

The Experiment of Eight Million People:

An Investigation into the Process of Designing Social Policies in China



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Abstract:

This project problematizes the general understanding of China's birth planning regime. By providing an analytical history of a two-child policy experiment, it moves beyond previous work to generate granular accounts of key policymaking decisions.

A 'critical junctures' approach centred around what has been called the 'Experiment of Eight Million People' was leveraged to unlock this alternative chronology within China's national fertility policy. The Experiment was a two-child pilot that governed select rural counties for more than thirty years, but it has not yet been systematically examined in the English-language literature. Tools from critical junctures theory, or the idea that explicating possible inflection points builds understanding of policy mechanisms, provide a framework to identify the times when the two-child design appeared most likely to be on the cusp of national expansion. Data from Chinese media, declassified internal government documents, secondary literature, and interviews with elite Chinese academics and policymakers are then leveraged to provide detailed descriptions of the events that predicated the policy outcomes at these points. This process yielded the first English account of the mechanisms that triggered China's change to a national two-child policy in 2015. Finally, results from this analysis were used to hypothesize about which political factors were most central in facilitating or obstructing changes in a Chinese social policy. Beyond Chinese birth planning specifically, the project has implications for the study of political factors enabling or constraining social policy change, welfare policy in East Asian and authoritarian states, and the degree to which population policies serve a social function.

Executive Summary:

This project challenges common understandings of China's birth planning policy. It moves beyond general descriptions of continuous and universal one-child limits to provide a granular history of the 'Experiment of Eight Million People', a long-lived alternative policy in several rural counties that allowed all couples to have two children.

The investigation's analytical framework is drawn from the literature on 'critical junctures'. This theory posits that policy outcomes are largely determined during brief periods of heightened contingency in which choices are made between clear alternative policy paths, and that close attention to the forces determining outcomes at those key points unveils mechanisms in the policy process. To operationalize it, the thesis first crafts a detailed chronology of the national-level birth planning policy and the Experiment of Eight Million People's place within it. This overview moves beyond prior accounts to trace the roots of China's fertility limits to earlier demographic distortions introduced by cyclical policy changes, as well as the political context and elite actor constellations at decision points.

A further step is taken to generate *a priori* 'observable implications' that would presumably characterize a critical juncture in the history of the Experiment of Eight Million People, and a series of candidates are tested to yield the most likely periods. An inductive portion then marshals the evidence from three main sources – Chinese newspapers, internal classified ('*neibu*') government documents, and interviews with academic and policy elites – to reconstruct the events of these times and hypothesize as to the drivers of the eventual outcomes. This effort yielded the first English-language account of the reasons for the 2015 shift to a national two-child policy. When the insights from these various accounts are compiled, a model for the factors determining birth planning policy decisions is proposed.

Beyond the micro-level of identifying the critical junctures in the Experiment of Eight Million People and describing the events within them, the project has larger implications. The findings are leveraged to comment on the political factors shaping China's birth planning policy, as well as their relationship to the drivers of population policies in other East Asian welfare states. On the highest level, the project also has a bearing on the academic understanding of China's implementation and maintenance of an antinatalist regime, and it

advances social policy theory by considering the welfare implications of population policies in an authoritarian context.

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PART ONE:

Framing the Project

‘According to the materialistic conception, the decisive factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a two-fold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite thereto; on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species’

-Friedrich Engels, 1884

Chapter 1 Introduction to the Project

1.1 Introduction

The whole world knows the story.

In 1980, the People's Republic of China and its authoritarian Communist Party, concerned about the prospects for its economic development with a huge and quickly-growing population, settled on a radical solution to address it: imposing a 'One-Child Policy' on its almost one billion citizens. For more than thirty years, despite widespread popular opposition, the state enforced this fertility limit stubbornly and sometimes brutally, changing the character of Chinese families forever. And the policy seemed to work: China's economy took off, shocking the global community with its meteoric rise and pulling hundreds of millions of people out of poverty along with it. Yet eventually there were signs of other problems: too many men, too many elderly Chinese, fewer and fewer new members of the once seemingly endless supply of cheap labour. In response, the government enacted an abrupt about-face in 2015, bringing an end to this singular history of demographic experimentation by unexpectedly intimating that the state would soon begin not only to allow, but to encourage, all couples to have two children.

This is a fascinating fable, an unrivalled tale of development and science and state intervention. But is it true? This thesis will problematize the common narrative, by relating an alternative history within the so-called One-Child Policy in China. It describes the course of the 'Experiment of Eight Million People', a pilot policy that arose in the mid-1980s in response to popular resistance to the one-child limit's implementation and allowed all rural couples to have two children (providing they abide by certain conditions about timing of births). While the experiment was popular in the places where it was implemented and had positive demographic and social outcomes, it was not expanded more widely until the 2015 announcement of the national shift to allowing two children per couple. Since that time,

numerous experts have questioned why the shift didn't come earlier. In fact, there were several moments across the past three decades where these two-child reforms appeared likely to be adopted across China, only to see elites reject it or even scale back the Experiment of Eight Million People's reach to encompass fewer locations.

This investigation will focus especially on these times of unrealized potential to draw conclusions about the way that the Chinese government considers results from experimental areas in shaping the design of national social policies. The answers will move the literature forward into what have been overlapping but under-researched areas to date: how political factors shape China's social policy, the role of antinatalism in East Asian welfare states, and the implications of a country enacting a population policy for welfare reasons. First, however, this Chapter will set the stage by expanding on this popular representation of the One-Child Policy, explaining why the Experiment of Eight Million People is a pivotal case within this context, and highlighting its relationship to unresolved questions in the policy studies literature.

1.2 The Myth of the 'One-Child Policy'

The version of China's experience related above is not wholly incorrect, but it is heavily oversimplified. What is undeniably true is that the population policy of the People's Republic of China was unprecedented in its stringency and longevity. As such, this thesis will reject the official translation of the Mandarin phrase *jihua shengyu* as 'family planning' for the more appropriate 'birth planning'¹. The distinction is not purely pedantic, because it captures the fact that China's policy was fundamentally different from the discretionary limitation of family sizes associated with the term family planning. China's policy was instead a:

¹ The one exception to this rule will be when referring to the state bodies responsible for designing and implementing the policy (the National Family Planning Commission in its various forms). Because these are official entities, their official English translations will be used.

Chapter 1

Distinctive revolutionary concept... that human reproduction, like economic production, could and should be organized rationally through state intervention and administration; that childbearing, like grain production, should and could be regulated according to state need and state plan (White 2006, p.7)

Yet besides this agreement with the framing of China's birth planning period as unique and influential in China's development path, very little of the pat summary above is accurate.

There are broadly three oversights inherent in this relation of events that warrant discussion.

First, the One-Child Policy at no time required all Chinese citizens to have only one child. Even in the early 1980s, when official zeal concerning the implementation of fertility limits ran the highest, members of China's 55 ethnic minority groups (who represented about eight percent of the total population) were exempt from birth planning limits (Retherford et al. 2005). Starting in 1984, after official acknowledgement that China was home to a category of people whose 'practical difficulties (*shiji kunnan*)' rendered it unrealistic for them to have only one child, there has been a varied patchwork of shifting exceptions over time

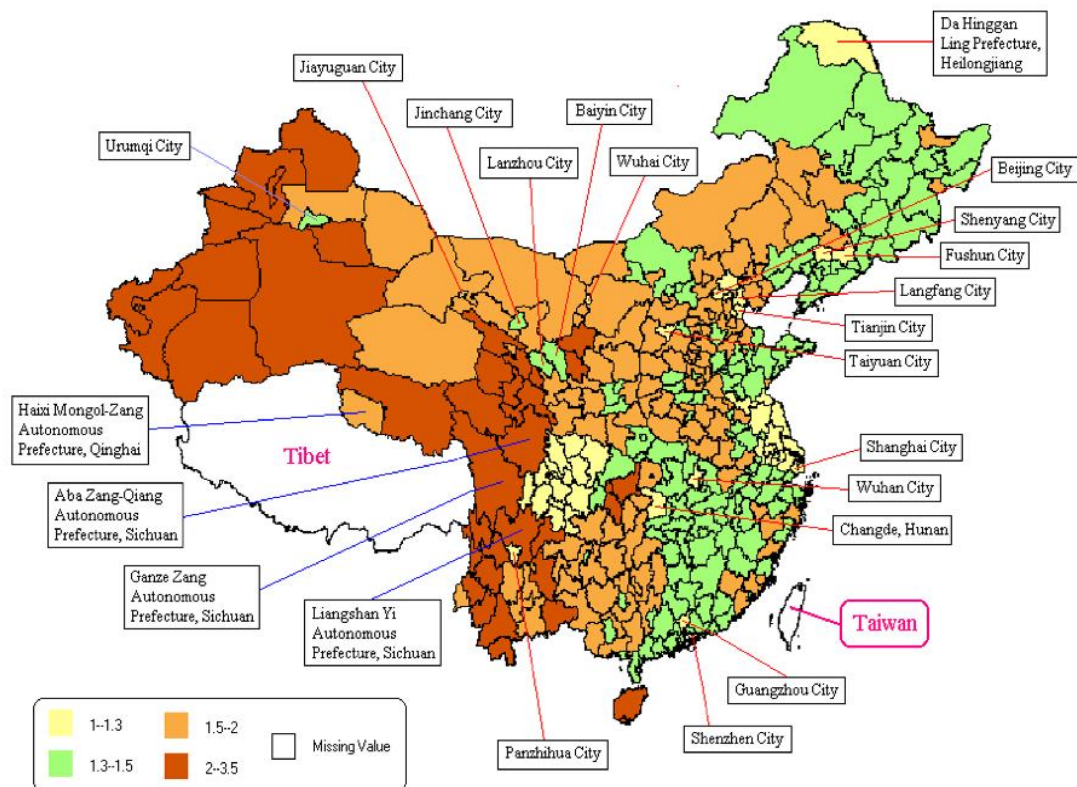


Figure 1.1: A Map of Different Fertility Policies across China, early 2000s (Gu et al. 2007)

(Greenhalgh 1986; Settles et al. 2013). Indeed, some have estimated that by 2000, less than half of Chinese couples were required to limit themselves to one child, and these were largely urban people on China's eastern seaboard (Bristow 2013). This is not to say, however, that all the exceptions were normatively 'better' than a one-child rule: for instance, the widespread one-and-a-half policy in which couples whose first child was a girl could have another baby has been cited as a main driver of China's abnormally high sex ratio at birth² (Attané 2009; Basten 2012; Murphy 2003).

Second, the policy regime was not constant; rather, there were many adjustments to birth planning policy at different times in its history. Just as the exceptions for the second child shifted as time went on, so did the institutions responsible for the policy and its methods of enforcement. The central bureau overseeing birth planning began as a subsection of the health administration, then moved to an independent ministry in 1981, was rebranded as the National Population and Family Planning Commission in 2003, and finally came full circle back to the National Health and Family Planning Commission in 2013 (Xinhua 2013b). Each time the structure shifted, so did the policy's implementation, as well as the governing philosophy of enforcement. At the beginning, execution was target-based and often strayed into direct state intervention, but over time there was movement towards a monetary incentive system and eventually a 'Quality of Service (*youzhi fuwu*)' regime (Short et al. 2000; Kaufman et al. 2006; Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005). These changes reflect the different zeitgeists of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter 'CCP') throughout its reign, and analysis can provide insight into the web of incentives and alliances that undergird seemingly monolithic Chinese governance.

² The sex ratio at birth (SRB) is defined as the number of male babies born for every 100 female babies (World Bank 2015a). A normal ratio is considered to be somewhere between 103 to 105 males per 100 females, a biological reality due to the fact that male foetuses and babies are somewhat more likely to die from disease; however, China's SRB is among the highest in the world, with observations above 120 (UNICEF 2015).

Finally, the 2015 shift to a national two-child policy was neither unexpected nor abrupt. In fact, close watchers of the Chinese population policy had been noting a gathering of momentum since the Xi Jinping-Li Keqiang³ government came to power in 2012. While the first sign was the re-combining of the Ministry of Health and the National Population and Family Planning Commission, the largest indication was the enactment of a national ‘*dandu*’ policy in 2013, which allowed any Chinese couple in which at least one member was an only child to have two children (Bai 2013; Basten & Gu 2013). Because the response to this loosening fell far short of official estimates of an extra one to two million births, with less than 15 percent of eligible couples applying for a second-child permit, there was speculation that a further loosening was imminent (Basten & Jiang 2014). After the shift, experts have begun arguing that the Chinese state will move further and implement explicitly pronatalist policies in some form to encourage Chinese couples to take advantage of the loosening and raise low birth rates (Attané 2016). Each of these observations may be interesting, but taken together they still do not illustrate the full insufficiency of the overly simplistic understanding of China’s birth planning policy. To do that would require a full investigation into one of the alternative regulations that operated under the umbrella of the national birth planning policy, and that is the aim of the remainder of this project.

1.3 The Experiment of Eight Million People: Why Look Here?

The basic facts about the Experiment of Eight Million People render it particularly key, both because the Experiment further complicates many preconceptions about Chinese birth planning and since it offers a new lens for examining several outstanding theoretical questions. What is now known as the Experiment of Eight Million People began in a series of rural counties in the mid-1980s then called the ‘late marriages and late births plus spacing

³ Throughout the document, the Chinese naming convention of putting the family name before the given name will be used for all Chinese-speaking people. All other non-Chinese names will be written in the traditionally Western first name-last name format.

(*wanhun wanyu jia jiange*)⁴ policy. Its experimental design squared the circle of Chinese couples' desire to have more than one child and the state's wish to dramatically decrease fertility by relying on a compounded tempo effect: by requiring couples to marry later and wait longer between their first and second births, it slowed population momentum while also easing policy enforcement (Gu & Wang 2009). Although the number of rural counties that implemented the policy and tracked its results changed over time, there were four locations – Yicheng (in Shanxi Province), Jiuquan (in Gansu), Chengde (Hebei Province), and Enshi (in Hubei) – where it was maintained across the entire birth planning period. Because the combined population of these counties was so large, a group of demographic advocates dubbed the pilot 'The Experiment of Eight Million People' in the early 2000s.

Like Chinese birth planning in general, the path from 1984 to the present was not a linear one for the Experiment. As the national policy ebbed and flowed, so did the attention of the central leaders to these rural counties, and the efforts of internal advocates to bring wider change in the birth planning regime. The CCP government has always relied on loosely controlled local-level policy pilots to test the outcomes of alternative policy designs before national implementation (Heilmann 2009; Perry & Goldman 2007), and there were times when sufficient interest coalesced around the 'late marriages and late births plus spacing' locations to bring them to the national agenda. For instance, in 1988, there was serious discussion about making this policy design the national rule for rural areas, before a decision was made in favour of the 'one-and-a-half' policy that has since upset the Chinese sex ratio at birth (Yi 1989). Especially after the turn of the century, when a group of Western-educated Chinese demographers seized on the experience of Yicheng, Jiuquan, Chengde, and Enshi as evidence to convince the CCP to change the birth planning policy, there are accounts of discussions surrounding the possible expansion of the pilot design as a step to full policy

⁴ This project will give *Hanyu pinyin* translations of Chinese terms and titles to ease the search for Mandarin documents and phrases. In keeping with international standards, tone marks will not be shown.

liberalization (East-West Center 2005). Yet until the shifts in 2015, these changes did not come to fruition. Why was this the case? This project will provide an answer to this question that is valuable not only in understanding this history, but also in unpacking the dynamics of China's birth planning policy and in understanding other antinatalist regimes throughout the region.

1.4 East Asian Comparisons

Although it must be stressed that no other country in the world has undertaken a birth planning policy comparable to China's in its scope, stringency, and temporal span, antinatalism was not unique among the developmentalist welfare states of East Asia in the second half of the 20th century (Robinson & Ross 2007). Sparked by their shared reality of large populations at low levels of education and income, the governments of South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Taiwan all instituted state policies designed to decrease population growth starting between 1950 and 1980 (Tsui 2013). Again, these were largely voluntary initiatives focused on education and propaganda, contraception provision, and monetary incentives rather than the direct parity limits that the CCP imposed on the Chinese populace (S. Lee 2009; M. Lee 2009; Peng & Wong 2010), but their results were astounding. Whereas it took most Western states over 150 years to complete the 'Demographic Transition' from a high fertility and high mortality population structure to a modern regime of nuclear families with low fertility and low mortality (Coale 1984; Kirk 1996), in East Asia, most nations saw their fertility fall below the replacement rate in less than 40 years (although Japan followed a somewhat different trajectory, as shown on the graph) (Feeney 1994). Figure 1.2 shows the comparison visually:

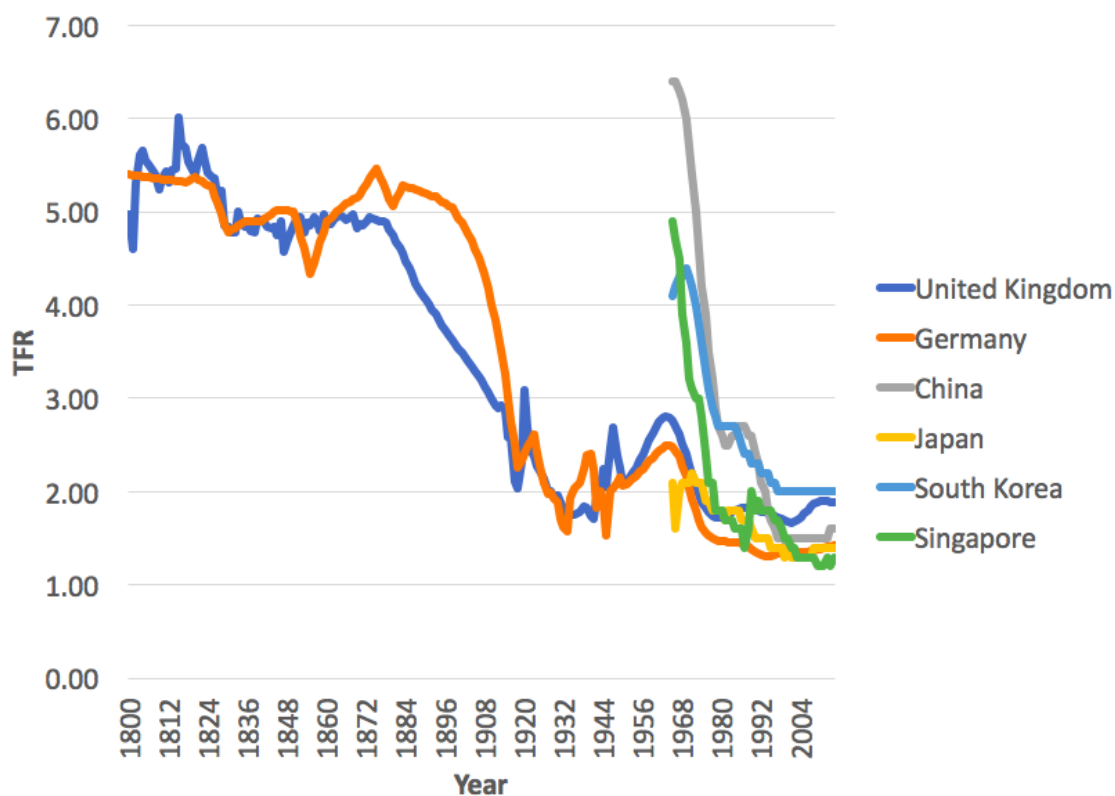


Figure 1.2: The Fertility Transition in England and Germany versus East Asia
(data from Roser (2016); World Bank (2016a))

In the short run, this drop in fertility and therefore dependency was a boon, as the large proportion of the population in the labour force contributed to the low-cost workforce that sparked rising incomes – the ‘demographic dividend’⁵ (Bloom et al. 2003; Lee & Mason 2006). But recently, growing awareness of rapidly-accelerating ageing and the spectre of future population decline has spread across the region. As such, a growing number of East Asian states have begun a policy shift away from antinatalism and toward pronatalist policies to encourage their populations to move beyond the lowest-low levels of roughly one child per woman (Jones 2009). Comparing China’s experience to that of other countries in the region is valuable to this project for two main reasons. First, what is known about the mechanisms by which other East Asian states transitioned from antinatalist to pronatalist population policies

⁵ Not all demographers agree with the theory of the ‘demographic dividend’. Dissenters have argued that the greatest determinant of whether or not productivity and income increase during the fertility transition is the growth in education among citizens, and therefore, ‘a substantial portion of the demographic dividend is an education dividend’ (Crespo Cuaresma et al. 2014, p.299).

can provide grounding for analysing China's trajectory to this point and the likelihood of a move towards encouraging more births in the future. And second, this analysis offers an opportunity to revisit the underdeveloped social policy literature on East Asian welfare states, which largely ignores the family except for vague references to traditional Confucian values absolving the state from responsibility in providing family assistance to the elderly (Unger & Chan 1995; Goodman et al. 1998). Could it be that an unacknowledged facet of welfare developmentalism was this pattern of reaping benefits from the demographic dividend and then facing the costs? This question will be considered in depth as a theoretical contribution of the project to the understanding of social policy in East Asia.

1.5 Chinese Social Policy, Chinese Population Policy

Besides the impact on the literature surrounding East Asian welfare states, the answers to the questions about the Experiment of Eight Million People also have bearing on the nascent scholarship of China's welfare state. While some work has been conducted on the degree to which China is a developmental welfare state (Baek 2005; White 1998; Ringen & Ngok 2012), and there are factual accounts of the CCP's efforts to extend its social safety net through recent pension expansions, health insurance provision, etc. (for overviews, see Baehler & Besharov 2013; Xiong 2009; Ngok & Zhu 2010), the field in general is underdeveloped. Specifically, there have only been a few investigations of the politics involving applying China's policy experimentation model to social policy initiatives, and those have come to conflicting conclusions that spread across the realms of institutional, ideational, and interest-based mechanisms (Béland & Yu 2004; Frazier 2010; Shi 2006; Wong 1994). By laying out the state of this field of inquiry and then considering whether the results of this project suggest that further inquiry into institutions, ideas, or interests will be most valuable, a greater understanding of the nexus of Chinese policy experimentation and social policy design will be achieved. Finally, the greatest unanswered question concerning

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China's long experience with birth planning is the degree to which a population policy can serve a social policy function, and the implications of that dual mandate.

China's 'population policy' – that is, its 'specific program(s) through which governments seek to influence, directly or indirectly, demographic change' (Demeny 2010, p.2) – was designed to manipulate citizens' fertility, and it was couched in specifically social welfare language. These direct interventions into what is often considered the private sphere of marriage and childbearing may be politically unsavoury in a liberal democracy, but it should be noted that in most of these contexts, these interventions were advocated on traditional social policy grounds. China's forty year experience of birth planning is perhaps the archetypal example: the government often emphasized that parity limits were 'an important step in giving support to the development of poor areas to alleviate poverty by promoting family planning' (White Paper 1995), and were intended to 'break the cycle of poverty leads to more births, which leads to more poverty' (Gu & Wang 2009). Yet such a construction raises numerous issues about the relationship between social policy and social control in autocratic states and ultimately begs the question: what does it mean when a government tries to alleviate poverty by preventing the poor from being born in the first place?

