situation of the region Xinjiang is described. Some western countries, particularly the United States, have always been accusing China of depriving its people of human rights, intentionally misrepresenting the human rights situation in Xinjiang and launching baseless criticisms of the Chinese government's policies for the region (Zhu, 2023). The demographic situation in Xinjiang is also a focal point of accusation by some western countries towards China. For example, a report titled China forces birth control on Uygurs to suppress population claimed that “the Chinese government is taking draconian measures to slash birth rates among Uighurs and other minorities as part of a sweeping campaign to curb its Muslim population” (The Associated Press, 2020). The English-language newspapers in China shoulder the responsibility of showing an authentic and comprehensive view of China to the world and letting the world know more about China's policies and development trends (Yu, 2023). Therefore, the demographic situation in Xinjiang is often talked about, thus explaining the high frequency and saliency of the word *xinjiang* in the corpus.

The topic *governance* covers keywords such as *policy, government, party, policies, planning, national* (NNP), *commission, cpc, development* (NNP), etc. Some of these keywords co-occur with each other and denote organization names, as has been discussed in the previous part. The example below illustrates the context of the keyword *xi* under the topic of *governance*.

Example 3: It was announced after the meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee heard a report on major policy measures to actively address the aging population during the 14th Five - Year Plan (2021 - 25) period and reviewed a decision on improving birth policies to promote long - term balanced population growth. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the meeting. (N_20210601)

Xi, representing Xi Jinping, the Chinese president and also general secretary of the CPC Central Party, presided over the meeting which introduced the three-child policy to deal with the aging population. Through showing leadership and authority in the CPC decision making, *xi* in this context demonstrates governance, therefore being placed in the governance category.

TOPIC: SOCIAL IDENTITY

The topic of *social identity* consists of the following sub-topics: *age/sex, family/relationship, ethnicity/race/nationality, profession/expertise, group and individual*. Under this topic, people generally impacted or involved in the family planning policy can be found in keywords such as *child, children, women, elderly, babies, couples, families, parents*, etc. To keep the explanation concise, this topic is illustrated with the concordances of the three keywords with the highest keyness score in this category: *child, children* and *couples*.

Example 4: But the huge costs to raise a child, including the high housing prices

and big expenditures on education, hinder many couples from having a second child. (N_20200117)

The words *child* is categorized under the topic *social identity – age/sex* because it does not only represent a biological age group, but also is connected with its role in society. This example expresses the high expenses of raising a child, such as housing and education, which has an impact on the family’s decision on having a second child. The social importance of a child as a key member of family and a core factor in discussions of the family planning policy is emphasized. The word *couples* fit into the topic *social identity – family/relationship*, emphasizing a social unit, which faces challenges of raising children and paying high housing prices and education expenses and is responsible for making a decision as to whether to have a second child. The word *couple* indicates both a relationship between two persons and a key role in the family planning issues.

Example 5: *And to boost the desire of couples to have children, the government needs to further improve its public services and increase its input in education, medical care and care for the elderly. (C_20190107_01)*

As the plural form of *child*, the word *children* is also classified under the topic *social identity – age/sex*. The word not only manifests the demographic aspect of children, but also shows their social roles and significance as family members. In this excerpt, the measures that should be taken by the government to enhance people’s intention to have more children are suggested.

TOPIC: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MATTERS

The topic of *social and economic matters* account for 50.22% in terms of frequency, ranking first among the three topics. It comprises sub-topics: *economy/finance, social services/welfare, development & initiatives, social issues, population & demographics, technology & digital practices, documentation* and *social & economic metrics*. To avoid a lengthy explanation, discussions on the first five sub-topics are provided.

The sub-topic *population & demographics* consists of keywords such as *population, fertility, aging*, etc. to refer to the population and demographic situation. This is not surprising, since this sub-topic is closely associated with the background of the changing family planning policies, which have been adjusted and implemented to cope with the demographic challenges such as population aging and birth rate decline. Considering this background, it is reasonable for this issue to receive attention in the reports.

Example 6: *Over the next 30 years , the overlapping negative population growth and aging in China will profoundly drag on economic and social development. (O_20221205_01)*

The two keywords *population* and *aging* emphasize the demographic challenges – negative population growth and aging population faced by China and their negative influence on the development of China. This partly explains the motivations for the adoption of the universal two-child policy and three-child policy.

Example 7: *According to the guideline, local authorities will have to improve childcare services with financial support from the central government. And subsidies and tax deductions will be introduced to reduce nursery costs, while steps*

will be taken to improve the quality of nursery services. (C_20220826_01)

The word *improve* is categorized under the topic *development & initiatives*. In this case, it indicates efforts that will be spared by local authorities for childcare services and nursery services. The word *improve* appears twice in this example, focusing on the initiatives to enhance childcare services and nursery services, which in turn facilitates the alleviation of parental concerns and the support for higher birth rate. The word *services* in this example falls under the topic *social services/welfare*. Denoting childcare and nursery services, *services* plays a part as a supporting measures by the government to reduce burdens for families and encourage childbirth.

The sub-topic *economy/finance* comprises keywords such as *economic, labor, market, economy, income, consumption*, etc. This topic indicates the strong interconnection between demographic situation and economic development, reflecting their mutual influence and the country's pursuit for economic growth and development.

Example 8: *The government is now counting on the amended policy to help the population grow in a balanced way and reverse a decline in the work force that could upset future economic growth. (N_20151102_03)*

The word *economic* in this example falls under the sub-topic *economy/finance*. It implies the possible influence of the adjustment of the family planning policy on the growth of work force and economic growth. The word *economic* emphasizes the government's intention to cope with the population decline and facilitate future economic development.