These considerations may appear to be specific to authoritarian states with direct fertility policies, but recently, there have been parallels of these same government-led efforts to manipulate birth rates with the advent of so-called 'family policies' around the world. Granted, these initiatives differ from the more extreme measures of the past. The most common designs are subsidizing or otherwise incentivizing contraceptive use on the antinatalist side (as has been seen in sub-Saharan Africa (Jaffe 1974a; Lopoo & Raissian 2014; Patel et al. 2015)), or providing favourable maternity leave and child tax subsidies on the pronatalist front (as is becoming common across Europe (Chesnais 1996; Kalwij 2010)). Yet the goals of these interventions remain inherently the same: to incentivize individual

couples to align their fertility behaviours with the state's desires for its optimal demographic future. The fact that the efficacy of these efforts appears to be inconsistent is beside the point (Hoem 1990; Bonoli 2008). It is still true that there are many countries attempting to encourage families to subsume their childbearing to some conception of national interest or social good. As such, investigating the drivers of China's population policy in the ways it was conceived as a matter of social welfare could hold insights for these experiences and the theory surrounding them as well.

1.6 Project Design and Rationale

As this Introduction has suggested, the merits of this project operate on several planes, ranging from the empirical to the theoretical. The investigation will first utilize a critical junctures framework to lay a solid contextual foundation and then focus tightly on the periods along the course of the Experiment of Eight Million People when policy change seemed most likely. By doing so, it will elucidate determinants for the outcomes at the important points throughout the history and highlight the political factors that shaped results across the different moments. These answers will then be leveraged to comment on the underlying questions of the thesis, which touch on outstanding theoretical questions in several respects. To clarify this set of aims, the research questions for the project have been disaggregated into three groups: the micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level questions. The micro-level questions are the ones that will be directly answered by the empirical work:

- **What were the critical junctures in the Experiment of Eight Million People?**
- **What happened within each of these junctures?**

These questions reveal the reliance of this investigation on 'critical junctures theory', or the notion that historical processes are largely determined during relatively short periods of heightened contingency. The selection of the critical junctures method for this project is explained below. On a different plane are the meso-level questions, which draw from these answers to comment on related questions from the social policy literature. These questions

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will form the focus of the literature review, and their answers will constitute the bulk of the

Discussion Chapter:

- **What were the most important factors that shaped the Chinese birth planning policy process?**
- **Were the reasons for policy stasis or change similar to the trajectories of population policies in other low-fertility East Asian contexts?**

Finally, the high-level questions underpin the project by situating it at the junction of several pressing and interdisciplinary questions. The macro-level questions are:

- **Why did China implement and maintain a strict antinatalist policy?**
- **What welfare function do population policies serve (in an authoritarian context)?**

It will obviously be impossible to settle these particular issues definitively after this project, but considering the findings' implications for them can advance the literature another step towards an eventual answer. In doing so, this project's value will be once again reaffirmed.

Although the method undertaken to answer these questions is described in depth in Chapter 4 (pages 116 to 123), it is useful to comment briefly here on the selection of critical junctures theory for the project's analytical framework. The underlying research questions about Chinese social welfare experiments and the progression of alternative birth planning policies could naturally be addressed in multiple ways, so three methodologies were considered: critical junctures theory, process tracing, and narrative history. Narrative history was deemed too wide-ranging to allow space for consideration of the theoretical areas of interest: the pilot policies stretched across 35 years and many counties, so a comprehensive narration would far exceed the space constraints of a dissertation even without addressing the social policy literature. The adjudication between process tracing and critical junctures was more complex, however. Indeed, the initial intention was to frame the project as a process tracing investigation. Yet two realities made critical junctures theory ultimately more appealing. First, as a deep understanding of the various sources developed, it became clear that there were a few relatively short times that largely determined overall outcomes. Second, while the central government data collected for the project was varied and exceptionally rich,

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sources at the local level were limited, which precluded rigorous triangulation of data for the early stages in the process of the Experiment of Eight Million People as a whole. As a result, a turn to critical junctures theory tightened the focus of the project, by both intensifying emphasis on the few times where the most meaningful change occurred and giving greater weight to the most important point in the process, right at the cusp of central-level endorsement of the policies.

Critical junctures theory itself has only come into widespread use in the past 25 years, so it has not been fully standardized, and there are still multiple ways in which it is operationalized for policy investigations (Collier & Collier 1991; Boogaerts et al. 2016; Hogan 2006). Although the differences between the various strains of thought are complex and covered in depth in Chapter 4, the essential differentiating factor is the degree to which an investigation emphasises deductive or inductive elements (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007). On the extremes, some scholars conduct traditional historical investigations and only afterwards posit the existence of a critical juncture, while others formalize a set of quantitative indicators they hypothesize would characterize a juncture, assign numeric values to them, and calculate the presence or absence of criticalness. Each of these poles exposes a project to serious oversights, and this investigation will instead strike a balance between induction and deduction. It accepted Hogan and Doyle's (2007) contention that testing a series of *a priori* 'observable implications', or attributes that would characterize a critical juncture, allows for the narrowing of likely time periods. Then the project built upon this deductive process by inductively investigating each of the likely periods rigorously, and only afterward were the times that embodied the aspects of contingency, institutional loosening, and capacity for change declared critical junctures. This way, critical junctures theory was used as 'a basis for cutting into the seamless flow of history' (Mahoney 2001, p.8), while still maintaining a high level of analytical rigour and transparency.

In general, this thesis was successful in answering each of these queries to the degree that can be expected. For the micro-level questions, it followed the approach of formalizing *a priori* observable implications to isolate periods likely to constitute critical junctures, which identified the years 1984, 1988, 2004, and 2015 as the time periods in the Experiment of Eight Million People that merited further investigation. Each of these possible junctures was described in detail, using a combination of insights from Chinese media, internal government (*'neibu'*) documents, elite interviews, and secondary literature in Mandarin and English. The insights from each period were compiled, and the general factors identified as most vital in predicting the outcomes were threefold: the degree to which advocates could leverage their 'channels' to political elites to influence the policy agenda, the interpretation and problematization of China's contemporaneous demographic situation, and whether or not the institutional inertia of the family planning policymakers could be overcome. These factors were formalized as a model, the tenets of which were then compared with other East Asian experiences and found to be similar in character but distinctive in degree: because the population situation in China was considered so vital and the infrastructure enforcing it so vast, change was slower in coming than in other states. This finding was therefore added to the litany of reasons for China's birth planning policy, and considered in light of the intersection of population and social policy.

1.7 Roadmap of the Thesis

This project will proceed in four parts, which are divided into ten Chapters. The remainder of Part One, comprising Chapter 2, will complete the foundation for this project by providing the remaining context necessary to situate the research questions within the canon. This will be completed through a thematic review of the literature relevant to the meso-level and macro-level research questions. Part Two, consisting solely of Chapter 3, will craft an in-depth chronology of the Chinese birth planning policy and the Experiment of Eight Million

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People, tracing its roots back to the CCP's shift away from its original pronatalism and through the numerous changes in the population regime over time. By lending special attention to the way that China's demographic situation, its institutions, and the relevant actors shaped the population policy at key points in time, this overview will move past prior histories of the birth planning policy to provide detailed context for the further analysis of the most crucial points along its course.

Part Three will relate the findings from the in-depth empirical work conducted with the media sources, *neibu* documents, and elite interviews. First, Chapter 4 will discuss the literature on critical junctures theory in more detail, and argue that a thorough analysis of key points across the history of the Experiment of Eight Million People is the best way to bring the political factors that determined its outcomes to light. It will then draw from a new strand in the literature that increases transparency in the selection of critical junctures to combat confirmation bias, by formulating a series of observable implications that would presumably accompany a critical juncture and then testing multiple possible moments. The remaining four Chapters of Part Three will discuss each of the selected junctures in turn. Chapter 5 returns to the beginning of the various pilot counties that came to be known as the Experiment of Eight Million People in 1984, to examine the events that triggered their genesis. Chapter 6 analyses the competition between the late marriages and late births plus spacing and the one-and-a-half child policies for expansion across rural China in 1988, and Chapter 7 traces the central response to the submission of the first policy proposal by the advocacy group in 2004. Finally, Chapter 8 describes the recent upheaval in the birth planning policy and highlights the factors that led to the final repeal of the focus on promoting one child per couple in late 2015.

The final portion, Part Four, first pulls together the various insights from the critical junctures in Chapter 9 to discuss the most important political factors that predicated the

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outcomes of the Experiment of Eight Million People. The Chapter then steps back to consider the implications of these factors for the understanding of social policy governance in China: how they are related to past work, how they can be understood as a model, and what directions they suggest would be fruitful for future investigations. Chapter 10, the conclusion, provides a cogent summary of the findings of this project and their implications for the study of Chinese social policy. Then, it continues on to comment on the ways that these answers advance the literature surrounding the macro-level questions about the general understanding of China's antinatalist experience, its future, and the implications of a welfare characterization for population policy. Before proceeding to the answers, however, the project's research questions first need to be explicated, and this is the aim of Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This project is a fundamentally interdisciplinary effort to push the literature into a previously overlooked empirical area, so a systematic review or simple overview of past work on China's birth planning regime is incommensurate with its aims and would be impractical to operationalize. Instead, this Chapter will situate the macro-level and meso-level research questions by reviewing the areas of social policy, China studies, and political science theory that touch on and surround them. Starting at the highest level, Section 2 will begin by relating the small body of literature that questions the nature and implications of an overlap between population policy and social policy. Section 3 will take a wide-angle view of theory surrounding China's welfare state by tracing its relationship to three strains of thought: explanations of welfare state emergence, the concept of East Asian welfare developmentalism, and the existing work on authoritarian social policy. Section 4 positions the discussions about Chinese policy experimentation as they relate to ideas of the 'China model' or 'Beijing Consensus', and then proceeds to lay out what is known about the process by which policies move from local-level pilots to national law in the People's Republic of China (hereafter 'PRC'). The next portion provides a touchstone for the empirical discussions of experimental obstructions by highlighting the scattered investigations that have previously been conducted on both the difficulties of scaling up social policy pilots within China and known delays in transitioning away from antinatalist policies in other East Asian states. Finally, the conclusion of the Chapter will summarize the importance of this project's contribution to these various strains of thought and transition into the empirical investigation that constitutes Part 3.

2.2 Population Policies, Social Policies

At its broadest, this project can inform an area that has been investigated empirically but not fully situated theoretically: the nature and implications of the relationship between

population policy and social policy. Although ‘population policy’ has been defined in several different ways, perhaps the most precise description is ‘specific program(s) through which governments seek to influence, directly or indirectly, demographic change’ (Demeny 2010, p.2). Attempting to demarcate social policy is a rather more treacherous matter: the classical definition is usually along the lines of ‘deliberate interventions by the state to redistribute resources amongst its citizens so as to achieve a welfare objective’ (Baldock et al. 2007, p.xxii), but this is often problematized, especially with regard to the terms ‘state’, ‘redistribute’, and ‘welfare’. At the very least, however, it can be said that ‘social policy and population policy proper are inextricably confounded’ (Demeny 2012, p.349), because a state’s social policies directly and indirectly delineate the contexts in which its citizens are being born, migrating, or dying. With regard to fertility specifically, which is the aspect of demographic change with which this thesis is most concerned, it is useful to remember that ‘public state intervention into family matters, through different kind of legal norms concerning marriage, filiation, inheritance, schooling obligations, working age and so forth, however, has a much longer and broader history’ than even many other well-known welfare policies like pensions and health insurance (Saraceno 2011, p.1).

Yet despite the fact that defining these two concepts and acknowledging that they are deeply intertwined is well-supported by the literature, this only scratches the surface of the myriad issues that such an acknowledgment brings up. This is especially true in the context of population policies centred on fertility since the 20th century. And before these issues are elucidated, it is worth re-iterating that examples of these state fertility policies spread far beyond China. They range from abortion campaigns in Romania (Stanoiu 2000) to the strong pronatalism in inter-war Germany (Lilienthal 2009), from the general embrace of antinatalist family planning regimes across East Asia (Robinson & Ross 2007) to the directly pronatalist interventions dubbed ‘family policy’ in Europe (Gauthier 2007a), and from the poverty

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alleviation/birth control campaigns in America (Chilman 1973) to the targeted attempts at pronatalism among the upper classes in Singapore (Straughan et al. 2009). Each of these policy efforts differed slightly in degree and design, but it can be generally said that they all raised issues about the appropriate scope of government intervention in the ‘private’ sphere of family, the nexus of social policy and social control, and the efficacy of government incentives to alter individual fertility behaviour.

In both feminist and social policy literature, there is often a strong divide drawn between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ spheres, in which the home and the family are construed as decidedly private, while state intervention should be delimited to the public realm (for an overview see Wyness 2014; Lewis 2006; Neyer 2011). As such, with respect to population policy, there will always be those who argue ‘that government’s sole proper function in this domain is to help the economy accommodate the macrodemographic results of microdemographic decisions and to ease social problems that might result from such decisions, notably through social policies affecting income distribution’ (Demeny 1986, p.338). Yet especially with regard to developing countries and families in poverty, there have been attempts to frame this breach of the private realm as aligning with citizens’ desires, or occasionally as contributing to the emancipation of women from their traditional roles outside of the public sphere (Jaffe 1974b; Hoem 2008; Razavi 2011; Schultz 2009). In addition, there are others who note that, whether it is the direct intention or not, all social policies have an impact in the private sphere, including structuring the incentives for fertility, so a closer examination of the mechanisms and extent to which this occurs would allow for a more fruitful discussion of the larger issue (Lopoo & Raissian 2014; Gauthier 2007b). And finally, the most nuanced interpretation of this problem concerns the voluntariness of the policy: it has been argued that if population policies are structured solely around providing couples with the tools to alter their fertility behaviours as they themselves see fit, then this is not an

imposition and indeed helps to ensure that relations in the private realm are more equitable (Tsui 2001; Westley et al. 2010).

This question of voluntariness is closely related to the issue of social control, which although a fuzzy concept, can most broadly be defined as ‘the capacity of a social group to regulate itself’ (Janowitz 1975, p.82), or, in the study of social policy, the degree to which a state’s welfare policies shape the self-regulation of different groups in society (Higgins 1980). It is a wide umbrella for a far-reaching swath of research (see for example Harrison & Sanders 2014; Chamlin et al. 2007), and as a result, it is unsurprising that the concept has been co-opted into explaining China’s ability to implement such a strict population policy for its citizens:

Probably the most impressive characteristic of the Chinese social structure is its level of social control...consequently, the welfare of the individual is viewed as a fundamental concern of the Chinese social system. Therefore, it becomes the society’s responsibility to enact uniform social policies which are aimed to help the individual become more healthy and productive (Roberts 1980, p.28).

Yet most studies that address population policy do not relate it to the concept of social control, and this seems to be a major lacuna. After all, if a state’s degree of provision of birth control or incentives to have more children can truly shape their fertility intentions (as mentioned above), is this not an instance of social control at the overlap of social policy and population policy? This demarcates another territory for fruitful exploration in the future.

The final outstanding question in this realm is related to whether state intervention through population policy truly can shape fertility, and if so, to what degree. This question has been investigated widely, although it is of course subject to many practical constraints: for instance, reliable data is difficult to come by, and so many factors are confounding that analysing one small part of such a complex issue can be impossible (Gauthier 2007b; McDonald 2008; Merli & Smith 2002; Bonoli 2008; Chesnais 1996; Kalwij 2010). After all, the debate becomes much different if it is found that the cultural context of a society or other aspects like religiosity have a larger effect on the birth rate than government intervention, and

many of the questions above require a calculation of the benefit to society in order to determine whether the moral or political cost is worthwhile (Castles 2003; Demeny 2012). Because this question is still at best contextually dependent and at worst unknowable, further discussions can only take an exploratory tack (Grant et al. 2006). At the conclusion of this project, however, these questions will be re-visited in light of the findings of this project. It is then that one of the most difficult macro-questions underpinning this project can be advanced a step towards a final answer: what does it mean if states move beyond redistributive responses to poverty as a social ill by trying to prevent the poor from ever being born in the first place?

2.3 Social Policy Theory and China

Because much of mainstream social policy theory remains focused on a small number of post-industrial capitalist democracies, any study of an Asian authoritarian state like China requires a discussion of the applicability of these theories. This segment will examine China's social welfare expansion in light of the Western theories of welfare state emergence, and it will posit a hybrid explanation. The next portion will look at the relationship between China's current welfare state and the so-called 'East Asian' or 'productivist' categories of welfare regimes, to see if these also fit. Finally, the last portion will survey the literature on authoritarian welfare states to decide this realm's applicability to the Chinese case.

2.3.1 A Theoretical Examination of China's Welfare State Building Project

Due to its tumultuous contemporary history, the case of China's current welfare state building project is unique. During the Maoist period (1949 to 1976), China built a Marxist-

Leninist-Maoist welfare regime⁶, which then collapsed during the general retreat of the state during the early reform period⁷ (1978 to 1995). After the mid-1990s, Chinese elites again prioritized welfare, and this is the period that will be analysed as the (re-)emergence of China's welfare state. During this period, China implemented an impressive number of policies in areas as diverse as pensions, health insurance, unemployment insurance, universal education, and state-subsidized public housing (Baehler & Besharov 2013; Bloom 2011; Chan et al. 2008; Cretin et al. 2006; Ku & Mok 2010; Ngok & Zhu 2010; Shi 2012; Xiong 2012). This time of social policy expansion will be compared with the four main theories of welfare state emergence (industrialization thesis, power resources theory, statist theory, and ideational explanations) to determine which — if any — theory is most explanatory.

The 'industrialization thesis' posited by Cutright (1965) and Wilensky (1975, 2002) argues that there is a direct relationship between economic modernization and social policy, because structural changes in the economy create newly vulnerable groups (Pierson 2006, p.15) whose exposure requires a shift from the 'residual model' of social welfare (Wilensky & Lebeaux 1965) to a new 'floor below which no one sinks' (Wilensky 1975). Although later theorists criticized Wilensky and Cutright (Kuhnle & Sander 2010; Acemoglu & Robinson 2012; Mitchell 1963), the industrialization thesis has been resurrected in recent years as applicable to the developing world (Haggard & Kaufman 2008; Mares & Carnes 2009). Particularly interesting in this conversation is Mares and Carnes' discussion of the 'autocrat's dilemma' (Haber 2007), because China's rapid implementation of social policies with broad

⁶ The CCP leadership built a Marxist-Leninist comprehensive and universal work-based system in which the state monopolized welfare provision and provided it through the state-owned means of production (Hu 2012; Wong 1998; Leung & Nann 1995; Ngok & Huang 2014; Chan et al. 2008). The 'Maoist' facet refers to the fact that social services were organized through a 'tripartite division' that reflected traditionally separate social contracts in Chinese society (Leisering et al. 2002, p.vii), and there was a focus on health and education in rural areas (Leung & Nann 1995, p.160; Naughton 2007, chap.10).

⁷ For discussions of the decline of the Maoist welfare regime and its effects, see: Bhattacharyya, Delu, Wong, & Bowen, 2011; Dummer & Cook, 2007; Hu, 2012; Liu, Hsiao, & Eggleston, 1999; Ngok & Huang, 2015; Zhang et al. 2011.

coverage to mitigate discontent would situate it in the third category of ‘organizational proliferation’ rather than the alternate mechanisms of repression or collusion with elites (Mares & Carnes 2009). Although the idea that the CCP saw the building of a welfare state as a way to maintain stability and buttress economic growth has been alluded to in some works⁸, there has not yet been an outright argument that Chinese technocrats have aligned the expansion of the welfare state with vulnerable groups. This is an oversight.

The first alternative theory of welfare state emergence to contradict the industrialization thesis was Walter Korpi's (1983) ‘power resources’ theory, which argues from a Marxist ontology that the working classes can organize to pressure political actors to institute redistributive social policies, thereby eroding the power of industrial leaders. Even if the fact that this theory is strongly dependent on the presence of a parliamentary democracy and large centralized labour movements (Amenta 2003, p.101) is ignored, however, it is still incommensurate with Chinese realities. First, protests in China have been few, disorganized, and focused on existing issues in welfare provision rather than expansion of benefits (Frazier 2004; Hurst & O’Brien 2002; Su 2009). Second, there is virtually no social welfare lobby in China (Wong 1998), and the CCP has kept a tight hold on the proliferation of civil society, which means that the ruling Party has a near-monopoly on power resources as they are defined. As such, Korpi’s power resources theory has little explanatory power in the Chinese case.

In the 1980s, the rise of ‘new institutionalism’ in political science led to the growth of ‘statist’ or ‘institutional’ analysis of welfare state emergence (Evans et al. 1985; Skocpol & Amenta 1986). This theory does not argue that a given polity’s institutional structure is the

⁸ For example, ‘social policy was regarded as a tool for supporting economic reform’ (Ngok & Huang 2014, p.259), ‘social policies receive attention only in so far [sic] as they abet the growth process’ (Wong 1998, p.206) and ‘social policies in China were mainly put in place to secure economic growth and maintain social stability’ (Xiong 2012, p.284), as well as passages in Dickson et al. 2013; Leung & Nann 1995; Lü 2013; Michelson 2012; Saich 2008; Xiong 2009; Xiong 2012; Zhang 2013.

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sole impetus of welfare state building; rather, it claims that institutions influence the goals and designs of policies (Steinmo et al. 1992), and can impede attempts to alter the course of policy development or remove existing policies through ‘path dependence’ (Pierson 1996; Peters et al. 2005; Pierre 2009) or ‘lock-in effects’ (Amenta 2003). In light of the broad literature within China studies of the important roles that the large bureaucracy (Nee 1991; Heilmann 2008), divide between central and local governments (Béland & Yu 2004; Frazier 2004; Landry 2012), and extensive fiscal reforms since 1978 (Gobel et al. 2012; Wong 2010; Zhang & Zou 1998) have affected the course of China’s provision of social services, there is a possibility that a clearly articulated argument for the statist theory of welfare state development could be in order. Like the industrialization thesis, however, this attempt has not yet been undertaken.

The newest — and therefore somewhat less uniform — theory for welfare state development examines the role of ideas and culture on welfare state emergence. By studying the association of such ‘national values’ (Lipset 1964; Rimlinger 1971; Tropman 1989) as solidarity (Stjerno 2004) and exceptionalism (Lipset 1996; Lipset & Marks 2000) with the building of welfare states, or the ideas of entitlement inherent in different ‘cultures of welfare’ (Pinker 1986), these theorists argue that citizens’ beliefs shape policies. Interestingly enough, the underlying logic of these theories has been used most widely in the China studies literature to explain the *retreat* of the Chinese state from welfare during the reform period (Shi 2006; Shi 2008; Goodman et al. 1998; Wong 1998). Scholars have argued that traditional ideas of ‘utilitarian familism’ (Wong 1994; Wong 1998) or Confucian values of self-reliance and communal support (Shi 2006) provided justification for a decrease in state provision and the reliance on substitutive sources of social support. However, there have not yet been discussions on how these ideas have changed or new ones have arisen to justify the

reassertion of the state's role in social policy, so this theory will also be considered to be inapplicable.

To summarize, the mechanics of China's recent welfare state building project do not appear to have followed the path suggested by the ideational or power resources theories of welfare state emergence. In contrast, Wilensky's (1975; 2002) industrialization thesis could be seen to explain the functionalist and incremental approach that the CCP has taken in implementing social policies, and the particularities of the expansion's process could be related to China's unique institutional structure. As such, China's welfare state emergence should be categorized as broadly 'structuralist', because it encompasses both the effects of China's economic rise and its unique institutional structure. In order to better understand the theoretical context of China's welfare state, it is best to consider it within two related realms of social policy theory: first, the relationship between China and the East Asian Welfare model and second, China's place in the literature on authoritarian social policy.

2.3.2 The East Asian Model and China

Although 'East Asia' can be a fuzzy concept geographically speaking, the social policy literature contains a sizeable discussion on the 'East Asian Model' of welfare. In this realm, 'East Asia' encompasses South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and Singapore. Discussing whether China fits into the so-called 'East Asian' welfare model requires disaggregating the concept into its two mostly distinct parts: first, those early constructions that focus on the region's cultural similarities, and the later 'productivist' explanations. The argument for an East Asian category of regimes arose from a widespread belief in the mid-1990s that Esping-Andersen's (1990) 'Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism' was too narrow and Euro-centric (Yu 2014). In general, these early explanations (see especially Jones 1993) tended to centre on the shared cultural and historical legacies of the fast-developing economies in this region, and particularly the effects of Confucianism.

However, these culturalist approaches (Walker & Wong 1996) soon came under fire (Peng & Wong 2010): some argued that a universal construction of Confucian values was oversimplified and overtly Orientalist (Goodman et al. 1998), or that it was used only functionally as ‘political rhetoric’ (Chau & Yu 2005) and applied differentially in various countries (Walker & Wong 2005). Others have pointed out that there were significant differences within the group designated as East Asian (Kwon 1997), and later analyses have also highlighted unacknowledged similarities between East Asian welfare development and states in the other worlds of welfare capitalism (Yu 2014).

As such, the second generation of East Asian welfare state literature (around the turn of the century) took a more economic tack by analysing the ‘productivism’ or ‘developmentalism’⁹ of welfare in East Asia. Holliday (2000, p.709) provided the clearest outline of this ideal type of welfare regime with his dual criteria of ‘a growth-oriented state and subordination of all aspects of state policy, including social policy, to economic/industrial objectives’, but other works unpacked the term into four (Gough 2004) or even nine (Wilding 2000) attributes. What was agreed upon by this group of scholars was that East Asian states had a shared experience of rapid economic development under strong (usually authoritarian) states, and those similarities — rather than an overarching cultural heritage — led to the development of similar welfare regimes. Although some recent scholarship has criticized the productivist model for being outdated (Choi 2012) or a misidentification of authoritarian legitimacy-seeking behaviour (de Haan 2010), it is more widely accepted than the culturalist East Asian approaches (White 1998).

The literature on whether China falls into the category of a productivist welfare regime is fraught with disagreement, so there is not consensus as to whether China’s current welfare state fully conforms to the productivist East Asian model. There are some who argue

⁹ This term actually traces back to Johnson (1982), but only began to receive significant attention in the social policy community in the early 21st century, as a result of its relation to the productivist welfare state literature.

that China's current welfare state arrangements do not constitute a regime at all (Choi 2012), while others claim that its programs are still in the process of development, and no final judgments can be made until the landscape is more unified and coherent (Deacon et al. 2001; Leung 2005). Still others point out conflicting positions visible within the Chinese state, of which developmental statist is only one (Goodman et al. 1998), and one article finds that China's emerging welfare state is decidedly *not* developmental (Ringen & Ngok 2012). It has also been argued that three attributes of the Chinese experience — the regional variations of implementation, the continuing lack of civil society, and the relatively weak central financial base — prevent it from being fully categorized as a productivist regime (White 1998). However, all of the authors except Ringen and Ngok (2012) acknowledge that China's welfare state *could* eventually develop into a strong, if not the strongest, productivist welfare state.

2.3.3 Authoritarian Social Policy

Because China has been under strong one-party rule since 1949, it is useful to examine the literature on authoritarian social policy in considering contemporary China's welfare re-emergence. It is important to note first that this is somewhat of a lacunae within social policy literature, which overwhelmingly considers democracy a prerequisite for welfare provision (Acemoglu & Robinson 2006; Lake & Baum 2001). A small body of research has called this assumption into question, however, since some scholars have shown that non-democracies and democracies spend roughly the same amounts of GDP on social policy (Lindert 1994), there are functionally equivalent pension schemes present in both authoritarian and democratic states (Mulligan et al. 2004), and some dictatorships actually redistribute income more than some democracies (Wintrobe 1998). These accounts are methodologically controversial, of course, but since the first welfare policies arose in authoritarian Germany under Bismarck (Rimlinger 1971), and because a significant number

of countries in the world are still under authoritarian regimes (Mulligan et al. 2004), this gap merits theoretical expansion (Mares & Carnes 2009).

In the literature that is available concerning authoritarian social policy, there are three prominent themes: the distinctive place of elites in policy formation and feedback processes, the importance of state institutions, and the function of social policy when it is divorced from the democratic conception of civil rights (Forrat 2013). Most of the work on political elites references Olson's (1993) theory of 'stationary bandits', or secure autocrats who are incentivized to increase productivity and strengthen their hold over the area they control by moderating their extortion of resources. There is some disagreement over the exact variations of how authoritarian rulers coordinate and distribute their social goods, however. Albertus and colleagues (2015) divide the schools of thought into three different perspectives, depending on whether public spending seems to serve a developmental (Wintrobe 1998), stabilizing (Desai et al. 2009), or clientelistic (Rudra & Haggard 2005; Cook 2007) function in an authoritarian regime. This idea of the clientelistic authoritarian punishment regime (Magaloni 2006) has received particular attention in studies of social policy expansion in the developing world (Haggard & Kaufman 2008). 'Clientelism', or the 'exchange of material goods or services for political support' (Stokes 2005, p.605) is thought to be particularly relevant in authoritarian regimes, which are by definition vulnerable to threats from powerful groups (Haber 2007), sometimes called the selectorate (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Through social policies, these actors can be appeased (Breslauer 1978; Desai et al. 2009; Rudra & Haggard 2005), or the costs to their possible collective action to overthrow the regime heightened (Haber 2007). In China, it has been argued that welfare expansion followed the path of clientelistic authoritarian expansion due to the constancy of social protections for government officials and the relatively earlier rise of social policies in urban areas (Frazier 2006). However, questions of institutions and citizenship are ones that have not

been addressed with regard to the authoritarian nature of China's welfare state, and these are ripe for theory.

2.4 Chinese Policymaking and Policy Experiments

The literature on China's unique style of policy experimentation is expansive, but it is almost wholly concerned with policy experiments that have taken place in the economic sphere. There is a major gap in coverage concerning how the Chinese authorities have utilized the same procedure or adapted it to make new social policies, and the few attempts that do exist to describe difficulties inherent in doing so will be covered in the next section. Here, however, I will survey the literature on the benefits and costs of using a gradual, experimentalist approach to development to understand the theories that scholars of social policy experiments have at their disposal. This segment will describe the major debates over policy experimentation, and then discuss the relationship between policy experimentation and China's decentralized Maoist structure. A link will be identified between the experimentation literature and the so-called 'China Model' or 'Beijing Consensus', and then the focus will narrow to prior work on the actual process of policy experimentation. Finally, an overview of the reasons for difficulties in promoting social policy experiments to the national level will be provided.

2.4.1 'Crossing the River by Feeling for Stones' –China's Policy Experimentation

Perhaps because the story of China's unprecedented success in reforming its economy since 1978 (World Bank 2015a; Zhu 2012) is so well known, there has been an enormous amount of academic work conducted on the factors that contributed to it. There are many scholars who attribute China's rise its unique type of economic policy experimentation¹⁰ (see

¹⁰ There is also a group of scholars that Woo (1999) call the 'convergence school', including Bruno (1994), Fan (1994), and Sachs (1997), who resist the 'experimentalist' view that gradual evolution has been the hallmark of China's growth, and instead argue that privatization, liberalization, and internationalization are the real reasons. In addition, scholars like Pei (1999, 2006) argue that the long-term costs of the reforms will eventually reveal that China is caught in a 'partial reform trap' (Hellman 1998).

especially Brandt & Rawski, 2008; Heilmann, 2008; Naughton, 2007). This process of ‘crossing the river by feeling for stones (*mozhe shitou guohe*)’ (Hsu et al. 2011), or moving policies ‘from point to surface (*you dian ji mian*)’ (Schoon 2014) is often contrasted with the shock therapy reforms that wreaked havoc on the economies of former Soviet countries in Eastern Europe (Florini et al. 2012; Dickson 2011a; Heilmann 2009). The core argument of those who hail China’s policy experiments as a panacea for development is that by leveraging China’s centralized authoritarian power and history of state involvement in the economy to test out liberalizing reforms in small areas and then slowly scaling the successful ones to the national level, China has created a unique political economy that maximizes benefits from its initial conditions (Walder 1995; Rodrik 2007; Yao 2010; Dickson 2011a; Pye 1986).

Although there is a broad interest in China’s policy experimentation, there is also a raging debate on its functions and relation to the attributes of the Chinese government. The first and most contentious argument concerns the degree to which China’s highly decentralized structure has shaped its experiments. Initial studies often praised local government officials in model localities as the heroes of experiments, since they began the first local pilots (Montinola et al. 1995; Yang 1997; Naughton 2007). Cai and Triesman (2006) have cast doubt on this idealized view, however, arguing that both the initial impetus and sustaining support for reform comes from the central authorities. Recent work has built on this theme to contend that policy experiments: are a result of the centre’s ‘conscious design’ (Mei & Liu 2014), proceed under constant central scrutiny (Schoon 2014), succeed more frequently in areas with stronger factional ties to the centre (Tsai & Dean 2014), are promoted through central encouragement of regional competition (Zhu 2014), and even can be initiated as symbolic reforms to legitimate a delay in central attention to an issue (Zeng 2014). Although almost all authors agree that central involvement is ultimately more helpful than harmful in the experimental process, there is an ongoing debate as to how Chinese

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officials negotiate the central-local divide. This issue is particularly interesting for the Experiment of Eight Million People, since advocates of the alternative rural policy design often attempted to reach across the rift and lobby the centre using the results from local level as rhetorical tools.

Another central point of disagreement is the extent to which the mode of adaptive governance is a departure from Mao-era governance norms. On one hand, some scholars ascribe to the belief that 1978 was a fundamental turning point in China's political economy, in which Mao's charismatic dictatorship was traded for Deng's more pragmatic consensus-building governance (Huang 1998; Su 2011; Teiwes 2014; Landry 2008). One piece even argues that China has completely transformed from 'a revolutionary mass party into a conservative ruling party' (Zhao & Zhang 2010, p.430). On the other hand, others see continuity between the Maoist view of policymaking as 'a process of ceaseless change, tension management, continual experimentation, and ad-hoc adjustment' (Heilmann & Perry 2011, p.3) and the current practice of seeking truth from facts to optimize policy (Ravaillon 2008, p.28). Perry (2007) coined the term 'revolutionary authoritarianism' to attempt to capture the ways in which the newer generations of Chinese leaders have updated and institutionalized radical norms to adapt the Maoist campaigns for new purposes of economic reform. Others point out that earlier national policies had emphasized principles or parameters rather than specific regulations, and current experimental norms grew from that (Brandt & Rawski 2008).

These debates and the larger discussion of Chinese policy experimentation are closely related to the narrative of the so-called China Model or Beijing Consensus. The 'Beijing Consensus (*Beijing gongshi*)' is simple to define because it was proposed as three theorems (innovation, 'chaos management', and self-determination) in a 2004 manifesto by Joshua Cooper Ramo. In contrast, the 'China Model (*Zhongguo moshi*)' has never had an agreed-

upon definition¹¹, and is therefore somewhat ‘broad and ill-defined’ (Dickson 2011a, p.41). However, it is generally agreed that the China Model of development involves an unprecedented level of state involvement in the economy (Amsden 1994; Callick 2007; Huang 2011; Hasmath 2014; Naughton 2009; Naughton 2010) and a gradual reform path that takes into account the initial conditions of the developing country (Brandt & Rawski 2008; Fan 1994; Prasad 2009; Heilmann 2009). Latent in both of these discussions is a controversial insinuation that China’s authoritarianism has contributed to its reform success; Walder (1995) differentiates between China and the ‘plodding Soviet-style dinosaur[s]’ (p. 963) of Eastern Europe by pointing out that China has not attempted a ‘dual transition’ through reforming both its economic and political system simultaneously, a claim echoed by Kennedy (2010) and expanded upon by others who cite the pervasive control, greater speed, and relative flexibility of China’s government under the CCP (Huang 2011; Dickson 2011b; Cai & Triesman 2006; Heilmann 2008). Despite the continuing debates on its attributes and applicability, however, what is agreed is that China’s economic reform is linked to its unique process of policy experimentation.

2.4.2 Seeking Truth from Facts – How Does It Work?

It is now necessary to consider the way that experimentation takes place within the context of the Chinese political system and the birth planning subsystem. The point must first be made that the type of policy experimentation this project investigates is unique to China, different from other types of piloting around the world. In other countries, policy pilots are usually used to build support for and gauge the efficacy of newly legislated programs before they are expanded universally (Ettelt et al. 2014). However, these policy pilots are almost always enacted after a long process of policy formulation, and they usually operate within

¹¹ This confusion has led many scholars to use the two terms interchangeably (Hasmath 2014), and there are even hybrid terms like the ‘Beijing model’ (Huang 2011, p.10). This lack of clarity can be seen quite cynically; one scholar even argues that ‘the point may not be in finding the ‘correct’ answer, but rather that power lies in depicting China’s model as being one thing or another’ (Ferchen 2013, p.411).

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fairly rigid central parameters; in other words, they very seldom independently create substantive policy (Ettelt 2013). In contrast, experimentation in China is much broader in scope, because it involves ‘innovating through implementation first, and drafting universal laws and regulations later’ (Heilmann 2008). While the centre may control which areas of policy are open for experimentation and always has the power to shut down or promote different experiments as it sees fit (Schoon 2014), the vast majority of the power to create and implement policy lies with subnational governments before the time when national legislation is drafted, and even then, the legislation is usually fluid enough to allow differing local interpretations (Florini et al. 2012). So essentially, piloting in other countries is a subset of policy experimentation in China, but the scope is much narrower outside of the PRC. This section will present the current state of the literature on what is known about how policy experiments proceed on the ground in China, beginning with the roots of the practice that trace back to the early days of the CCP.

Although the idea of evidence-based experimentation is associated with the period following ‘reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*)’ in 1978, there were antecedent structures under Mao. Even before the founding of the PRC, Communist-controlled areas saw widely varying experiments on to how to best complete land reform (Heilmann 2008, p.4). The idea of governing by emphasizing ‘broad principles or parameters rather than specific instructions or regulations’ was common in the Maoist era, when the central directives were largely ideological stances that were to be converted into substantive policy in each location (Brandt & Rawski 2008, p.16). Perry has written extensively on the ways in which Mao’s idea of revolutionary authoritarianism, or constant revolution in order to move towards perfect socialism, allowed Chinese citizens to acclimate to the type of policy fluidity and ad-hoc adjustment that have made reform-era China adaptive (Perry 2007; Heilmann & Perry 2011). In addition, the idea of localization, or ensuring that each policy and initiative had Chinese

characteristics, truly began with the addition of Maoism to Marxism-Leninism (Ramo 2004, p.32). As such, it is important to note that 1978 was more of an inflection point than a new era in Chinese governance.

Yet the decision in the late 1970s to forego radical reform programs in favour of gradualism and incrementalism was a major one, because the rubric for policy success shifted from ideological correctness to economic efficiency (Fan 1994). The processes that had long begun at Mao's (sometimes abrupt) requests were institutionalized (Teiwes 2014), and the career trajectories of government officials were closely linked to improved efficiency and economic growth (Florini et al. 2012, p.46). Although Deng Xiaoping did not actually coin the phrase 'crossing the river by feeling for stones (*mozhi shitou guohe*)'¹², he was central to the transition, because his supporters mobilized Chinese people to participate in reform to an unprecedented degree, and he also worked to strike sufficient compromises to maintain central cohesion (Su 2011). By delegating greater authority to local government officials, the Chinese state was able to enlist millions of them as policy entrepreneurs, while minimizing losses by limiting the new efforts to a very defined geographic area (Xu & Shuai 2011). Despite the fact that local government officials are given massive amounts of authority – indeed, one author calculated that China has the most decentralized power structure ever for an authoritarian government (Landry 2008) – the Party-state structure looms over policy experiments and has the authority to end any initiative at any time (Mei & Liu 2014; Schoon 2014; Tsai & Dean 2014; Cai & Triesman 2006).

Since reform and opening, Chinese policy experimentation has become more institutionalized while simultaneously expanding to policy areas that had previously been off-limits. There have been several attempts to conceptualize and model the process itself. The

¹² Despite the fact that this phrase is associated with Deng Xiaoping, it was actually his policy rival, Chen Yun, who introduced it at a meeting in 1980. Although Deng is on record as having quickly agreed with Chen, there is no documentation of the leader actually using the term himself (Florini et al. 2012, p.181).

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simplest effort to understand the ways that pilots make national law was advanced by Greenhalgh, when she noted that policies in China tend to move from being referred to as ‘pilot policies (*shidian*)’ to ‘policies (*zhengce*)’, then to ‘slogans (*kouhao*)’, ‘directional policies (*fangzhen zhengce*)’, and finally to ‘guiding ideologies (*zhidao sixiang*)’ (Greenhalgh 2008, p.32). But Greenhalgh’s work did not hazard hypotheses about how pilots moved through the different stages. There have been different theories for the intervening causal mechanisms in the process. On one end are Cai and Triesman (2006), who argued that competition between rival factions in the central government leads officials to utilize their connections to promote experiments that most align with their interests. Florini et al. (2012) took a more nuanced approach by contending that there are actually ‘several meandering and overlapping trajectories’ for local-level experiments, each of which is dependent on support from the centre, ability to draft regulations at each level, and messaging from the local sites. Finally, Xu and Shuai (2011) have a theory that is more localized; they argue that coordination among the relevant subprograms of any given experiment is the most important variable, because it directly affects the results communicated to different levels of government. Although each of these theories offers some explanatory power, their lack of granularity is apparent.

Indeed, the only comprehensive model that has been put forth to map out the policy experimentation process in general is Heilmann's (2008) widely cited description of the Experimentation-Based Policy Cycle. This eight-step model illustrates the development of new policies from their inception as local experiments until post facto debates about their continued optimization, and it has been cited over two hundred times in both English language and Mandarin publications. Essentially, the model argues that policies begin when a certain area is designated as a place of focus by the centre, which in turn encourages local government officials to act as policy entrepreneurs to design and test their own solutions to

the policy dilemma (Heilmann 2009). The centre then collects the results from the most successful local experiments and incrementally scales them up in more localities until the policy is formalized in law and enacted nationwide, after which a new policy area is identified (Heilmann 2008). There have been several criticisms of Heilmann's heuristic (Zeng 2014; Mei & Liu 2014; Tsai & Dean 2014), but as of yet, no alternative models of experimentation's role in social policy design have been proposed.

2.5 Political Factors in Family Planning Decisions – Social Policy Experiments and East Asian Experience

There are two possible sources for insights into the likely drivers of political obstruction to the Experiment of Eight Million People's expansion: prior work on the problems of social policy experimentation in China and wider investigations of the transitions away from antinatalism across East Asia. The articles that examine the difficulties of expanding successful social welfare experiments in China fall into three main categories: those that point to institutional difficulties, ideational problems, and the intransigence of interested actors in complicating the social policymaking process. Béland and Yu (2004) argue that the cumulative effects of multiple layers of overlapping institutions have led to failure in universally enacting experimental social policies like health insurance initiatives. Frazier (2010) also corroborates this view, focusing on the intricacies of central/local government interactions to frame the failure of pensions as a principal-agent problem. From an ideational paradigm, Shi (2006) highlights two points at which the Chinese government has failed to place appropriate emphasis on rural social policies: first, in not defining their lack as an area for reform (problem definition), and second, in not seeking state-led solutions to elderly poverty (problem solution) (this follows from Blyth 2006; Mehta 2011; and Kingdon [1989] 2011). Wong (1998) has also studied the role of traditional ideas about the family's duty for social welfare in preventing a widening social safety net, and numerous accounts of China's birth planning policy describe the problematic persistence of ideas privileging large families

even under the new population regime (Greenhalgh 1990; White 2006; Narayan & Peng 2006). Finally, on the interest-based front, Heilmann (2008) has argued that the factor complicating social policy implementation is the impact of local level government officials who are disincentivized by the existing promotion structure to advocate for social policies, a point which was expanded by Shi's (2008) analysis of conflicting bureaucratic interests surrounding social policy at the central level.

The other area that provides a background for analysis of these issues is the existing literature on the factors that contributed to the shifts from antinatalism to pronatalism in other East Asian contexts. As alluded to in the introduction, most other East Asian welfare regimes instituted at least some form of a family planning policy in the latter half of the 20th century (see Robinson & Ross 2007 for an overview), and they have largely changed to actively pronatalist paradigms in recent years. Yet a uniting factor across the region is that there was a gap between the drop of fertility below replacement rate and the eventual implementation of policies promoting higher birth rates (Frejka et al. 2010). The most succinct overview of the various factors that contributed to this lag was contained in Jones et al. (2009b), who listed three main drivers:

Demographic momentum meant that population kept increasing despite below-replacement fertility, thus seemingly obviating the need to modify or reverse policy.... inertia and the entrenched bureaucratic interests and mind-sets of agencies entrusted with antinatalist policies and leaders who had been promoting antinatalist policies...[and] a deficiency in the theory of demographic transition¹³ (p. 6).

In another article, Jones (2009a, p. 7) said that the primary driver was that 'all of these countries (except Japan) had built a strong family planning program, oriented to reducing fertility from unacceptably high levels in these densely populated countries, and the mind-

¹³ This deficiency has been widely covered in the literature; essentially, it refers to the unquestioned assumption in the Demographic Transition Theory that post-transition fertility rates would settle around two children per woman (Hirschman 1994; Knodel & van de Walle 1979; Coale & Watkins 1986). In reality, countries have followed widely divergent paths, with a significant number of countries in Europe and Asia descending to 'ultra-low' or 'lowest-low' levels fertility, defined as less than one-and-a-half children per woman (Jasilioniene 2009; Jones et al. 2009a).

sets of planners and the bureaucratic interests involved in continuing this program proved difficult to adjust to the radically altered demographic situation'. In Taiwan, Lee has argued that the transition to pronatalism was complicated by 'oppositions from feminists and environmentalists', who made three major arguments: 'there is no such social problem as population ageing...low fertility should be taken as a rare opportunity for doing compensation [*sic*] for environmental destruction...some active feminist scholars forcefully dispute pronatal policy as a sort of discrimination against women' (Lee 2009). These factors will be compared with the themes that emerge from the empirical investigation, so that suggestions can be made for future research directions.