Example 9: *In 2021 , the number of Chinese marriage registrations fell to 7.64 million , from 14.37 million in 2013 ; the marriage rate had decreased from 9.9 per 1,000 people to 5.4 during the period. (O_20230308_01)*

The word *marriage* in this example is associated with the sub-topic *social issues*, which consists of keywords such as *challenges, rights, social, poverty*, etc. The word *marriage* represents an important aspect of social issues, as the decline of marriage is closely linked to falling fertility rate and childbirth, shrinking labor force, aging population, which will have a negative impact on the healthy development of China's population and society.

DISCUSSION

The ideological implications of collectivism, gender essentialism and economic development centered ideology can be found and summarized from the results. First, the topics surrounding family planning policies reflect a collectivist ideology, where the national goals and interests are prioritized. China is generally considered to be based on a collectivist system and ranked high in collectivism (Steele & Lynch, 2013). This can be reflected in that the implementation of the universal two-child policy and three child policy is consistent with the government's initiatives to encourage childbirth to cope with the demographic issues, boost economic growth, and maintain social stability. Keywords such as *party, cpc, authorities* reflect the governance of the central government in implementing the policies to achieve the collective and national demographic, economic and social development, which takes precedence.

Another ideology manifested in the news articles is gender essentialism, which means "the idea that there are certain essential, biologically based or psychologically

universal features of gender” (Hepburn, 2003, p. 107). Under this ideology, the childbearing and parenting burdens are largely allocated to and viewed as the major responsibility of women and women are generally confined to their identities as mothers or caregivers. Women are associated with reproduction through keywords such as *fertility*, *birth*, *maternity* to constrain their primary values to childbearing. Besides, one thing worth noticing is that *man/men* does not appear among the top 100 keywords in the list, despite their supposed role in childbearing and parenting, further suggesting that men are largely left out of these responsibilities in the family planning discourse. This is deeply rooted in traditional China’s patriarchal society, limiting women’s role to their biological function and leaving men unaccountable, reinforcing the notion that women are “naturally” responsible for childbearing, caregiving and household duties and leading to social expectations and requirements for women to balance their work and family. The expectations for women to make a balance of their work and household duties and leaving men out of discussions about their childbearing and family roles shows an unfair imbalance and reinforces injustice for women. With the optimization of China’s family planning policies, supportive measures, such as maternity leave, reproductive health services, childcare care services have been introduced to protect women’s rights, ease their burdens and safeguard the rights of working women. However, the perception of women as the primary actors in childbearing and household matters have not been fundamentally changed, and men have not been assumed an equal role of shouldering these responsibilities. This imbalance may even place a heavier burden on women and pose greater challenges for women in the workplace.

The economic development centered ideology can be manifested mainly through the two sub-topics: *economy/finance* and *development & initiatives*. The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made a decision to shift its focus to the economic development and implement the reform and opening-up policy (Gan & Bao, 2024). Through years of development, China has evolved from a poverty-stricken country into the world’s second largest economy. Since the 18th National Congress, China’s economic development has entered a new phase. Prioritizing economic development is considered the key to solving the challenges faced by the country and the foundation of national prosperity (Shi, 2022). The report of the universal two-child policy and three-child policy are linked to the nation’s socio-economic development.

CONCLUSION

This article places China’s family planning policy in the context of its coverage in China’s English-language newspaper and explores the main topics presented in the reporting and the ideological implications underneath the discourse. Adopting a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis approach, this article examines what information the newspaper intends to convey to its audience. Through analysis, it is found that three major topics exist in the news articles on the family planning policies, including *national/regional entity*, *social identity*, and *social & economic matters*. Among the three major topics, *social & economic matters* is most frequently discussed, showing its significance in the news articles, and *social identity* ranks last in terms of frequency. Probing further into the sub-topics within the three major topics, the study finds that

area/country, social & economic metrics, governance, development & initiatives, age/sex, and population & demographics have gotten the most attention in the news articles, which shows the key messages the newspaper wants to deliver to the public and the ideological underpinnings guiding the reportage.

Three distinct ideologies can be found in the news articles, namely collectivism, gender-essentialism and economic development centered ideology. China is considered to have a collectivist culture, which regards the well-being of the nation as a whole and the national interests and prosperity as the highest priority. The implementation of the family planning policies is viewed as a measure to achieve the holistic development of the country. Gender essentialism is also manifested in the discourse. Through analysis, it can be found that women are frequently discussed and linked with their reproductive and fertility roles while men are largely left out of the discussion of their duties in family and childbearing affairs, which poses a structural inequality between men and women in their participation in the family affairs and workplace dilemma for women employees. It is suggested that men's involvement in household responsibilities should be promoted and measures should be taken to make men fulfill their family and childbearing duties, and these could also be covered and reported in the news media. The economic development centered ideology could also be found in the news reports, which is consistent with China's developmental strategies that highlight the importance of economic development as the core of the national development and prosperity. The coverage of family planning policies reflects the emphasis on economic development and its role as the basis of holistic and sustainable progress. This emphasis conveys the idea that economy serves as the foundation for addressing various social challenges, including the demographic issues, and the implementation of the population polices, in turn, is to promote economic and social progress.

The current research has contributed to the literature on media representation of the family planning policy in China through a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis. However, it's not without limitations. Only one newspaper, *China Daily* was selected as the source of data, focusing on the period covering the universal two-child policy and three-child policy, while excluding the one-child policy due to time constraint. Further research could investigate more newspapers and extend the data collection period.

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