2.6 Conclusion

This Chapter has completed the aim of Part One by ensuring that the project is thoroughly grounded in the relevant prior literature. Due to the various aims of the different levels of research questions, this took a less formulaic form than a systematic review or other formalized process. Instead, the Chapter situated the project by contextualizing the macro-level and meso-level research questions in the pertinent interdisciplinary literature. At the highest level, the importance of examining population policies as social policies was considered, and existing work was presented. This completed the foundation for the question, *What welfare function do population policies serve?* Next, the Chapter discussed the thematic relationships of the meso-level questions (*What were the most important factors that shaped the Chinese birth planning policy process?* and *Were the reasons for policy stasis or change similar to the trajectories of population policies in other low-fertility East Asian contexts?*) to prior literature on China's welfare state. Specifically, the discussion related this topic to theories of welfare state building, East Asian developmentalism, and authoritarian social policy, as well as the two sources of comparisons for policy obstructionism: other Chinese

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social policy experiments that have failed to become national law, and the issues other East Asian states have faced when transitioning from antinatalism to pronatalist policies.

Now that these questions are fully understood, the process of answering them can begin at the micro-level, with an empirical investigation. As described in the Chapter 1 (see pages 18 to 19), this requires the identification and explication of the ‘critical junctures’, or periods of heightened contingency in which decisions between alternative policies shaped the path and outcomes of China’s birth planning regime. A full description of the process that will be followed and its relationship to prior investigations is contained in Chapter 4 (see pages 116 to 123). Put simply, though, the operationalization of critical junctures theory first requires a deep understanding of the context for the policy process under investigation. Therefore, the first step in the empirical portion will be to contextualize the investigation within the realm of Chinese birth planning by providing a granular history of the population policy over time and the Experiment of Eight Million People’s interaction with the national regime. This will be completed in Chapter 3.

PART TWO:

Context of the Experiment of Eight Million People

‘非控制人口不行

(It won't do not to control population growth)'

- Mao Zedong, 1975

Chapter 3 History of the Birth Planning Policy and the Experiment of Eight Million People

3.1 Introduction

Because this project is historically focused, it is important to situate the Experiment of Eight Million People within the larger context of Chinese birth planning. This Chapter will lay the foundation for the two micro-level research questions concerning the critical junctures in the Experiment's history by building a chronology of China's experience with state-sponsored fertility policies, and how the 'late marriage and late births plus spacing' pilot interacted with national trends. This history will move beyond prior accounts (Scharping 2003; Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005; White 2006) to highlight pertinent aspects of China's demographic situation at key points and to examine how the Chinese population was affected by policy adjustments. It will differ from many histories by emphasizing policy trends prior to the shift to 'one child per couple' in 1979, in order to highlight the fundamentals of population policymaking and the demographic distortions introduced by the numerous policy reversals. Throughout the Chapter, attention will be paid to influential actors and their role in shaping the history, as well as the ways that the institutions buttressing the birth planning policy developed and changed. By identifying the broad trajectories of the birth planning policy, the influential actors who molded it, and its institutional structure, a framework will be built for the identification and discussion of the most critical junctures in the history, which will be covered in Part Three.

The Chapter will proceed by giving an overview of the four experimental counties whose two-child pilot policies came to be known as the Experiment of Eight Million People. Then the largest portion will be devoted to a chronology of the birth planning policy and the ways that the Experiment of Eight Million People's history interacted with it. This will proceed in two parts: the first will describe attempts at a Chinese fertility policy before 1979, and the

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second will cover the main birth planning period from 1980 to 2015. Following this overview, there will be two sections on demographic outcomes: the first will focus on the imbalances introduced into the Chinese population as a result of the general focus on one child per couple, and the second section will contrast these realities with the demographic outcomes of the counties that implemented a late marriage and late birth plus spacing policy. The final portion will conclude by summarizing which times in the larger history and the Experiment of Eight Million People appear to be inflection points, where multiple pathways were available and decisions caused significant divergences in the eventual outcomes. In other words, this portion will provide a summary of the possible critical junctures to be evaluated in Chapter 4.

Before delving into the complex political history of China's experiences with birth planning, however, it is useful to first provide several illustrations of the momentous demographic change that has taken place within the Chinese population over that time. As was suggested in Chapter 1 (see pages 13 to 15), China's population has gone through the 'fertility transition' from a high fertility population typical of clan-based traditional societies to the low fertility structure of nuclear families, and it has done so in less than half a century. Figure 3.1 shows the change in the Total Fertility Rate (measured as the average total number of children a woman would have if she were to act in line with current age-specific fertility trends) from 1950 to 2012, with the important policy events that will be described below indicated on the graph. While the relationship between the two is not directly causal, the overall trends are illuminating. To show these changes in another way, Figure 3.2 shows population pyramids of the Chinese population at points between 1950 and the present. The sheer growth in numbers is expressed, as well as the increasing 'rectangularisation' of the pyramids that shows ageing and the growing gap between numbers of men and women. These Figures will serve as a visual reference for the numerous trends, reversals, and demographic distortions that have characterized the Chinese population across its history

with population policies. Next, the background of the various experimental counties will be briefly introduced.

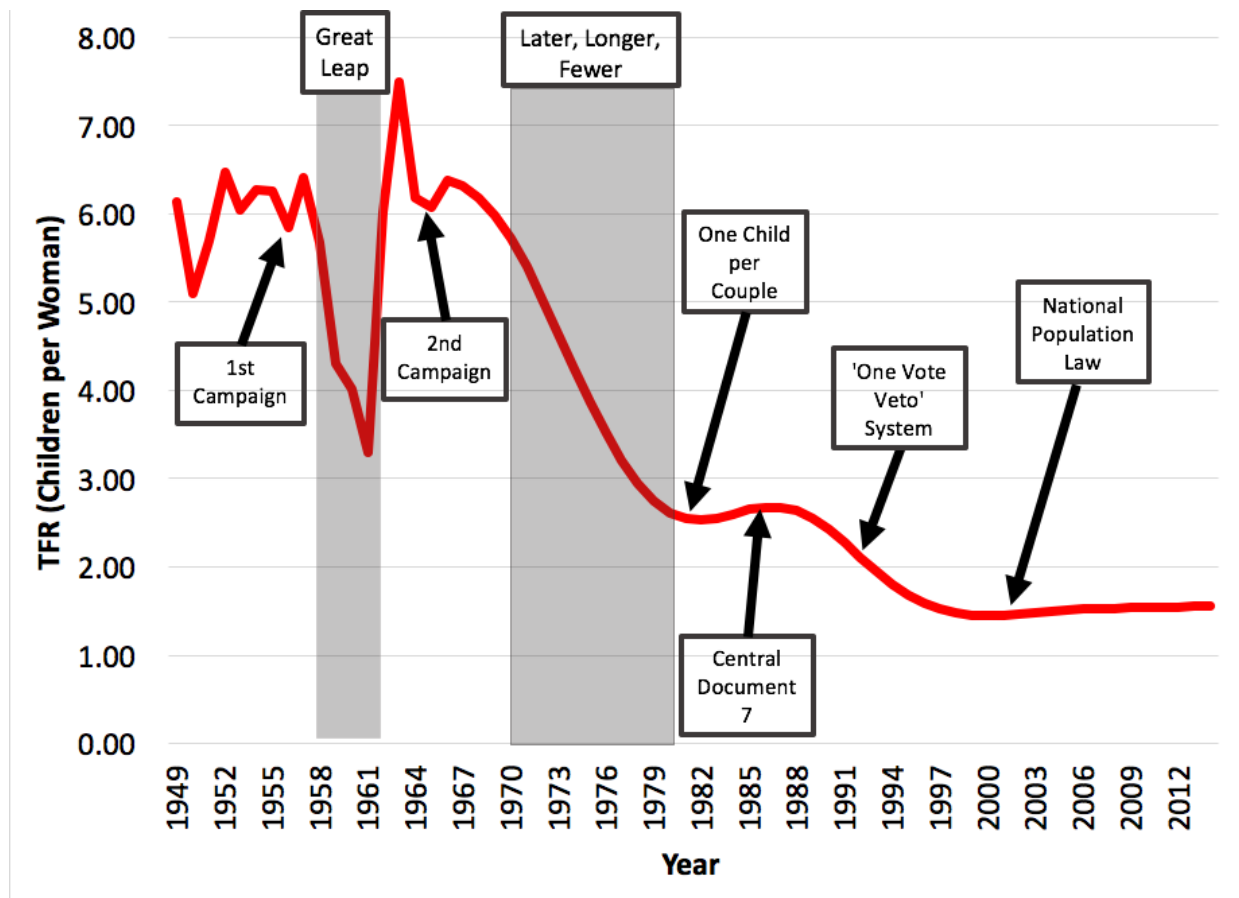


Figure 3.1: China's TFR, With Important Events (data from Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005)

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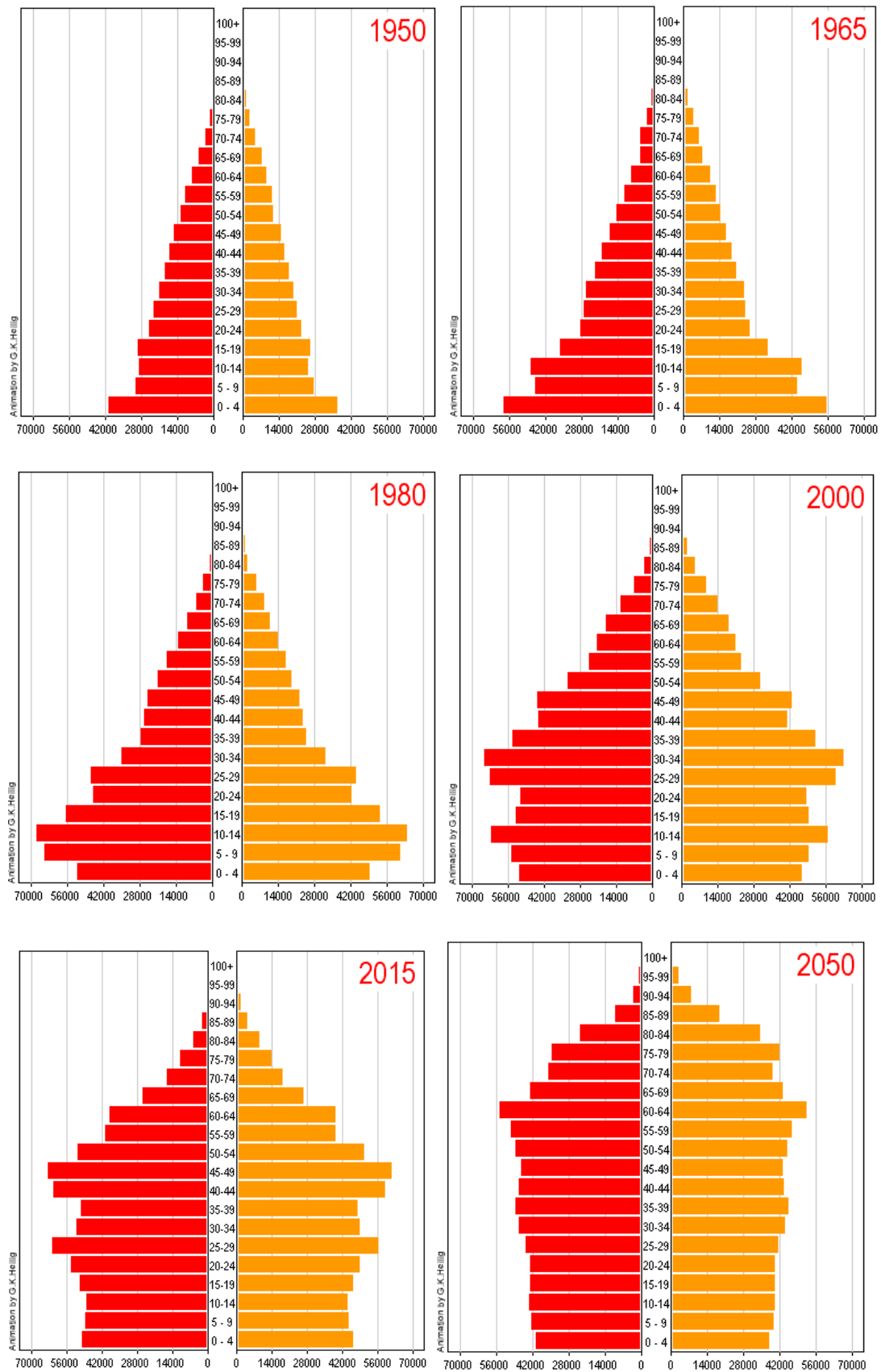


Figure 3.2: China's Population Age Structure across its History and Projections from 2050 (IIASA 2015)

3.2 The Four Experimental Counties

Although there is a tendency to conceptualize China as a monolith, it contains many distinctive socioeconomic and cultural sub contexts. As such, it is useful to provide background information for the locations in which the ‘two-child plus spacing’ policies that came to be known collectively as the Experiment of Eight Million People occurred. Of course, the specifics will be discussed further with the experiment’s results in Section 6, as well as in Chapter 5, which will cover the genesis of the experimental regulations. But an overview allows for pre-emptive acknowledgement of local conditions that could have affected the results of the pilot policies. In general, it can be said that each of the four local areas in which the experiment occurred differed somewhat in their geographic, social, and economic attributes, but each was rural, poor, and representative of many other counties in the region where it was located. Indeed, this representativeness was one of the attributes that attracted advocates to these pilot counties across the history of the Experiment of Eight Million People.

3.2.1 Jiuquan, Gansu

Gansu Province is a land of arid plateaus in the narrow corridor in western China. It has traditionally been a poor area plagued by earthquakes, and it has only recently been able to produce self-sufficient amounts of grain (Cheng 2013). Jiuquan is in the very northwest corner of Gansu, and is home to about one million people, six hundred thousand of whom are rural and many of whom are members of Gansu’s 25 recognized minority groups (Jian & Zhou 2008). The prefecture’s seat is in Jiuquan City, which has an important iron and steel plant. But besides two mining outposts in the south of the prefecture that supply the plant with raw materials, the villages are still largely dependent on agriculture and have not industrialized (Falkenheim & Cheng 2015). For the entirety of the birth planning period, rural Jiuquan was a characteristically



Figure 3.3: The Location of Jiuquan, Gansu

poor agricultural area of China. It has a history with distinction in birth planning, however. Jiuquan implemented the ‘later, longer, fewer’ policy and was recognized in 1981 as having the lowest total fertility rate in Gansu province, at 2.02 (Gu & Wang 2009). From 1980 to 1984, Jiuquan imposed one-child limits for all citizens of Han ethnicities, but in 1984, there was a transition to allow all rural Han couples to have two children, and ethnic minorities to have three, providing they follow stipulated birth intervals (Jian & Zhou 2008). A report from the National Family Planning Commission (NFPC) released in the year 2000 declared that the ‘experiment was successful (*shidian shi chenggongde*)’ in Jiuquan, but (for unspecified reasons) it was ‘inadvisable to expand it (*buyi tuigang*)’ (Gu & Wang 2009, p.4).

3.2.2 Chengde, Hebei

Hebei is the province surrounding China's capital, Beijing (which is itself a provincial-level autonomous region), and it covers the North China Plain (Treager & Falkenheim 2013). Chengde lies in the province's extreme northeast, bordering the province of Inner Mongolia, and it is a designated 'old, minority, mountainous, and poor (*lao, shao, shan, qiong*)' region with a total population of about 3.5 million people, three million of whom have rural *hukou* and about a million of whom are members of minority groups (Gu & Wang 2009). Chengde has been a centre of textile production since the 1950s, and the south



Figure 3.4: Location of Chengde, Hebei

of the prefecture has copper and coal deposits that have been mined extensively (Treager & Falkenheim 2013). Yet when Chengde was announced as a two-child pilot area in 1984, it had the lowest per capita income in Hebei province (Wang 2008). Despite a recent uptick in tourism to visit ancient sites and increasing transportation infrastructure that has rendered China's capital more accessible, most people in Chengde still have below-average per capita incomes (Falkenheim 2015).

3.2.3 Yicheng, Shanxi

Shanxi Province is in northern China and is a vast plateau bordering the Yellow River; although it was traditionally an important agricultural and trading area, it has taken on new

standing as one of the main coal-producing regions in the PRC (Boxer 2013). Yicheng is a county in the southwest of Linfen Prefecture, which is itself near the southernmost tip of Shanxi Province. Yicheng's population is 78 percent rural, and it is in the middle of Linfen Prefecture's 11 subdistricts economically (Gu & Wang 2009). Because Linfen is near-average economically for Shanxi, which is itself ranked 18th of China's 31 provincial-level



Figure 3.5: Location of Linfen Prefecture, Shanxi

units for GDP per capita (The Economist 2011), Yicheng is considered to be an average county representative of rural China (Liu & He 2008). Prior to the experiment's codification in 1985, it had been recognized as a leading county for birth planning work, with some of the lowest birth rates in Shanxi (Gu & Wang 2009). The pilot was allowed to continue through the general shift toward a one-and-a-half policy for rural areas in 1988, and it has continued (with only small adjustments to the denominations of the economic incentives and penalties) to present day (Wei & Zhang 2014).

3.2.4 Enshi, Hubei

Hubei is in central China, in the fertile Yangtze River basin, and as a result, it has historically been one of China's main grain producing areas (Treager & Falkenheim 2013). In

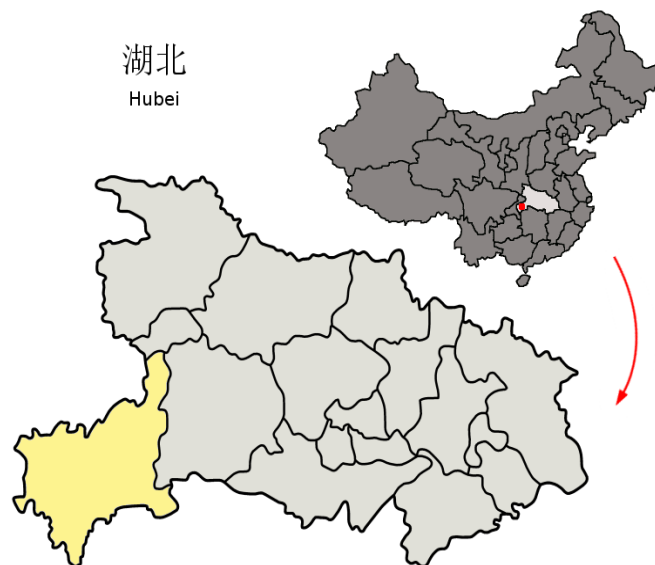


Figure 3.6: Location of Enshi, Hubei

Hubei's southwest is an area called Enshi, which has traditionally been home to both the Miao and Tujia ethnic minorities (roughly half of the population are members of a minority group). The Tujia people are a small ethnic group who speak an unwritten dialect of Tibetan (Encyclopaedia 2015). The Miao ethnic group is about the same size overall as the Tujia, but because it is a confederation of loosely related peoples who speak a similar language, its members are more geographically dispersed (Tapp 2015). Enshi is home to about 3.5 million people, over half of whom belong one of the minority groups. It is very rural, and it is officially designated as an 'old, minority, peripheral, mountainous, and poor (*lao, shao, bian, shan, ku, qiong*)' area (Gu & Wang 2009). The original birth planning pilot proposed in 1984 was to extend the two-child late marriage and late birth plus spacing policy only to the minorities in Enshi, who had to that point been immune from birth planning regulations, but it was decided to harmonize the design across all the county's rural residents (Shi & Jiang 2008). Enshi was somewhat unique in that the birth planning pilot also included provision of health insurance to citizens, and the original goal of keeping the population under four million by the year 2000 was far surpassed (Gu & Wang 2009).

3.3 Attempts at a Chinese Population Policy Before 1979

This Section will move through the early history of the CCP to examine the ways that nascent population policies shifted, and how this path led to the promotion of ‘one child per couple’ in 1979. This moves beyond the Literature Review by laying the foundation for the further empirical work with a granular account of how China’s demographic situation, political atmosphere, and population policy were deeply intertwined. This contrasts with most accounts of Chinese birth planning, which tend to begin their coverage in 1980, when a nationwide effort at limiting fertility began in earnest. Yet such a narrow focus would ignore the importance of the complex political factors surrounding population policy in the early years of the PRC, many of which persisted into the main birth planning period. Perhaps more importantly, an examination of the early birth control efforts allows for a discussion of the demographic imbalances that resulted from the policy reversals. These population distortions played an important part in shaping later birth planning policy design, so despite the fact that this early history will not be considered in the selection of critical junctures, it merits discussion here.

3.3.1 Pronatalism

In the Yan’an period and the war against the Nationalists, the CCP had a highly pronatalist stance. The impetus for advocating high fertility among its supporters was to

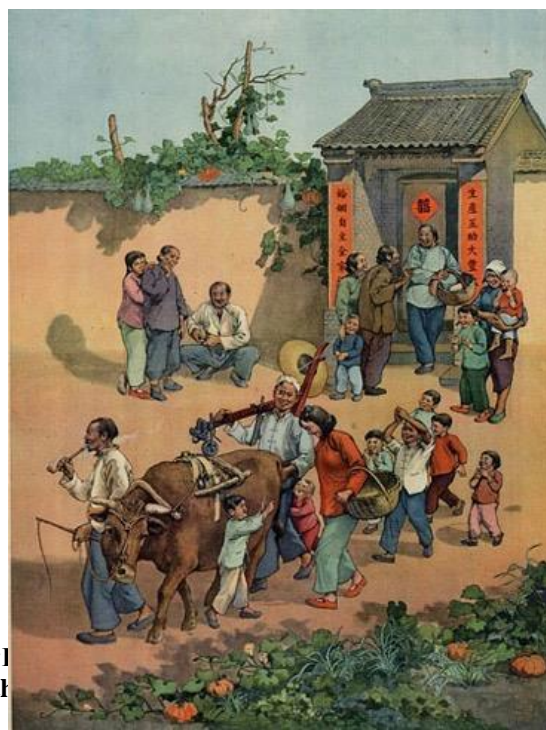


Figure 3.7: This poster, ‘I [unclear] with [unclear]’ (1952) featured an extended family

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produce more people to further the Communist cause, which was in line with China's distinctly pronatalist Confucian heritage (Aird 2015; Tang 1995). There is evidence that this pro-fertility view came directly from Mao, and it was intensified after the official founding of the PRC (Greenhalgh & Bongaarts 1987). The greater stability and reunion of

couples after the end of the war naturally promoted higher birth rates, and fecundity became an issue closely tied with national pride following the release of a report by the United States' Secretary of State Dean Acheson that dismissed 'New China' on the grounds that it would not be able to feed its many people (Acheson 1949). Mao railed against this diagnosis, saying, 'It is a very good thing that China has a big population. Even if China's population multiplies many times, [the PRC] is fully capable of finding a solution...[R]evolution of production can solve the problem of feeding the population!' (quoted in Greenhalgh 2008, p.52). At the time, China was home to almost 600 million people, although the government did not realize the population numbers were so high until they conducted their first census in 1953 (Cressey 1955).

As a result of this pronatalism, contraceptives were not widely available, and abortion was strictly controlled (Scharping 2003, pp.40–50). There is evidence that the impetus for the shift away from this view of many births as a universal positive came from within the Party itself, specifically from female cadres who found themselves struggling with the 'double burden' of taking part in the new socialist economy while still being expected to care for their children (Wang 2004). Indeed, there is documentation of the wives of high officials actively promoting a shift towards birth control: Zhou Enlai's wife, Deng Yingchao, wrote letters to Deng Xiaoping and other leaders arguing that restrictions on contraception prevented female cadres from being able to effectively 'hold up half the sky' (Wang 2012). Due in part to the work of these women, the Ministry of Health admitted in 1954 that it 'lacked a correct

understanding' of contraception and relaxed many of the restrictions (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.66). The Ministry then promulgated revised rules allowing for the production and sale of contraceptives (although these specifically excluded provision to rural citizens), and the first plants for domestic production of contraceptives opened in 1956 (Scharping 2003, p.45;181).

This focus on encouraging couples to have babies for the good of the state, in combination with the uptick in fertility after 1949, had implications that would echo to present day. Although data is scarce for China's fertility patterns under the Nationalists, investigation has suggested that, before Japanese occupation, the Chinese population was generally characterized by 'high mortality, moderate fertility'¹⁴, and early and universal marriage' (Barclay et al. 1976, p.609). Analysis of a 1982 survey that asked women up to age 67 their birth histories suggests that, throughout the 1940s, TFRs fell from six or above to less than five, and then returned to higher than six after the Communist victory in 1949 (Banister 1991, pp.6–7). As a result, by the 1964 census, about 40 percent of China's population – almost 300 million people – were under the age of 15 (National Family Planning Commission 1983). In combination with the rapidly-improving sanitation and health infrastructure of Maoist China (Browne 2001), China's encouragement of more births created a large population with a very young age structure and quickly-improving life expectancies. It was a recipe for extremely high future population momentum: that is, a situation in which births outnumber deaths even with sub-replacement rates of fertility (World Bank 2016b).

3.3.2 Policy Confusion

Despite these moves away from direct pronatalism in the mid-1950s, it was another 15 years before there was a prolonged campaign for population control, and the interim was

¹⁴ Traditional Chinese fertility, which ranged between five and seven children per woman, is indeed moderate for pre-industrial societies, where TFRs often average above ten (Banister 1984). Past research has suggested that these figures were due in part to low coital frequencies and long breastfeeding durations, which implies that pre-industrial Chinese families practiced at least some methods of natural family planning (Lavelly 2007).

rife with policy reversals. This instability was caused by two primary factors: the vulnerability of birth planning campaigns to the general tendency for periodic upheaval, and the lack of a concrete Marxist justification for birth planning. Because Maoism promoted constant revolution, there were frequent ‘campaigns’ of mass mobilization – ranging from minor propaganda initiatives to large scale dislocation and violence – which created an atmosphere that was not conducive to long-term initiatives like population policy (Perry 2007; Heilmann & Perry 2011). To compound this, any policy that promoted a decrease in fertility was dangerous in Communist rhetoric, since Marx had spoken out virulently against the work of Malthus and Malthusianism¹⁵. Marx had argued that overpopulation was a purely capitalist problem, and it could be solved by a shift to communism (Meek 1952; Pereleman 1979). In the strict Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, proposing policies that directly contradicted Marx’s teaching was all but impossible, so this tension was problematic (Greenhalgh 2009). During this discontinuity, there were only two concerted attempts to jumpstart birth planning campaigns –in 1956 and 1962 – but both were ultimately unsuccessful in producing a universal policy line (Attané 2002). Yet despite the fact that they were short-lived, these efforts were central to future policies.

The 1956 campaign began with Mao’s speech ‘On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People’, in which he linked the idea of socialist planning to birth planning for the first time, as a way in which Marxism could end chaos in the production of human beings themselves (Mao 1989 [1957]). The actionable points of this plan appeared to mirror the idea of voluntary ‘family planning’, and the policy slogans were to ‘popularize and propagandize birth control’ and ‘promote childbirth according to a plan’ (Settles et al. 2013).

¹⁵ Malthus was an English political economist at the end of the 18th century, who argued that food production could only increase linearly while population could increase exponentially; therefore, human beings would not be able to support themselves if rapid population growth continued (Lohmann 2005; Rao 1994). His work is among the most controversial but lasting demographic theories, and it was later resuscitated by the so-called ‘Club of Rome’, the mid-20th century population alarmists who predicted the end of the world due to unchecked growth of populations in developing countries (Golub & Townsend 1977; Lomborg 2012).

A prominent Chinese demographer, Ma Yinchu, was a critic of this more moderate approach, as his research projected that China's population was growing at an unsustainable pace (Scharping 2003, p.48). Figure 3.8 shows a propaganda poster from this period:



Figure 3.8: Poster from the late 1950s 'Practicing Birth Control is Beneficial to Protect the Mother's and Child's Health' (Landsberger Collection 2016b)

Beginning in 1958, the pendulum swung back towards pronatalism due to optimism surrounding Mao's communization plan. In January, as the plans to take a 'Great Leap Forward (*dayuejin*)' in industrial production were being finalized, Mao declared that a large population was useful in the current level of socialist development, although he still favoured access to birth control for those who wanted it (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.74). The next two years saw a series of vicious attacks on Ma Yinchu's 'New Population Theory', and the general idea that China's large population was an obstacle to its development (Freeberne 1964). More than 200 articles were published arguing that Ma's theory was 'an attempt to discredit the superiority of Socialism, and showed no compassion for the people' (Tien 1981,

p.687). In 1960, Ma was accused of propagating Malthusianism and deposed, reportedly at the request of Mao himself (Scharping 2003, p.48). Yet at the same time that Ma's theories were being decried, they were being borne out through the Great Leap Forward famine, which ravaged the countryside. Due to nutritional deficit and disruptions in married life (Orleans 1962), more than 25 million people died, and even more births were lost (Bachman 1991; Spence 1999).

The return to economic normalcy in 1961 led to a rebound in the number of births, which was the impetus behind the next campaign to 'earnestly advocate planned birth' in urban and densely populated rural areas (Orleans 1962). This was the first instance in which the policy area was given an institutional grounding: the Ministry of Health set up a 'Section for Birth Planning', and in 1964 a 'Family Planning Office' of the State Council was established (Orleans 1975). Once again, however, Mao's personal support seemed lukewarm at best:

As he phrased it delicately in a speech of February 1963, 'A large population is a good thing, but as we are the most populous country in the world, we already have plenty of this good thing, and if we still let the population grow rapidly in an unplanned manner, it won't be a good thing any more' (Scharping 2003, p.32)

In this case, it was actually Premier Zhou Enlai¹⁶ who was the driving force behind the initiative: Zhou spoke out forcefully against critics of the campaign, and went on the record in 1963 advocating the first formulation of 'two children per couple is enough' and promoting sterilization for couples with two offspring (White 2006, p.52). In 1965, at a conference on birth planning in Shandong Province, the slogan 'one is not few, two are perfect, and three are too many' emerged for the first time (Jiang et al. 2013).

¹⁶ Zhou Enlai was the first Premier of China, and a skilled statesman who is thought to have been the main force behind interpreting Mao's ideology into governance of the PRC. He was the main formulator of China's foreign policy and oversaw many economic initiatives. Only recently has his role in bringing birth planning to the agenda become clear; yet he died in 1976, before China transitioned to one child per couple (Gao 2007; Wilson 1984).

This second campaign was again short-lived due to political upheaval. When Mao sparked the ‘Cultural Revolution (*wenhua da geming*)’¹⁷ in May of 1966, he threw the Party and the nation into chaos, which meant that implementing birth planning work was all but impossible (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005). But it was also during this period of heightened attention to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism that justification was discovered for state planning of births, in a letter that Friedrich Engels, Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* co-author, had written to Karl Kautsky (Greenhalgh 2008, p.70). The letter contained the quote ‘If communist society should one day be compelled to regulate the production of human beings as it regulates the production of goods, then it and it alone will be able to do this without any difficulty’; this was interpreted to mean that human fertility was a type of production that, like economic production, should be controlled by the state (Engels 1972 [1884]). This phrase and the insinuation that reproduction could be planned like economic production would become incredibly influential in China. With this Marxist justification to push against accusations of population control as fundamentally Malthusian in nature, supporters of birth planning had a powerful new weapon.

This period of policy reversals exacerbated China’s peaked population structure. The most pivotal event among those described above was the Great Leap Forward and its direct aftermath, because ‘the famine led to serious conditions of subfecundity, as well as to disruptions for numerous couples in their patterns of normal married life’ (Poston 2000, p.44). Although the figure is widely disputed, it is estimated that China suffered roughly 25 to 30 million more deaths and produced 30 to 35 million fewer births in the period 1958 to 1961 than would have occurred under normal circumstances (Jowett 1991; Orleans 1962). As China recovered, births postponed by these factors were closely clustered, such that the 1982

¹⁷ The Cultural Revolution was a movement sparked by Mao in 1966 to purge capitalist and traditionalist elements (old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas) from the Party. Its politics were complex, but in practice, it led to years of chaos and hundreds of thousands of deaths (Gao 2008; MacFarquhar 1997).

census showed 19.5 million people alive who had been born in 1958, only 10.7 million from 1961, and 27.4 million from 1963 (Jowett 1991). Even with the increased mortality from 1958 to 1961 and the variable fertility over this period, however, the general trend in the Chinese population was still one of significant increase. China's population growth was astounding: in 1953, China was home to 583 million people, but by 1970 this had increased a full 42 percent to 830 million total (Banister 1984, p.718). As greater understanding of these realities dawned, the situation was ripe for the state to take a harsher stance on issues of China's population.

3.3.3 'Later, Longer, Fewer'

As order returned to China in the late 1960s, Zhou Enlai and his supporters again agitated to get birth planning on the agenda, and this time they were successful. The institutional grounding came first: in 1968, the State Council established a 'Leading Small Group (*lingdao xiaozu*)' to coordinate enforcement (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, pp.80–83). Playing off the model of the 'twofold character of production' extrapolated from Engels's letter, Zhou said in 1970 that 'family planning belongs to national planning; it is not a health



Figure 3.9: 1974 Propaganda Poster: 'Family Planning Has Many Advantages'(Landsberger Collection 2016a)

issue, but a planning issue' (Huang & Yang 2004, p.195). This logic jumpstarted a series of trials in the early 1970s with what came to be known as a 'later, longer, fewer (*wan, xi, shao*)' policy, which promoted 'late marriage' (23 for women and 25 for men in rural areas and 25 and 27 in cities), 'late birth' (first birth over the age of 24), 'longer spacing' (three years between births in the countryside and four in the cities), and 'fewer' births (three in rural areas and two in cities) (Greenhalgh 2008, p.66). This campaign also universalized free contraceptive provision and mandated reimbursement for reproductive health procedures (White 2006, p.59).

In 1973, the national Party newspapers began a concerted press campaign to propagandize the birth planning policy (Scharping 2003, p.49). December 1973 saw a formal announcement of the later, longer, fewer policy as a national guideline, marking the first time that birth planning had been a universal requirement (Settles et al. 2013). And in 1975, Mao gave his final endorsement of the birth planning policy, scribbling in the margins of the annual plan that 'it won't do not to control population (*renkou fei kongzhi bu xing*)' (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.89). As Mao's long rule drew to an end in the mid-1970s, however, it seemed as if birth planning might be a victim of factional infighting. While Mao's appointed successor, Hua Guofeng, was a prominent advocate of birth planning who had served as the first chair of the Leading Small Group for Birth Planning (White 2006, p.62), Jiang Qing, Mao's powerful wife, was an outspoken critic. Madam Mao had called birth planning a 'feminine triviality (*popo mama de xiaoshi*)', and said that the policy was evidence of the very 'bureaucratism, obstructionism, and oppression' her husband sought to eradicate in the Cultural Revolution (Greenhalgh 2008, p.59). As a result, when Madam Mao and her compatriots were put on trial, the birth planning effort and Hua's ascendancy to leader of the Party were linked with the 'anti-Gang of Four' campaign, which strengthened

birth planning's political status (Jaffe & Oakley 1978). The first sign of the coming tightening was the 1977 ruling that all couples (even rural ones) should limit themselves to having two children (Banister 1984). This was the beginning of the end for the 'later, longer, fewer' policy.

Some demographers have argued that the 1970 to 1980 was the most successful period in the entire Chinese birth planning experience. In a decade, the TFR fell from around 5.5 children per woman to 2.6 (World Bank 2016a), and the crude birth rate decreased from 34 births per 1,000 population in 1970 to 18 per 1,000 in 1978 (Banister 1984, p.719). The policy conformed to cultural ideals about the desirability of children (especially boys), and it allowed for ethnic minorities and rural citizens to have looser restrictions (White 2006). In addition, the demographic impact of encouraging later childbirth and increasing the birth interval between two children was by definition a more gradual transition to low fertility, one which some research has calculated would have allowed China to achieve similar population targets in the long run (Greenhalgh & Bongaarts 1987). Recent examinations of the statistics surrounding the number of state birth planning interventions (abortions, IUD insertions, sterilizations) have noted a rise in the 1970s that suggests at least some of the groundwork for later coercion was laid under this early regime (Whyte et al. 2015), but the fact remains that the decade from 1970 to 1980 saw the most precipitous drop in Chinese fertility in history.

3.4 National Birth Planning and the Experiment of Eight Million People, 1980 to 2015

The era of the so-called One-Child Policy in China has been described as 'the most spectacular demographic experiment in history' (Hvistendahl 2010, p.1458), 'an extraordinary story of social engineering' (Lavelly & Freedman 1990, p.358), and a 'social policy...of unprecedented magnitude' (White 2006, p.251). These descriptions may be somewhat hyperbolic, but it is clear that China's birth planning campaign was a long-lived effort by the government that expanded the power of the state into the spheres of family and

reproduction to an unprecedented degree (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005). It was directly in response to the difficulties of implementing this monumental policy that the experimental designs in Yicheng, Jiuquan, Chengde, and Enshi arose, so this second portion of the Chinese birth planning chronology will form the main focus of this Chapter. Here especially, particular attention will be paid to influential time periods, actors, and institutions, in order to lay a foundation for the detailed discussions of possible critical junctures in this history.

3.4.1 Shift to ‘One Child Per Couple’, 1978-1980

Although the ‘later, longer, fewer’ campaign contributed to a significant decrease in fertility, the policy was tightened further less than a decade after its inception. A universal one-child limit was first proposed in 1978, when data showed that there was a high number of women entering childbearing ages; this led to an official slogan of ‘one is best, two at most’ in Central Committee Document 69 (Shi 1988). Document 69 also ordered the secretary of every Party committee to take personal responsibility for birth planning, which was ‘an unambiguous signal to all party cadres that birth planning was a primary state task, [and] one that they could not ignore’ (White 2006, p.83). In the spring of 1979, there was a turn toward the one-child solution, with the head of the NFPC (Chen Muhua) and the Party Vice Chairman (Li Xiannian) loudly supporting it in speeches (Shi 1988). Also prescient was the rehabilitation of Ma Yinchu in the fall of 1979: the same population scientist whose antinatalist views had seen him disgraced 20 years before was made head of Peking University (Tien 1981). By September 1980, sufficient support had been mustered to render the promotion of one child per couple an official state program, and it was formally announced through an Open Letter from the Central Committee (Central Committee 1980). Although the policy slogan was still ‘late marriage, late childbearing, few births, and quality births (*wanhun, wanyu, shaosheng, yousheng*)’, critics used the phrase ‘one childization (*yitai hua*)’ to refer to the change (Greenhalgh 2008, p.148). In recognition of the resistance that the

new policy would face, the Third Session of the People's Congress in 1980 announced the need for a 'crash drive (*tuji*)' to promote implementation and to ensure that the nation would meet its goal of 1.2 billion people by the year 2000 (White 2006, p.68).



Figure 3.10: 'Carry out Family Planning, Implement the Basic National Policy' - Poster from the mid-1980s (Zhou 1986)

Contrary to popular belief, the so-called One-Child Policy was never universal: at its inception, it applied only to ethnically Han people (thereby omitting the nation's 55 minority groups, who form approximately eight percent of the population) and from the beginning it had some local exceptions (Retherford et al. 2005). It is true, however, that most Chinese families were limited to having one child, and elaborate systems and incentives were put in place to ensure compliance. Within the Party, a 'family planning responsibility system' withheld wages and promotions from cadres who did not meet birth planning targets (Huang & Yang 2004). The permanence of the shift was underlined when the State Council's Leading Small Group became a formal 'National Family Planning Commission (*guojia jihua shengyu weiyuanhui*)' (hereafter 'NFPC') in 1981; the Commission still coordinated with the

Ministry of Health, but it could now independently set guidelines and devise implementation methods to achieve goals (Merli et al. 2004). And in 1982, birth planning became a ‘basic national policy (*jiben guoce*)’ as well as a constitutional duty (Attané 2002, p.103). This ‘basic national’ classification is very important in the PRC, because it denotes a policy as a ‘permanent priority, off-limits to criticism of fundamentals’ (Merli et al. 2004). It meant, in effect, that national birth planning had begun in earnest.

3.4.2 Resisting ‘One Childization’ – Foundations of the Experiment

When China was moving from the later, longer, fewer policy toward the promotion of one child per couple in the late 1970s, the head of the Shanxi Province Party School was a man named Liang Zhongtang, whose strong resistance to what he dubbed ‘one childization



Figure 3.11: Liang Zhongtang in Yicheng, c.2013 (personal photo)

(*yitaihua*)’ has been extensively documented in Greenhalgh's (2008) book and is widely known within the Chinese population studies establishment (Gu Interview 2016; F. Wang Interview 2016)¹⁸. The trend towards a one child per couple rule had begun as early as the end of 1978, but it is generally acknowledged that a birth planning policy conference held in Chengdu in December of 1979 was a particularly pivotal moment for deciding among three

¹⁸ Throughout the text, data gleaned from the elite interviews will be cited differently (as ‘SURNAME Interview 2016’) in order to showcase which of the information is from this new primary source.

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possible policy designs: Liu Zheng's suggestion that the government prohibit third births and vigorously encourage couples to have one child, Liang Zhongtang's argument for a strengthened later, longer, fewer program, and the cyberneticist Song Jian's advocacy for a universal one child per couple rule (Greenhalgh 2008). Liang coined the term '4-2-1 problem (*si, er, yi wenti*)' in his paper, as he correctly predicted the pressure that limiting births would place on later generations of Chinese couples to provide for four parents and an only child simultaneously (Zhang & Goza 2006). Yet Liang was an official from an outlying province, with rudimentary demographic projections conducted by hand, while Song Jian was a celebrated scientist well known to many of China's highest officials and with significant resources (including some of the first Chinese computer models) at his disposal (Greenhalgh 2003). It is perhaps unsurprising that Liang's objections were largely ignored, and Song Jian's computer-generated graphs helped antinatalists like Li Xiannian, Chen Muhua, and the other officials build consensus on the necessity of limiting couples to one child (Greenhalgh 2008, pp.235–249).

Yet the debate at the 1979 Chengdu conference went beyond a squabble about the ideal policy design: it helped to draw battle lines that would hold over the coming decades. Song Jian, who effectively transformed from a mathematician calculating optimal rocket trajectories to a respected expert on the Chinese population outlook (Greenhalgh 2005), would continue to play a role in ensuring that his one-child design stayed in place, even intervening personally as late as 2007 to ensure that his fertility limits stayed in place (Wee & Li 2013; Greenhalgh 2008, p.335). Liang Zhongtang became widely known as a conscientious objector to the one-child limit, and it was his late marriage and late births plus



Figure 3.12: Zhao Ziyang in the mid-1980s (Biography.com 2016)

spacing policy design that would form the basis for the eventual pilots in all four locations of the Experiment of Eight Million People. Perhaps most importantly, the responses of the various CCP elites showed Liang and other population experts who could provide support for future reforms. Zhao Ziyang, who was preparing to take over as Premier and was already known as an economic reformer (and who had six children himself) (Bao et al. 2009), was noticeably interested in Liang's proposal (Liang Interview 2016). He was joined in his attentiveness by the incoming Secretary-General, Hu Yaobang, a close associate of Deng Xiaoping and a fellow reformist, who sided with Zhao against Li Xiannian and his pro-only child contingent (Yang et al. 1988). At the time, these cleavages were behind-the-scenes differences, but in the coming years, they would provide fissures for Liang and other reformers to exploit in trying to crack open the one-child rule.

3.4.3 The Sterilization Campaign of 1983 and its Aftermath

In the early 1980s, the confluence of economic reforms and 'one childization' meant that the institutions that made birth planning implementation possible were being undermined even as the policy was tightening. In the late 1970s, the strict control low-level cadres exerted over life in the collective or 'work unit (*danwei*)' made enforcing birth planning fairly easy, but decollectivization in the countryside and the gradual end of full employment in the urban sector began to undermine those structures soon after the policy changed (Naughton 2007). In the rural areas especially, new patterns of land distribution for the Household Responsibility System favoured larger families with more agricultural labour, the drying up of welfare funds decreased money available to reward single-child households, and penalties against violators became harder to enforce, so the policy compliance lagged (White 2006, p.115). To complicate matters further, a 1981 change in the Marriage Law decreased the minimum age for marriage to 20 for women and 22 for men, which led to a twofold increase in the number of marriages and a rise in births among newlyweds (Banister 1984).

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In response to the increase in births, there was a major push from 1982 to 1983 to re-exert control over fertility by ensuring compliance the direct way: sterilization. Chinese people were generally fearful of sterilization, which many believed had side effects ranging from chronic illness and debility to the end of male virility (Mueggler 2001). Yet Hu Yaobang declared in the fall of 1982 that in January and February of 1983, all of the Party's efforts would be directed at enforcing the birth planning policy and carrying out sterilizations and abortions to ensure success (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.109). The central Ministry set strict targets and sent 1.37 million propagandists and 138,000 doctors and nurses to the countryside (Scharping 2003, p.57). Importantly, the standard admonition to avoid 'commandism and coercion (*qiangpo mingling*)' was missing from the directive (White 2006, p.143), and this led to a pattern in which 'ambitious goals set by the centre were pushed even higher by local officials seeking to demonstrate their enthusiasm' (White 1994, p.147). The results were astounding: in two months, more than 16 million women and four million men were sterilized (White 2006), and over 15 million abortions were performed (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005). Yet increasingly troubling details about the campaign emerged, including accounts of late-term abortions and sterilizations on women who had not fulfilled their parity quotas (Short et al. 2000; Zheng et al. 2012). As a result, Qian Xinzhong, the head of the NFPC, came under increasing pressure from critics who believed the campaign had been too drastic. By the end of the year, Qian had been replaced by his Deputy Director, Wang Wei (Yi 1989), and the stage was set for another adjustment to the policy.

The time directly after the switch to promoting one child per couple had mixed demographic results. It has been estimated that the 'initial wave' of the new birth planning policy led to a one-child rate in the next four years of 42 percent (78 percent in cities and 27 percent in rural areas) (Freedman et al. 1988, p.47). Yet the 1981 decrease in the minimum age at marriage meant that the number of new unions increased more than a hundred percent

(Banister 1984), at the same time that the first of the large cohorts born after the Great Leap Forward were reaching marriageable age. Due to the age structure, crude birth rates shot up from their 1979 low of 17.8 births per 1,000 population to a high of 22.3 in 1982 and only a slightly lower 20.2 in 1983, although the TFR stayed consistent at 2.6 births per woman (World Bank 2015a). Some have argued that these figures could be underestimated, as the 1980s saw the first wave of records falsification by grassroots cadres unable to achieve their targets (Banister 1991). And while the radical campaign of 1983 staunched the flood somewhat, the fact remained that the decade of the 1980s would be the fulfilment of China's population momentum, as peak cohorts of young Chinese citizens entered prime childbearing years.

3.4.4 Central Document 7, 1984

There is some evidence that the CCP's leaders realized at the time of the one-child rule's inception that some Chinese couples would require an exception to allow them to have two children, but no such exemptions were specified (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.105). After the massively unpopular 1983 sterilization campaign and the change in leadership at the NFPC, however, things were ripe for recalibration. The shift came in the April 1984 release of 'Central Document 7', which stipulated 14 types of cases in which couples were eligible for second-child permits, and also named 44 counties allowed to experiment with forms of second-child permission (Scharping 2003, p.60). The two most commonly implemented designs for alternative policies were the so-called one-and-a-half rule in which rural families whose first child was a girl were allowed to have a second, and various exceptions for families with 'practical difficulties (*shiji pinkun*)', defined based on local conditions (Currier 2008). Despite the fact that Central Document 7 is generally seen as a moderation of the strict focus on one child per couple, it should also be noted that ethnic minorities, who had

previously been exempt from birth planning restrictions, began at the same time to be governed by policies promoting two children per couple (Retherford et al. 2005).

3.4.5 Taking Advantage of a ‘Small Hole’: Beginning the Pilot Policies

It was in this context of Central Document 7’s suggestion of policy loosening that the pilots in Yicheng, Jiuquan, Chengde, and Enshi began. The Document initiated the doctrine of ‘opening a small hole to close a big hole (*kai xiaokou du dakou*)’, or allowing for limited exceptions to birth planning rules to prevent large-scale violation of the rules (Scharping 2003). In combination with the renewed focus on encouraging ethnic minorities to implement birth limits (Retherford et al. 2005), this idea was particularly powerful in the four pilot counties. In addition, Document 7 was a symptom of underlying dissension among high leaders as to the wisdom of continuing the one-child limits, although there is disagreement as to whether or not the divisions were a direct response to the unrest from the sterilization campaign (White 1994) or a factional dispute between Vice Premier Li Peng and his one-child supporters and Premier Zhao Ziyang and his dissenters (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.101). Whatever the specifics, the turmoil surrounding Central Document 7 provided an opening for the implementation of alternative policy designs.

It is the experience in Yicheng County, Shanxi, that has been most extensively documented, thanks in large part to the personal efforts of Liang Zhongtang, who had previously gained notoriety as an objector to the one-child rule at the Chengdu conference in 1979 (Greenhalgh 2008) (see page 71). In February 1984, Liang Zhongtang wrote a report to the NFPC, in which he again argued that his proposal of a late marriage and late births plus spacing policy would allow the population target of 1.2 billion by the year 2000 to be achieved, but with support from the people due to the allowance of a second child (Liang 2013). This report was circulated, and it eventually reached Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang, who gave Liang Zhongtang permission to attempt the policy design in a local area under his

control (Liang 2010). With the written clearance from the nation's Premier and General Secretary, Liang was able to convince the provincial authorities to comply. He then chose Yicheng as the site of his pilot based on the quality of its demographic records, its transport accessibility (for inspections), and its representativeness for rural China (Liang Interview 2016). By July of 1985, the provincial and national birth planning authorities had officially announced the implementation of a late marriage and late births plus spacing policy in Yicheng (Gu & Wang 2009).

The record is sparser surrounding the impetus of the other three policy pilots, but they began only slightly later than Liang's experiment in Yicheng County. In Hebei province, the government allowed Chengde to implement a two-child plus spacing policy because it was the poorest prefecture, and it was expedient to allow its citizens more household agricultural labour; its selection therefore relied primarily on the practical difficulties doctrine (Wang 2008). In contrast, the beginning of the policy in Enshi was closely tied to ethnic issues in that area of Hubei. The local policymakers saw an opportunity to solve the dual problems of high future growth among minorities who averaged more than three births and the complaints of the Han Chinese in their jurisdiction about their continued one-child limit, so they implemented a two-child policy with spacing to allow the Han an extra child and to limit fertility among minorities (Shi & Jiang 2008). In Jiuquan, resistance to the one-child limit and institutional insufficiency sparked the institution of a two-child policy with a four-year birth interval in 1984, with the condition that only villages in which there were no out-of-plan births and over 80 percent of fees had been collected were eligible for second births (Jian & Zhou 2008). Despite the unique beginning of each pilot, by 1985, Yicheng, Jiuquan, Chengde, and Enshi all had policies that allowed couples to have two children, providing they abide by conditions on timing of births.

3.4.6 Re-tightening the Policy

Whatever the impetus for the changes brought by Central Document 7, the policy liberalization in the 40 counties where some form of a two-child policy was enacted was followed by a slight rebound in the number of births. The three years after the ‘small holes’ opened saw an overall increase in the total fertility rate and crude birth rate, from about 2.5 children per woman and 20 per thousand in 1982 to 2.8 and 23 per thousand in 1987 (World Bank 2016a). Despite the fact that many contemporary experts argued that the rising birth rates were a function of the large cohort of people at child-bearing ages (White 2006, p.167), the Birth Minister, Wang Wei, was dismissed over the matter (Qian 1997). Later analysis has suggested that Wang Wei and his supporters were correct: although parity progression ratios¹⁹ from first to second births increased marginally during this time, they stayed lower



Figure 3.13: Peng Peiyun in the 1990s (Huang 2008)

than they had been in 1982 (Luther et al. 1990). Yet Wang Wei was nonetheless replaced, and his replacement, Peng Peiyun, went on to play a significant role in the Experiment of Eight Million People. Minister Peng Peiyun had been a CCP official since her graduation

¹⁹ A parity progression ratio (PPR) is defined as ‘the proportion of women who progress from one parity to the next’; in this case, it reflects the percentage of women who already have one child who go on to have a second birth (Moultrie 2013).

from Tsinghua University in 1949, and had served primarily in the Ministry of Education, reaching the rank of Deputy Director by 1985 (Huang 2008). She was selected to be Minister of the NFPC because she came from a revolutionary family, her background in education fit the need for propaganda activities in birth planning, and she had shown interest in women's issues (she would go on to be Chairperson of the All-China Women's Federation) (China Vitae 2008). Minister Peng had four children herself, and from the beginning was seen as somewhat of a dissenter with the one-child rule, although her efforts to continue policy liberalization in the mid-1980s were ultimately fruitless (White 2006, pp.214–216).

Whatever the specific demographic drivers of the increase in births in the mid-1980s, and despite the protests of both Wang Wei and his successor Peng Peiyun, the policy was re-tightened beginning in 1986. Central Document 13 (1986) noted a 'loss of control (*shikong*)' in birth planning policy, and a debate about the best way forward for the troublesome rural areas ensued (National Family Planning Commission 1989). The winter campaigns to propagandize and enforce the birth planning limits were restarted in 1987 (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.119). There appears to have been a high-level division on the best policy for rural Chinese citizens across most of 1988, but by mid-summer, the Family Planning Commission cut down the number of centrally endorsed two-child experimental counties from 45 to only 13 (Wei & Zhang 2014). Instead, most of the local exceptions were harmonized to the so-called one-and-a-half policy, which allowed households whose first child was a girl to have a second baby, although provinces maintained leeway in implementing exceptions to suit 'local conditions' (Scharping 2003). By 1989, there were broadly three categories of birth planning rules across China: a universal two-child policy for rural couples in 13 counties and for minorities; a 'one and a half child' policy for rural citizens in 18 provinces; and very limited concessions for second births in some cities (White

2006). This diversity has led some to estimate that, by the end of the 1980s, only 35 percent of China's population was subject to a strict one-child limit (Bristow 2013).

The period post-June 1989 marked a conservative resurgence in the CCP that led to retrenchment of many policies, including a further tightening of birth planning regulations²⁰. During this period, the birth planning Leading Small Group was re-started and the ranks of full-time birth planning spots posts were expanded, reflecting the new focus on birth planning work (White 2006, p.221). In general, the new narrowing focused more on intensifying enforcement through increased 'crash campaigns' and harsher punishments for rule-breakers than imposing new rules, but after results from the fourth population census in 1991 showed that the population had risen to 1.16 billion, the State Council passed a new resolution on birth planning (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.125). The May 1991 document instituted a campaign of IUD insertions, sterilizations, and abortions, although this was less extensive than the one in 1983 due to a shortage of funds (Scharping 2003, p.75). The enforcement drive was followed by a propaganda campaign, dubbed the 'Three Links (*san jiehe*)', which focused on demonstrating how birth planning could have benefits outside the realm of fertility, through increasing the standard of living, developing the economy, and constructing 'civilized and happy families' (Greenhalgh 2001).

Even though regulations stayed relatively consistent in the early 1990s, there were other actions that sought to indirectly strengthen the birth planning policy. To close a perceived loophole, the State Council passed a new law that restricted the adoption of healthy babies to couples over 35 without children (Johnson et al. 1998; Johnson 1996). Another move was to buttress enforcement of the birth planning policy at the local level by vastly

²⁰ Zhao Ziyang fell victim to elite struggles concerning the response to the students in Tiananmen Square, and Zhao's support for their protest and refusal to respond with violence ended with revocation of his Party membership and house arrest until his death in 2005 (Bao et al. 2009). Zhao had been seen as a reformer, but after his purge, many of his followers lost their posts, which led to reversals of many progressive policies (Chan 2010).

expanding the Birth Planning Associations, quasi-governmental organizations with an enforcement mandate directly from the CCP, in rural villages (Scharping 2003, p.174). And perhaps the most important change was the institution of the ‘one vote veto system (*yipiao foujue quan*)’, so that cadres who did not meet their birth planning targets could not be eligible for promotion (White 2006, p.222). This focus on statistics meant that officials began underreporting births in order to meet their targets, which severely affected the integrity of Chinese population figures (Goodkind 2004; Zhao & Zhang 2010; Retherford et al. 2005).

By the mid-1990s, when the reformist clique again exerted control over the CCP centre (Naughton 2007), the policy moderated somewhat. The most important change was the circulation by the NFPC of a document outlining the ‘Seven Prohibitions (*qi buzhun*)’, or practices that would no longer be tolerated in birth planning work:

- (1) Illegally detaining, beating or humiliating an offender or their relative;
- (2) destroying property, crops, or houses;
- (3) raising mortgages without legal authorization;
- (4) imposing ‘unreasonable’ fines or confiscating goods;
- (5) implicating relatives or neighbours of offenders, or retaliating against those who report cadre misbehaviour;
- (6) prohibiting childbirths permitted by the local plan in order to fulfil production targets;
- (7) organizing pregnancy check-ups for unmarried women (White 2006, pp.231–232)

While these measures lend insight into the extremity of reinforcement in the early 1990s, they also made for a more relaxed atmosphere toward birth planning within China in the late 1990s. Yet the government concurrently released a White Paper on Family Planning that took a hard-line stance against foreign entities criticizing its birth planning regime; it was translated into English and published soon after (Chinese Government 1995). Surveys also showed that fertility intentions in the population at large decreased in the 1990s, although it is unclear whether this was due to a resignation to the birth planning policy or acceptance of its long-promoted norms (Merli et al. 2004).

An important turning point for China’s demographics occurred during this period: for the first time, Chinese fertility dropped below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman

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(Huang & Yang 2004; Cai 2008). Yet in the same decade that the Chinese government appeared to be achieving their goal of controlling population growth, a different problem was emerging: between 1990 and 2000, all Chinese provinces except Zhejiang recorded an increase in the sex ratio at birth, or the number of male versus female babies born (Attané 2009, p.89). In some places, the ratios reached highs of 145 boys born for every 100 girls (Currier 2008). Importantly, later research to disaggregate the distortions by parity has shown that the sex ratio of second births is incredibly sensitive to the gender of a firstborn child, with only-daughter households much more likely to prenatally select for a son (Das Gupta 2005; Basten et al. 2013). This suggests that the one-and-a-half policy was a significant contributor to China's gender imbalance (Attané 2009; Golley & Tyers 2014). The detailed implications of this imbalance will be described further below, but the perceived victory earned by the desired decrease in fertility was dampened by the increasing sex ratios of Chinese babies. Figure 3.14 shows the trends of China's rural and urban sex ratios at birth over time:

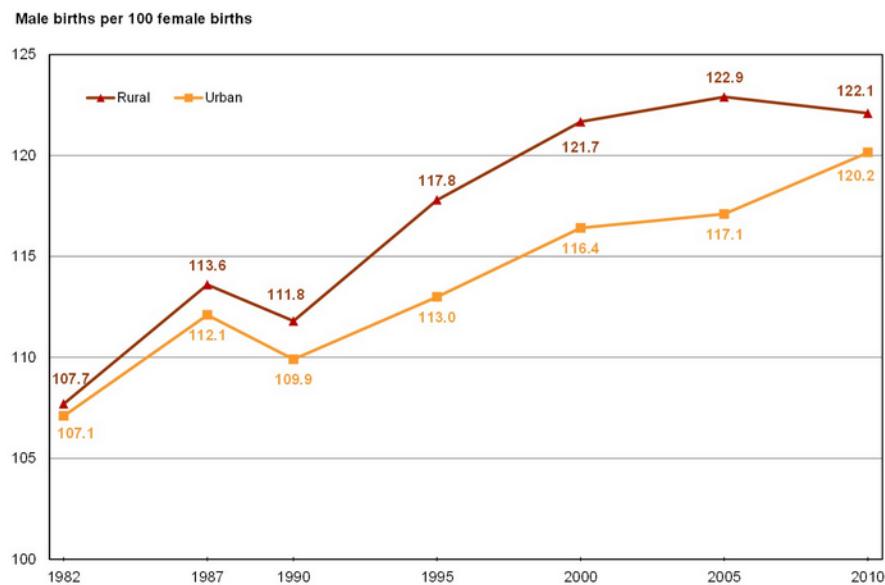


Figure 3.14: China's Urban and Rural Sex Ratios at Birth from 1982 to 2010 (UNICEF 2015)

3.4.7 Changes in the 21st Century

The remainder of this portion will address the intricacies of the national policy's shifts since 2000, and the following segment will detail the advocacy activities around the Experiment of Eight Million People that occurred concurrently. On a national level, China's birth planning policy has been a mixture of reaffirmation and loosening since the turn of the century. In 2000, the State Council released a Decision on 'Reinforcing Population and Family Planning Policy and Stabilizing Low Fertility Levels' (Jiang et al. 2013). Birth planning was officially codified into a national law in 2001, but the statute was considered mild in its wording, and it still allowed for the patchwork of local exceptions that hardliners wanted to eliminate (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.160). In 2003, the NFPC was renamed the National *Population* and Family Planning Commission (hereafter 'NPFPC') and tasked with a wider range of missions, including formulating strategy to address problems of ageing and gender imbalances (White 2006, p.241). Its ranks continued to grow: by 2005 the NPFPC had over 500,000 employees (Hvistendahl 2010). The 'Care for Girls Action (*guan'ai nü'er xingdong*)' was started in 2003 to emphasize that 'gender discrimination should be eradicated from the prenatal stage and gender equality should be stressed in early childhood', but in 2005 the government released a document arguing that birth planning had never adversely affected women and girls (State Council 2005a). There seemed to be a relaxation of the rhetorical undertones that had characterized earlier population documents (Merli et al. 2004), but the 2007 'Decision on Population and Birth Planning' again played on the 'doctrine of population as threat' to argue that China's fertility policy must remain unchanged for the foreseeable future (Greenhalgh 2008, p.321).

Although the NPFPC conducted several large-scale research projects on the future of the population policy during this time, it was not until 2013 that there were shifts that could be characterized as the bellwether of major reform. In March 2013, the NPFPC was merged

with the Ministry of Health to become the National *Health* and Family Planning Commission (hereafter ‘NHFPC’), an institutional adjustment that took birth planning full circle back to a sub-issue of health governance (D. Wang 2013). Then, at the Third Plenum of the Eighteenth Party Conference in the same year, China officially changed the national policy such that any couple in which one member is an only child could apply to have a second (Ouyang 2013; Bai 2013). The government had projected that this shift would lead to an additional one to two million births per year across China (Bai 2013), but the results from 2014 quickly showed that such a baby boom would not appear. Instead, it was estimated that there were less than half a million extra births in response to the policy change, and the numbers were even lower across parts of urban China, where fewer than ten percent of eligible couples were applying for second birth permits (Basten & Jiang 2014). This fact assuaged some of the worries of China’s highest policymakers that any policy loosening would once again make population growth a problem, although its gradualism also dismayed experts and academics who believed that China needed more births to rectify its population structure.

The true termination of China’s promotion of one child per couple came in October of 2015, when the government announced ‘universal two-child policy (*quanmian erhai zhengce*)’ at the end of the Fifth Plenum. Under this new law, which came into effect in January of 2016, all Chinese couples could apply to have a second child (Hesketh et al. 2015). Some scholars had foreseen this shift (Basten & Jiang 2015), although most media coverage sensationalized it as an abrupt reversal (Buckley 2015; Phillips 2015; Evans 2016). The official justifications for the change had to do with the accelerated ageing of China’s population, as well as the decline of its labour force, but it is still unclear to what extent the loosening will have its desired effect (Attané 2016). In practice, the policy allows all couples to have a two children, and also removes the requirement to apply for a birth and receive official permission before pregnancy; now, families need only register their babies after they

have already been born (Gu et al. 2016). Although critics of China's birth planning regime have spoken approvingly of the policy, most point out that it still places a limit on the number of children Chinese citizens are allowed to have, and it therefore doesn't represent a true end to China's long history of state-sponsored antinatalist population policy.

Although this new policy still puts conditions on the timing of births and requires new parents to apply for permits to have a child, the 2015 decision effectively marks the conclusion of China's unprecedented demographic experiment. The overall chronology of the birth planning policy may well have terminated in 2015, but in its last 15 years of existence, there was an untold facet of its history that was largely hidden from the public. The story of how Jiuquan, Enshi, Chengde, and Yicheng attracted a group of advocates who leveraged their results to argue for a policy change has only been barely mentioned in the English language literature²¹. The next Section gives an overview of that alternative history, which sets the stage for the later possible critical junctures that will be covered in Chapter 4. Then the final two portions of this Chapter cover the demographic outcomes of the focus on promoting one child per couple and those of the alternative late marriage and late birth plus spacing policies in the experimental counties.

3.5 Advocacy for the Experiment of Eight Million People

Fifteen years after the Experiment of Eight Million People began, it seemed to many that China's birth planning policy regime was entering a new stage. Following the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 World Conference on Women, the CCP had shown notable openness to improving the policy (Birchard 1998). The rapid progression of a 'Quality of Care' initiative funded by the Ford Foundation from a local experiment to national policy illustrated this clearly (Kaufman et al.

²¹ It was alluded to in less than a paragraph in Golley (2011, p.294), Foundation (2014), and Scharping (2003, pp.70–71). Liang Zhongtang was the subject of a human interest chapter in Fong (2016).

2006)²². Encouraged by the results from this collaboration, the NFPC moved into a second phase of partnership with the Ford Foundation in 2000, and the new round of funding called for analysis of the feasibility of so-called ‘administrative reforms (*xingzheng gaige*)’, a phrase that specifically encompassed the possibility of moving towards a universal two-child policy (Kaufman Interview 2016; Gu 2010a). A demographer named Gu Baochang, who was transitioning from his role at the Population Council to be the Director of International Cooperation at the Chinese Family Planning Association, was chosen to be the head of the group who would undertake the research for this project, and he enlisted several colleagues to join him at the centre of the new initiative, most notably Wang Feng of the East-West Center (Wang 2011; Wang 2005), and Zhang Erli, a long-time birth planning official and adviser to the NPFPC (Zhang 2001).

In May of 2001, Gu Baochang organized a meeting of 16 Chinese scholars in Shanghai to set out a work plan and timetable for an official policy proposal to be formulated and submitted to the NPFPC (Gu 2010a). Over two years, the team carried out extensive analysis centred around the necessity, feasibility, and operationalization of policy change, including an extensive mapping of Policy Fertility, or the aggregate Total Fertility Rate that would result if all local fertility requirements across China were fulfilled (the number they arrived at was 1.47 children per woman; this work was later published in English as Gu et al. (2007)). The group then spent another year compiling the data and figures and drafting them into a formal policy proposal, which was signed by 16 demographers and submitted for internal review in April of 2004 under the title ‘A Suggestion on Adjusting China’s Birth Policy (*Guanyu Tiaozheng Woguo Shengyuzhengce de Jianyi*)’. Although the document itself was not made public out of fears that this would be seen as an attempt to undermine the

²² The ‘Quality of Care Initiative’ was a pilot started in the 1990s in six counties to integrate Bruce’s (1990) framework of client-centered choice into China’s system of contraceptive provision. Over eight years, the policy was scaled up to increasingly more locations and finally implemented nationally, and some of its main advocates moved on to work with the Experiment of Eight Million People (Kaufman et al. 2006).

government's authority, Gu Baochang supplied a personal copy to the author. The substance will be covered in Chapter 7, but it essentially argued that China's population was suffering distortions (aging, an unbalanced sex ratio, etc.) from the focus on promoting only children, and the policy should change to allow all couples to have two children.

After the proposal was submitted to the NPFPC, it was not immediately clear what the response would be. In June of 2004, at the Chinese Population Studies Conference in Baoding, a follow-up initiative called 'China's Fertility Policy for the 21st Century Research Project (*21 shiji Zhongguo shengyu zhengce yanjiu xiangmu*)' was approved. This allowed the group to conduct further analysis on areas with two-child policies, but a more ambitious plan to expand two-child policy experiments to new areas was vetoed (Zheng Interview 2016). This proved to be the first sign that the proposal was not going to bring substantive change. In April of 2005, several of the first proposal's signatories and birth planning officials attended the 'Forum on Emerging Population Changes in China and East Asia' at the East-West Center in Hawai'i, where they presented results from projections of future population changes and work on Policy Fertility, which the advocacy group took as a positive sign (Gu 2010a). Yet the largest indication that real change would not materialize concerned a NPFPC meeting scheduled for June of 2005, as a follow-up to the Hawai'i meeting. The meeting was intended to include scholars and high-ranking birth planning officials, including Minister Zhang Weiqing and several Vice Ministers, but it was abruptly moved from the NPFPC headquarters to a distant suburb in Beijing, and promised coverage in the Party press failed to materialize (F. Wang Interview 2016).

In response to these discouraging signals from the Party centre, the core group of demographers shifted their focus to initiatives that would promote wider awareness of the issues with the promotion of single-child families. These included the involvement of foreign and domestic experts, further research, and media outreach. Members of the policy proposal

team worked with Chinese economists from 2005 to 2008 to release two publications linking China's population changes to its economic outlook: '21st Century Population and Economic Development in China (*21 Shiji Zhongguo Renkou yu Jingji Fazhan*)' (Zeng et al. 2006) and 'The Demographic Transition and Its Social and Economic Consequences (*Renkou Zhuanbian de Shehui Jingji Houjie*)' (Wang & Gu 2006). In 2009, they organized a conference in Beijing called the 'Forum on Population, Gender and Development (*Renkou Xingbie Fazhan Luntan*)', which enlisted feminist scholars to examine the effects of the birth planning policy and other initiatives on women and girls across the course of China's development (Gu 2010a).

In addition to ongoing work on the 'China's Fertility Policy for the 21st Century Research Project', the signatories of the policy proposal studied a pre-existing policy that was becoming a natural experiment. Jiangsu, the large and dynamic coastal province surrounding Shanghai (Falkensheim 2013), had since the 1980s had a strict One-Child Policy even for rural areas, with a *dandu* exception that allowed rural couples in which one member was an only child to have two children. At the time of the policy's inception, this loophole allowed very few couples to have more than one child, but almost two generations later, nearly 90 percent of rural people in Jiangsu were only children who were eligible to have a second child (Gustafson & Baofeng 2014). In a research project spearheaded by Zheng Zhenzhen of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (published as (Zheng et al. 2009)), almost 20,000 women in six villages of varying levels of economic development were asked about their fertility intentions, with follow-up surveys to determine whether they had fulfilled those plans. They found that fertility intention was significantly lower than the legal two children per women, at 1.31 on average, and that less than ten percent of women who stated a preference for having a second child did so in the three-year period between surveys (Zheng et al. 2009).

The rest of the advocacy group was focused on fieldwork in the four counties selected as sites for the China's Fertility Policy for the 21st Century Research Project. Over two years, surveys, interviews, and documentary analysis were conducted in Jiuquan, Yicheng, Chengde, and Enshi to examine the results of the experiments and the prevalence of the various issues of ageing, shrinking labour force, and rising sex ratios at birth addressed in the 2004 policy proposal. In 2007, the group reconvened for a workshop at Beijing's Renmin University, called the 'Discussion Conference on the Situation in the Two-Child Areas (*Erhai Diqu Renkou Taishi Ketu Yantaohui*)', to present their findings on the situation in the counties (Gu 2010a). At the meeting, former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun gave a speech in which she discussed the significance of the investigation's results, and said that the research was an important milestone, because it had evaluated 'an experiment of more than eight million people', meaning it was the largest body of evidence on the effects of the two-child policy to date (Gu Interview 2016). The results of these investigations were published in a Mandarin-language book, *The Experiment of Eight Million People (Babai wanren de shijian)*, whose title drew directly from Peng Peiyun's speech at that conference (F. Wang Interview 2016). The demographic and social outcomes of the experimental areas will be described below.

In January of 2009, concurrent with the final stages of the book's publication, a second policy proposal was signed by 26 demographers and submitted to the NPFPC. Unlike the first proposal, this one was also released to the public through several media outlets, in hopes that it would garner popular support to convince the government of its efficacy. This second document, 'Another Suggestion on Adjusting China's Birth Policy (*Guanyu Tiaozheng Woguo Shengyu Zhengce de Zai Jianyi*)' was similar in format to the first, with a relatively concise eight-page proposal followed by extensive supporting materials. This version also contained appendices that drew from the analyses in Jiangsu as well as across

Yicheng, Chengde, Enshi, and Jiuquan. The proposal itself was worded strongly, opening with a direct call for policy change rather than the measured tack taken in the first iteration.

The second proposal argued that China's population had undergone a 'historic change (*lishixing de bianhua*)' in the last 30 years, which necessitated a move to a two-child policy. It addressed the promise in 1980 to reconsider the policy after a few decades, and went on to show that the past 30 years of promoting one child had eroded the necessity of strictly controlling birth rates, while also giving rise to new problems of population ageing, a shrinking labour force, growing numbers of vulnerable senior citizens, and a rising sex ratio. Next came a broad overview of the results from the group's investigations, which were used to argue that people's childbearing preferences changed with development, and allowing two children would not unduly increase fertility. The final section included five 'suggestions (*jianyi*)':

- To strengthen research into low birth rates to further scientific development
- To gain experience in adjusting the birth planning policy by loosening it in urban areas
- To consider extending policy liberalization step-by-step to less developed areas
- To strengthen statistical methods and work for population data
- To give greater attention to research in areas that have had two-child policies for years

Interviewees said that the response to this second proposal was somewhat more positive than to the first, but the national policy itself still showed no signs of changing. As a result, the core group began a flurry of media activism in both the domestic and foreign press to raise popular awareness of the results their work had yielded. The authors gave interviews in China and abroad about their work, focusing on the theme that externalities from the decades of one-child promotion would comprise a 'new demographic tipping point' that could undermine China's progress (c.f. Hvistendahl 2010; Economist 2010; China Daily 2011). In Yicheng, especially, Liang Zhongtang brought numerous international correspondents to visit his experimental site (LaFraniere 2011a; LaFraniere 2011b; Macartney 2010; Schiller 2010). Although the media coverage did not extend to the main

Party platforms like the *People's Daily* and the *Enlightenment Daily*, Gu Baochang wrote lengthy pieces in the *China Daily* and *Southern Weekend (Nanfang Zhoumou)* (Gu 2010a).

The change in government from the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao administration to the Xi Jinping-Li Keqiang leadership in 2012 marked a renewed opportunity for policy change, although the demographers involved in the Experiment of Eight Million People were still primarily focused on their own research. The early signs from the new leadership were positive: in the first year, the NHFPC was created and a national *dandu* policy put in place (Xinhua 2013; Alcorn 2013; The Atlantic 2013; Ouyang 2013). Although this was similar to the course of action that had been called for in the original 2004 proposal, there is no evidence that the group had any hand in this initial shift. However, the results from the *dandu* change were in line with their projections: despite the fact that the government thought the adjustment would lead to an extra one to two million births per year (Liu 2013; Bai 2013), the response was lacklustre, with less than ten percent of eligible couples applying for a second-birth permit in the first year of the policy's implementation (Basten & Jiang 2014).

Using a new round of funding from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the demographers held a third meeting at Shanghai Fudan University in December of 2014. This meeting was originally intended to compare notes on recent research and present early analyses of the effects of the 2013 *dandu* shift, but former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun was in attendance and reportedly advised the core group that a third policy proposal would be expedient (Gu Interview 2016; F. Wang Interview 2016). As a result, in January 2015, another proposal was submitted to the NPFPC. The contents of this proposal will be covered in Chapter 8, as will the intricacies of the central response to it. In general, however, multiple interviewees told me that former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun ensured that the proposal reached the desks of President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, who annotated it and passed it along to Xinhua, which in addition to serving as the official news agency also

comprises the central research body for the Party. Xinhua commissioned ten new reports on the possibility of changing to a two-child rule, the ways that it had been enacted in lower-level policy units (including follow-up investigations of the four counties of the Experiment of Eight Million People), and the effects it had on the population structure there. These reports were submitted to the State Council in May and June of 2015, and by October, Xinhua released a statement on behalf of the Party that:

To promote a balanced growth of population, China will continue to uphold the basic national policy of population control and improve its strategy on population development. China will fully implement the policy of ‘one couple, two children’ in a proactive response to the issue of its ageing population. (Jiang et al. 2015).

In December, the National People’s Congress rubber-stamped the change, which officially took effect on January 1, 2016 (Chan 2015). The new two-child policy still places conditions on couples’ ability to have two children, but it effectively marks the end of the promotion of single-child families that the advocacy group had hoped would come. Before a discussion of the effects this long history of government intervention in fertility decisions has had on the dynamics of the Chinese population itself, Table 3.1 provides a cogent summary of the main events covered in the Chapter to this point:

Table 3.1: Important Events in Chinese Birth Planning

Year	Event
1953	First PRC census shows that China’s population is 600 million
1954	The Ministry of Health relaxes restrictions on contraceptive services
1956	The first domestic production of contraceptives begins
1956-57	The first birth planning campaign, to ‘popularize and propagandize birth control’ and ‘promote childbirth according to a plan’ occurs
1960	Ma Yinchu is purged from the Party for his ‘New Population Theory’
1964	A Birth Planning Office of the State Council is established
1964-66	Second birth planning campaign
1970	Free contraceptive provision nationwide for the first time
1973	Party newspapers propagandize ‘later, longer, fewer’ policy
1979	Ma Yinchu rehabilitated and made head of Peking University
1980	‘One Child per Couple’ becomes a state policy
1981	National Family Planning Commission is formed
1982	Birth planning becomes a ‘basic national policy’ and a constitutional duty

1983	Unpopular sterilization and abortion campaign occurs
1984	Release of Central Document 7 allows more exceptions to one-child rule
1984-85	‘Two-child plus spacing’ experiments started in several rural counties
1986	Central Document 13 notes a ‘loss of control’ in birth planning
1988	Shift to one-and-a-half policy; decrease of two-child experiments from 45 to 13
1991	Re-tightening, including new adoption law and the ‘one-vote veto’ system
1995	‘Seven Prohibitions’ for birth planning show shift to a client-centred approach
2001	National law passed on birth planning
2003	National Family Planning Commission re-named the National <i>Population</i> and Family Planning Commission
2013	National Population and Family Planning Commission re-named National <i>Health</i> and Family Planning Commission
2013	National <i>dandu</i> policy passed to allow more couples to have two children
2015	Legal change to allow all couples to have two children

3.6 Demographic and Social Effects of One Child Per Couple

In order to highlight the differences between the outcomes of the general focus on one child per family and those in experimental areas with a late marriages and late births plus spacing policy, this section will provide an overview of the externalities the so-called One-Child Policy exerted on the Chinese population. The primary effect of China’s birth planning policy period has of course been a significant drop in fertility: the TFR declined from almost 5.5 in 1971 to less than replacement by the 1990s (Attané 2002) to around 1.5 today (World Bank 2016a). This meant that the natural growth rate of the Chinese population slowed from 11.6 percent in 1979 to about six percent in the 21st century (Settles et al. 2013). There have been many other outcomes, ranging from higher levels of savings among Chinese families anxious about their security in old age (Fitoussi 2013) to a degeneration of the quality of China’s population statistics (Zhao & Zhang 2010; Goodkind 2011), an overall decrease in the stated ideal number of children (Hou 2015; Luo & Mao 2014), further division between urban and rural Chinese citizens (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005), higher rates of women foregoing prenatal services (Doherty et al. 2001), and even the possible extinction of some of the smallest ethnic minority groups in China (Cao & Wang 2010). These are minor, however,

in comparison to more destabilizing effects. There were three most troubling outcomes: widespread policy resistance, accelerated population ageing, and an increased sex ratio at birth.

3.6.1 Coercion and Commandism: Abortions, Sterilizations, and Opposition

In keeping with efforts to ensure policy compliance across China, millions of men had vasectomies and women had abortions or tubal ligations during the birth planning period; in fact, China is home to the highest percentage of sterilized men and women in the world (Scharping 2003, p.115). As mentioned briefly above, sterilization is culturally sensitive in China (particularly among rural males) due to ideas about the body and the importance of reproductive capacity to health (Mueggler 2001). Nonetheless, sterilization was the most prevalent method of contraception in China for many years, due to its ability to ensure that a couple would not proceed past their allotted birth quotas (Short et al. 2000). However, the numbers of sterilizations were far from constant over time, and the highest peaks were closely associated with the ‘crash drives (*tuji*)’ in 1983 and the early 1990s. During these mass campaigns, outside teams descended on villages to conduct large-scale sterilizations, sometimes resorting to sterilizing women late in their childbearing years or those who had not yet fulfilled their parities in order to achieve quotas (White 2006, pp.107–110). Over time, sterilization became an increasingly rural phenomenon, while women in urban areas tended to use IUDs and other less permanent forms of contraception (Zheng et al. 2012). This has led some to suggest that the coercion of birth planning in rural areas reflected the government’s blame for not meeting targets (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.249) or was seen as a price for having somewhat looser policies (Short et al. 2000).

The number of abortions in China has also remained high, but its character has not been constant over time. In total, the Chinese government reports that there have been 336 million abortions from 1971 to 2013, or about 13 million per year (Moore 2013). As

mentioned in the beginning of this section, abortion was originally strictly controlled, and many prominent women pushed for greater access in the 1950s (Scharping 2003, pp.40–45). Since the beginning of national birth planning campaigns, however, the numbers of abortions have increased significantly, and there have been widespread (although difficult to substantiate) reports of extremely late-term or forced abortions (Zheng et al. 2013; Fisher 2013; Jacobs 2010; Shi 2014). The annual number of birth control procedures are shown in

Figure 3.15 below:

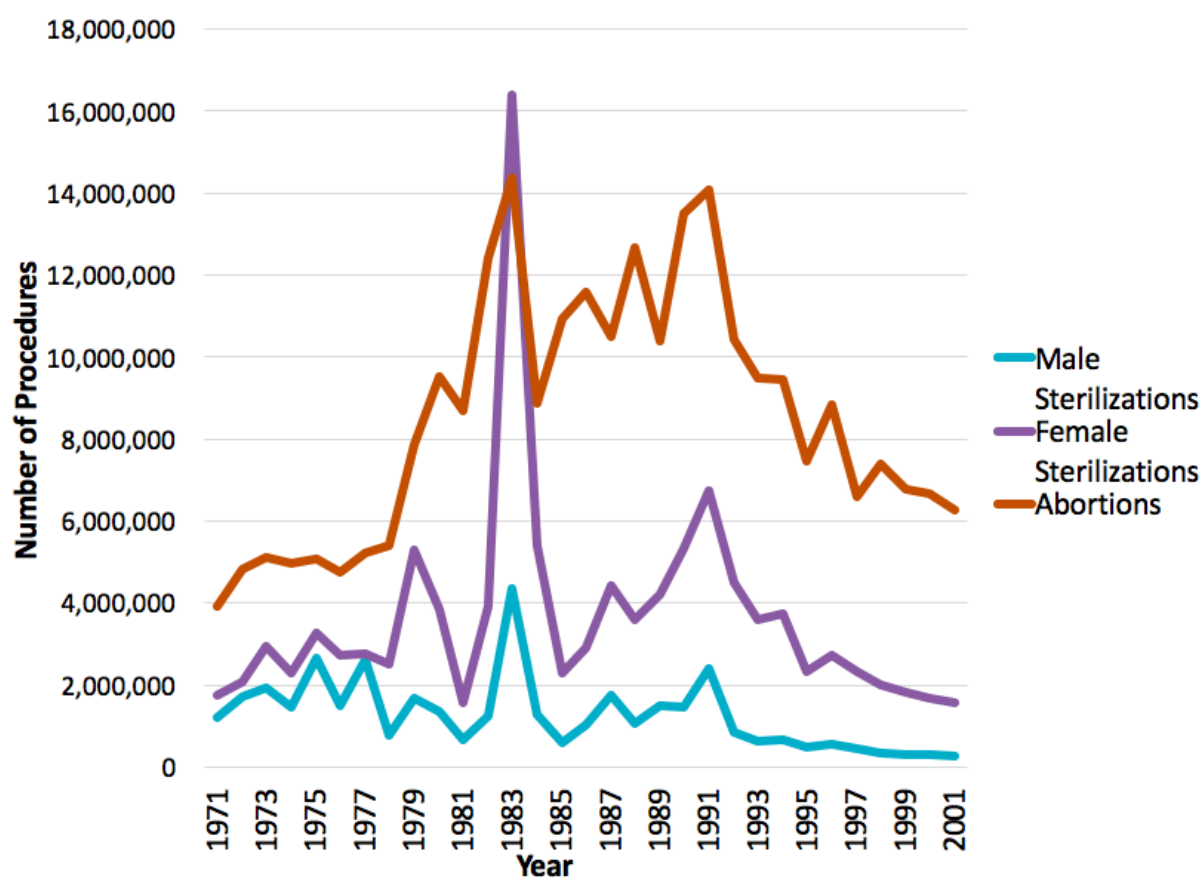


Figure 3.15: Birth Control Procedures in China, 1971 to 2001 (data from Greenhalgh & Winckler (2005))

In general, across the reform period, abortions have ‘shifted from older, rural, less educated women, toward younger, urban, more educated women’, which has been attributed to a decrease in policy focus on women who already fulfilled their birth planning quotas to unmarried women who have not yet reached their childbearing years (Zheng et al. 2013)

Chapter 3

Although inadequate training of rural doctors and insufficient facilities have led to cases of death or long-term disability (Pan 2005), such reports are often suppressed (Shi 2014).

White (2006) created an excellent typology on the types of opposition that Chinese couples, especially rural ones, enacted against the government's various birth planning policies and campaigns, and a summary is valuable to illustrate the negative effects direct and often coercive fertility interventions had on governmental relations at the grassroots. In general, White says, resistance took five forms: evasion, collusion, cover-up, confrontation, and accommodation. Evasion involved concealing pregnancy (wearing heavy clothes, for instance) or leaving the place of a couple's *hukou* registration to give birth and claiming upon return that the child had been adopted (p. 172-174). Collusion included bribing cadres to submit falsified records, or working with doctors to bypass birth control procedures (p. 177-181). Cover-ups involved falsifying statistics or avoiding inspections (p. 182-186), while confrontation could encompass attacks on cadres, organized protests, and efforts to expose coercion (p. 193-197). Finally, accommodation refers to those actions that allowed couples to optimize their family composition within the policy, including sex-selective abortion (p. 199). Although the exact statistics are disputed, it is clear that the implementation of strict birth limits across China was unpopular, and that it stressed relations between the cadres and the masses, especially in the rural heartland.

This picture of societal resistance is complicated further by birth planning's effects on the fiscal realities of grassroots governance. Since the early 1980s, there have been financial penalties for couples across China violating their allotted birth quotas, although they have gone by different names: 'extra birth fees (*duo zini fei*)' until 1994, then 'unplanned birth fees (*jihuawai shengyu fei*)' and, after the national Population Law in 2001, 'social support fees (*shehui fuyang fei*)' (Merli et al. 2004). Although the rationale has shifted toward ostensibly repaying society for the debt incurred with excess births, the fees are still very high:

they are often assessed at a large proportion of a couple's annual income and can be collected for up to 14 years (in Beijing there have been reports of one-time amounts as high as \$176,000) (Guan 2016). Because the vast majority of local governments' budgets come from higher-level transfer payments that are often insufficient to cover costs (see overviews in Ong 2012; Jin et al. 2005; Shen et al. 2012; Fan 2014), these extrabudgetary birth planning fees became important sources of income for local government offices (in addition to the bribes that independent officials skimmed from constituents (White 2006, p.105; Basten & Jiang 2015). The total amount of these fees is unclear, but one study estimated that as much as \$320 billion has been collected since 1980 (Hong 2012). Numerous reports have argued that large proportions of birth planning fees disappear into individual officials' pockets, which resulted in the fertility policy becoming a major target of President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive in recent years (Y. Zhang 2013). Indeed, some have gone so far as to argue that the national two-child policy was itself a direct effort to undercut this source of illicit government money (Luedi 2015; Guan 2016). The fiscal component of birth planning adds yet another facet to the issues of grassroots legitimacy raised by the implementation of one-child limits over time.

3.6.2 Ageing and Dependency

While China's unique population age structure and rapid demographic transition have aided its economic rise, there is mounting evidence that the tide will turn in the future. A relationship between China's development and the 'demographic dividend', or the period in demographic transition when the labour force increase outstrips dependency and sparks economic growth (Lee & Mason 2006), has been drawn, because China has developed a reputation as a labour-rich and low wage manufacturing centre (Cai & Wang 2007). This economic benefit was compounded by the fact that dependency ratios, or the number of labourers versus non-labourers (Population Reference Bureau 2016), were low throughout the

reform period, hovering around fifty percent (World Bank 2015a). Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, the combination of rapidly decreasing fertility and increasing life expectancy – from 40.8 years in 1955 to 75 years at present (Kaneda 2006) – has meant that more than nine percent of China’s population, or more than 100 million people, were over the age of 65 (Bartlett & Phillips 1997). Currently, just under ten percent of China’s population, or 120 million people, are over 65 years of age (World Bank 2015a), and this proportion is expected to increase to around a quarter of the population by 2050 (Branigan 2012; Bird 2014; Bailey et al. 2012).

Although ageing is typical of any country undergoing the demographic transition from a high fertility, high mortality structure to the low fertility, low mortality pattern (Coale 1984; Kirk 1996; Galor 2011), certain facts of China’s experience make it possibly more destabilizing (Wang 2011). First is the speed with which it occurred: while it usually takes a century or more for fertility in industrializing societies to fall to below replacement level, China’s decline took less than 30 years (Huang & Yang 2004). This has meant that the economy has not moved past its labour-intensive model (Nielsen & Fang 2007), and per capita income still hovers around \$7,500, a middle-income designation (World Bank 2015a). This has led to the refrain that China is ‘growing old before it grows rich’ (Cai & Wang 2007). Second, traditional forms of old age support are breaking down. In the past, an elderly person could expect to move in with an adult son and his family to receive support in old age (Wong 1998). Now, however, the decrease in parity has meant that parents must live with their one son or one daughter, leading to a situation popularly referred to as the ‘four-two-one (*si er yi*)’ problem, in which a working-age couple is responsible for the care of their only child and all four of their parents (Mian 2007). Yet pension schemes are still residual in urban China and largely absent from the rural areas, which precludes state-sponsored financial support to buttress lower family provision (Shen & Williamson 2010; Zeng 2011; HelpAge

International 2013; Shi & Mok 2012; Hu & Yang 2012). Without a substantial expansion of the social safety net, China could see a significant portion of its population rendered vulnerable in old age.

3.6.3 Sex Ratio at Birth and ‘Bare Branches’

China was traditionally heavily patriarchal. In addition to the value placed on male labour, China’s patrilocal marriage means that parents could not traditionally rely on their daughters for old age support, so they must ‘rear a son for old age (*yang’er fang lao*)’ (Attané 2002). There are strong ideas about the cultural importance of continuing the family surname, referred to as ‘burning incense (*xianghuo*)’, because only male heirs can have memorial services for their ancestors (Sleeboom-Faulkner 2011). Other popular sayings like ‘there are three disrespects for our ancestors, but not carrying on the family name is the biggest (*buxiao you san, wuhou wei da*)’ and ‘no sons, no grandsons (*duan zi jue sun*)’ give further insight as to why Mao said that the Chinese ‘favour sons and disregard daughters (*zhongnan qingnü*)’ (Li & Zheng 2009). White (2006) possibly captured the phenomenon best when she said, ‘Giving birth to at least one son, therefore, was the single most important act a woman could perform,’ (p. 77). There is evidence that, across Chinese history, women who failed to bear sons were likely to be abused, and repeated birth of daughters was sometimes considered valid grounds for divorce (Wasserstrom 1984). With the advent of the birth planning policy and its abrupt decrease in parity, then, this gender bias was exacerbated, because parents felt that they had fewer chances to have a son (Short et al. 2001; White 2006, p.148).

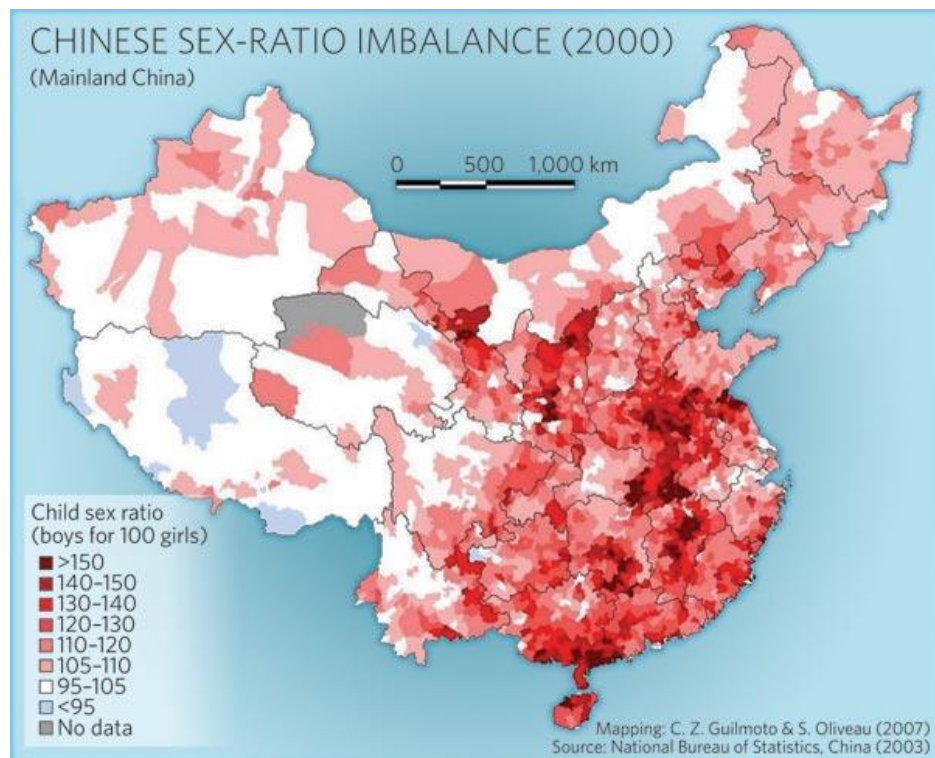


Figure 3.16: Sex Ratio at Birth Across China (Guilmoto & Oliveau 2007)

Although the sex ratio at birth began to increase above normal levels (around 103 to 105 boys for every 100 girls) soon after the shift to promoting one child per couple, two changes in the mid-1980s caused its rise to become more rapid. First was the increased availability of ultrasound technology that allowed for sex selective abortion, a before-birth selection added to the after-birth selection in which families neglected girls or killed them outright (Gu 2007). Researchers have calculated that the availability of ultrasound machines in rural areas significantly increased the proportion of female foetuses that were aborted, as well as the sex ratio at birth (Li & Zheng 2009; Shou et al. 2012). Second, the introduction of the one-and-a-half policy has been labelled by some scholars as an instance in which state policy reinforced existing gender norms (Murphy 2003). As a result, this design has been accused of being ‘even more detrimental to China’s [sex ratio at birth] than the One-Child Policy itself’ (Golley & Tyers 2014). When disaggregating sex ratios by parity, it was found that in areas with the one-and-a-half policy, the sex ratio of the first birth remained close to normal levels, while the SRB for a second birth was almost 150 in some places (Basten et al.

2013; Das Gupta 2005). In addition, analysis of the 2000 census showed that a female infant was more than 50 percent more likely to die before her first birthday than a male counterpart (Cai & Lavelly 2003). As early as 1992, Chinese authorities held a conference on the issue of sex ratio at birth (Gu & Roy 1995) and passed laws against using ultrasound machines to determine the sex of a baby, but the rates continued to rise. In total, it is estimated that there have been more than million excess males born annually in the past 20 years (Basten 2012; Jiang et al. 2011), which means there are around 25 million total excess males (Poston et al. 2011). There is some evidence suggesting that son preference is weakening (Zhou et al. 2013), but it is obvious that this imbalance will have significant effects on marriage cohorts in China for decades to come.

China will likely continue promoting nearly universal marriage for the foreseeable future (Poston et al. 2011). However, calculating the exact effect on future marriage patterns is difficult, because people often marry outside their age cohorts and region (Jiang et al. 2011). Estimates tend to vary depending on projections for when the sex ratio at birth will stabilize, but most agree that by 2050 there will be more than 40 million men who will not be able to find a wife (Jiang et al. 2014). This figure will preclude options like searching abroad for a wife: after all, by 2020 the number of unmarried men in China will be greater than the entire female population of Taiwan (Eberstadt 1999). The population of ‘bare branches (*guanggun*)’ men will be unevenly distributed, but since women in China tend to marry richer and more educated men, most scholars predict that they will be disproportionately in poorer areas and will have lower levels of education and income than the general population (Jiang et al. 2011; Sharygin et al. 2013). Many have foreseen detrimental effects of these large volumes of poor, uneducated bachelors, ranging from higher rates of depression and crime (Zhou et al. 2011) to increased sex trafficking and even a greater likelihood for war (Hudson & Boer 2002). The validity of these predictions remains to be seen, but it is important that

besides effects wrought by the excess bachelors themselves, these lost opportunities for marriages will further decrease future population growth capacity (Attané 2006). If one of these problems – erosion of trust in local governments, rapid ageing and labour force decrease, and sex ratio imbalances – were to exist within a population, it would be cause for concern. Yet the fact that China will weather all of them simultaneously is a problem of a different magnitude altogether.

3.7 Results of the Experiment of Eight Million People

Now that the imbalances one child per couple introduced into the Chinese population – social friction, rapid ageing, and high sex ratios at birth – have been covered, it is useful to compare and contrast them with the demographic and social outcomes within the four counties that operated under the alternative late marriage and late birth plus spacing policy across the reform period. Doing so provides a summary of the evidence that the advocates for the expansion of the experiment had at their disposal, and it also creates a counterfactual for the differential demographic outcomes that presumably *could have* occurred if the CCP had switched to this more gradual policy design earlier. In addition, nuances in outcomes across the four unique contexts provide evidence as to which factors of the local conditions contributed to differential outcomes. In general, each of the four counties were able to meet their population growth targets, mitigate ageing problems, moderate the sex ratios at birth, and minimize strife between officials and their constituents.

3.7.1 The Pilot Policy's Results in Jiuquan, Gansu

The researchers who investigated the experimental effects in Jiuquan used a combination of documentary and statistical analysis and on-site investigation (including informal discussions/interviews with over 100 birth planning officials) to compile their report

(Jian & Zhou 2008)²³. The investigators found that the average annual growth rate of Jiuquan's population was 12.47 percent across the 20 years of the experiment, which was lower than Gansu as a whole, and only marginally higher than the national average. The age-specific fertility rates of women in Jiuquan were lower than those of a comparable county in Gansu with a one-and-a-half policy, and Jiuquan's natural rate of population increase was lower than both the national and provincial average. With regard to the sex ratio at birth, Jiuquan averaged 108.2 in 2000, which was slightly outside of the normal range of 103 to 107 boys per every 100 girls, but significantly lower than the provincial average of 119.35; for second births, the sex ratio was 117.8, far below the average of 157.7 for second births in Gansu's one-and-a-half policy areas. Finally, Jiuquan's population structure only aged slightly since the early 1980s, with over 65s representing 5.17 percent of the total, significantly lower than the eight percent of the nation at large. These facts combined to convince the researchers that the experiment in Jiuquan had 'satisfactory results (*lianghao de jieguo*)', demographically speaking.

In addition to the 'demographic effects (*renkou de jieguo*)' of the experiment, the advocacy group's examination also included a section on the 'societal effects (*shehui de jieguo*)' of the change from a one-child to a two-child policy in Jiuquan. First, the researchers argued that the change caused a shift in cadre work focus, from 'conducting abortions (*guagong yinchan*)' to 'developing births (*fazhan shengchan*)'. There was strong resistance to the one-child limit from 1980 to 1984 that necessitated many coercive interventions from cadres, and the switch to the two-child limit led to an average of only 0.2 percent of births each year occurring out-of-plan (therefore necessitating few interventions). This progress was cemented by a birth planning management system, which combined cadre responsibility targets with birth planning work and management, as well as propaganda activities. These

²³ Unless otherwise noted, the source for the data in the following section is the investigation report printed in the *Experiment of Eight Million People* book. This format will be utilized for the four experience reports.

factors, plus the fact that the lack of gender specifications allowed birth planning cadres to treat all one-child families equally, led to a positive shift in cadre-mass relations. In addition, the symbiosis between economic development and fewer births meant that conducting propaganda campaigns became easier over time, and the ‘fewer children means faster prosperity (*shaosheng kuaiifu*)’ campaign met with success in the mid-1990s. The authors cite opinion surveys in Jiuquan that showed many people had an ideal number of children under two to suggest that the continuation of a two-child policy could be accompanied by still slower population growth moving forward.

3.7.2 The Pilot Policy’s Results in Chengde, Hebei

To conduct the investigation in Chengde, researchers used census data, documents, and interviews with birth planning cadres (Wang 2008). In addition, they also conducted a detailed survey in both Chengde and Handan, a one-and-a-half child policy area with similar economic and demographic characteristics, in order to directly compare the effects of the two-child policy with its most prevalent policy alternative in rural Hebei. First, they showed that the two-child policy did not significantly increase the number of high-parity births in relation to a one-and-a-half policy; in fact, slightly more women in Chengde (41 percent) had one child than in Handan (38 percent), and there were more couples with three or more children in Handan. With regard to birth intervals, the survey also found that the majority of women in Chengde actually exceeded the policy-mandated four years between births, with over 91.5 percent of births being at least 4.5 years apart, and a surprising 17.9 percent of those births occurring after a gap of more than 10 years. In Handan, only 52 percent of women waited four years or more between children. The population structure of Chengde was very similar to the provincial average, but it had a slightly higher proportion of people over 65 than Handan and Hebei at large (0.05 percent and 1.67 percent higher, respectively) due to the quicker pace of fertility decline there. However, the combined dependency ratio of

the young and old was lower than the national average, meaning that Chengde was still benefitting from the demographic dividend.

The survey also included a section examining people's attitudes toward birth work, and the report synthesizes the analysis of these questions with insights from interviews with birth planning officials. In general, records suggest that people's attitudes towards cadres and birth work generally became more positive after the shift to the two-child policy, and the vast majority (95 percent) of people surveyed stated that they were 'fairly satisfied (*jiao manyi*)' or 'very satisfied (*hen manyi*)' with their birth planning cadres and the cadres' work. They also overwhelmingly supported the continuation of the two-child policy. At the same time, birth planning cadres reported better experiences and more satisfaction carrying out their work in Chengde than in Handan. Cadres pointed to the stipulation that second births were not contingent upon the sex of the first child as making their work more consistent. Chengde had lower rates of out-of-plan births than the provincial average across the entire period post-1984. As a result, the authors suggest that a possible effect of expanding the experiment in the future would be an increase in birth planning effectiveness and easing of cadre-mass relations.

Chengde is unique among the four experimental counties in that it had somewhat distorted sex ratios at birth, however. From 1999 to 2004, Chengde's SRB stayed over 115 (with a high of 119 in 2000), while Hebei province as a whole hovered around 113 to 114. The authors disaggregated the sex ratios of Chengde's 11 individual villages, and found that there were six areas where the SRB was especially skewed. Because the remaining five areas were either within or just slightly above the range of 103 to 107 considered normal, the authors concluded that these six counties were responsible for the bulk of Chengde's excess male births. Examination of the characteristics of these atypical counties showed that they were among the most mountainous and poorest regions of Chengde (and indeed Hebei as a

whole), and that they were the areas scoring the highest on the survey's measures of paternalism/chauvinism. Therefore, the authors concluded that the structural realities of the son preference in combination with the economic necessity for more sons to work in the fields was sufficiently strong in these areas to overcome the sex ratio-normalizing benefits of the two-child policy. Although they do not conclude that this finding is a major problem with the policy in general, realization of the experiment's failure to moderate outcomes in these counties was considered in the recommendations for expansion and cited as a possible consideration in thinking of where to next implement a two-child policy.

3.7.3 The Pilot Policy's Results in Yicheng, Shanxi

In Yicheng (Shanxi), a team had informal discussions with both cadres and rural Chinese people; they also conducted a comparative survey in Yicheng and a similar site with a one-and-a-half policy (Liu & He 2008). They also carried out documentary analysis of past research reports, statistics, and policy documents from Yicheng. The researchers found that the demographic effects of the policy were very positive: birth rates fell from 11.28 percent in 1985 to 8.76 percent in 2006, and the natural increase rate of the population decreased from 5.02 percent in 1985 to 3.80 percent in 2006. The 1985 goal for total population in the year 2000 was 300,000, and this was achieved. The proportion of underage marriages was low and decreasing, and the share of families having one child was high: 36 percent in 2006, with 55 percent having two children and less than four percent having three or more. Over the course of the entire experiment, the researchers calculated that over 95 percent of all couples had complied with the policy and had either one or two children. As in the other experimental areas, the shift in policy led to a dramatic decrease in the number of out-of-plan births, which had been averaging over 55 percent before the shift. Most births that were labelled as noncompliant after the two-child policy's implementation were found to be a result of newly-married couples having a first child early or without the proper paperwork.

To better evaluate societal effects, the researchers conducted a survey of people in Yicheng and a similar (in terms of income, education, occupation, etc.) county in Shanxi called Quwo. The survey first inquired about respondents' ideas towards birth planning and birth work, and it revealed that significantly more people in Yicheng (40 percent versus only 29 percent in Quwo) were 'very satisfied' with the birth planning policy. In addition, questions about the ideal number of children revealed that about three-quarters of people in Shanxi stated that their ideal configuration was having two children (one boy and one girl), and none expressed a preference for three (which some people in Quwo did). Although the survey results showed a slightly higher incidence of 'traditional (*chuantong secai*)' beliefs among people in Yicheng concerning the importance of having a son, it had a lower SRB than Quwo. From these results, the authors surmised that the two-child policy conformed more to the desires of the people by allowing two children irrespective of sex, which moderated their sex-selective behaviour and made the policy easier to enforce. Besides the benefits of improved relations with the government, the researchers cited two other societal remunerations: normalization in the SRB and a feeling of greater security in old age. Yicheng was the only of Linfen's counties to have an SRB in normal ranges in 1981, 1989, and 1999, and remained in the normal range in 2006 even as the national average hovered at almost 117 male babies per 100 girls. This finding was considered important in light of the struggle with missing girls in Shanxi.

3.7.4 The Pilot Policy's Results in Enshi, Hubei

In Enshi (Hubei), researchers conducted an investigation on the efficacy and outcomes of the two-child policy through interviews, on-site investigations, documentary research, and a comparative survey in Enshi and Shiyan (a similar area under a one-and-a-half policy) (Shi & Jiang 2008). With regard to the demographic effects of the two-child policy, the researchers declared the experiment to be successful. Over its twenty years, the

average natural increase in the population was 8.52 percent, although it was hovering around a significantly lower 4.5 percent in the 21st century. Only 39 percent of people in Enshi had two children, and 3.5 percent had three or more. Although the respondents to the survey showed a slight preference for boys and other attributes of more ‘traditionally paternalistic and chauvinistic views (*zhongnan qingnü de chuantong guannian*)’, the sex ratio at birth stayed normal across the entire experiment. The rate of in-plan births stayed above 98 percent in every year after 2000. In addition, marriage behaviour broadly conformed with the policy: less than 0.5 percent of marriages were early, and over 40 percent of all marriages were consistently in the late category.

The Enshi survey also focused on societal factors like the ideal number of children and support for the birth planning policy and cadres. The results of questions probing notions of gender and paternalism suggested that the long-running education and propaganda campaigns were taking effect, because 91.8 percent of respondents said that ‘having a girl or a boy is the same (*shengnan shengnü dou yiyang*)’, and over 85 percent disagreed with the statement that ‘only a son can support you in old age (*yang’er fanglao, nü’er bu fanglao*)’. In addition, 80 percent of respondents in Enshi said that they were not planning on having two children, citing economic reasons, a better quality of life for a single child, and also belief in government propaganda. Ideas about education of children supported the authors’ contention that the quality portion of the experimental policy was gaining traction, as over 94 percent of respondents cited a child’s good education as paramount, and 73.7 percent of people said that they did not care about the number or gender composition of children, as long as each of them received a good education.

Although there were some slight differences in the results of the ‘late marriage and late births plus spacing’ pilot policies across the four local contexts, the general outcomes had some important continuities (Gu & Wang 2009). First, population growth was gradual and

controlled despite the more relaxed policies, and indeed the proportion of families with one child had increased steadily over time. There was a normalized sex ratio at birth in all areas except Chengde, which suggested that the two-child pilot could be expanded successfully providing that there was a focus on education and initial extension avoided areas with particularly high levels of chauvinism. In addition, comparison with so-called one-and-a-half policy areas suggested that transitioning those locales to late marriage and late births plus spacing would have immediate benefits for policy compliance, and therefore for the quality of the relationship between the grassroots cadres and the masses. And finally, the results from the opinions surveys in all areas suggested that the younger generations of Chinese citizens, even in the rural and poor areas, had lowered fertility ideation that suggested that birth rates would continue to decline voluntarily, and could even require pronatalist policies in the future to raise it beyond the bounds of lowest-low fertility. Overall, the demographic and social results of the counties that made up the Experiment of Eight Million People stood in contrast to the overall distortions seen within the Chinese population at large.

3.8 Conclusion

The foregoing history has shown that China's long experience with birth planning is anything but one dimensional; it has argued that the convention of referring to it as the One-Child Policy encompasses nothing of the complex reversals, revisions, and retrenchment that characterized its course. The overview also introduced several key actors – Liang Zhongtang, Zhao Ziyang, Peng Peiyun, etc. – who appear to have altered the course of the birth planning policy at specific stages, and it indicated how the institutional structure of birth planning changed over time. Finally, the chronology provided insight into the course of the alternative policy experiment in place in Jiuquan, Yicheng, Chengde, and Enshi as it proceeded within the wider realm of birth planning, and described how the two histories seemed to intersect at

different moments between 1980 and 2016. It has thereby provided grounding for a deeper discussion of the most influential time periods within this larger story.

From the above discussion, it seems that there are essentially eight time periods within the interwoven histories of the birth planning policy and the Experiment of Eight Million People that could be candidates for critical junctures. First is the phase surrounding the release of Central Document 7 in 1984, when the atmosphere of policy loosening allowed for the generation of the alternative late marriage and late births plus spacing policies. 1988, when the central authorities effectively ended the majority of two-child pilots but allowed the Experiment of Eight Million People to continue, also stands as a possibility. The re-tightening of 1991, when the post-Tiananmen government marked birth planning as an area that required renewed focus but again passed over the four pilot counties, is a candidate. The beginning of the policy advocacy group and the concurrent formulation of national birth planning legislation in 2001 seems to be particularly prominent, as does the period surrounding the submission of the first policy proposal and the response it evoked in 2004. The compilation of the second policy proposal and the *Experiment of Eight Million People* book's publication in 2009 could merit attention, as could the time directly surrounding the national shift to a *dandu* policy in 2013. And finally, the most recent policy proposal submission's overlap with the final move towards a national two-child policy in 2015 stands as a period ripe for further study. As such, the next Chapter will return to the literature on critical junctures theory in order to present an account of the methodology itself, and to adjudicate among these eight possible critical junctures to pinpoint the most promising points for further investigation.

PART THREE:

Critical Junctures in the

Experiment of Eight Million People

*'Nothing is so easy as to find fault with human institutions;
nothing so difficult as to suggest adequate practical improvements.'*

-Thomas Malthus, 1798

Chapter 4 Critical Junctures Methodology and Selection of Critical Junctures

4.1 Introduction

The chronology of the birth planning policy in China and the history of the Experiment of Eight Million People presented in Chapter 3 showed long periods of stability in both the national policy and the ‘late marriages and late births plus spacing’ pilot areas. Yet there were also clear moments in which the two histories seemed closely intertwined, or when relatively drastic policy change happened in a comparatively short period. While the long-term lens and broad scope of the previous discussion was valuable to provide context and problematize the case of the Experiment of Eight Million People, it is these intermittent periods of change that are the most fascinating from a policy studies standpoint. As such, this Chapter will provide a methodological grounding for the project by arguing that an in-depth case study is a valid way to examine this history, and then draw from the political science literature on critical junctures theory to argue that detailed descriptions of these moments is a fruitful method to explain outcomes in Chinese birth planning and the ways that the Experiment of Eight Million People altered its course. It will then focus on the portion of the methodological literature that provides the clearest process of identifying junctures, by defining ‘observable implications’ expected to accompany a pivotal moment and testing various candidates. This technique will then be applied to the specific case of the Experiment of Eight Million People, in order to identify the times that are most likely to have been critical junctures, which will be described in the coming Chapters. Finally, the different types of data sources used to conduct the investigation are described in detail. In doing so, the Chapter describes the manner in which the two micro-level questions (*What were the critical junctures in the Experiment of Eight Million People?* and *What happened within each of those junctures?*) will be answered.

4.2 Case Studies

Narrowing to focus on a single case as the unit of analysis always requires attention to the aims of the project and the degree of applicability for the findings. The use of a small-n qualitative method is justified for this project, because the focus is on examining the so-called ‘causes of effects’ within one particular context rather than the ‘effects of causes’ across many cases; in formal terms, the aim is more idiographic than nomothetic (Pearl 2014; Smith 2014). This approach has an advantage over the ‘Humean’ ontology of cross-case comparison in disaggregating the causes of eventual outcomes (Kittel & Kuehn 2012; Yin 2009; Gerring 2010) because of the greater ‘depth of analysis’ a more focused study offers (Gerring 2004, p.348). Choosing a single-case study rather than a cross-case comparison or another small-n design does indeed sacrifice representativeness for the lesser standard of ‘comparability’ (Gerring 2004), but such a cost is justified by the opportunity to consider both theoretical and empirical uniqueness in determining the outcome of the particular case (Rohlfing 2014). In addition, the focus on the history of a policy of interest has a long tradition in the study of the politics of social policy, and the emphasis on a single policy allows for the most depth of analysis while also clarifying which specifically contextual factors could have swayed the outcome (Mitchell 1963; Orloff & Skocpol 1984; Skocpol 1992; Fleckenstein & Lee 2012; Immergut 1992).

Gerring (2004) defines a ‘case study’ as ‘an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena’ (p. 341). Some have construed Gerring’s case studies as country-level instances of international phenomena, but the broader formulation of ‘bounded phenomenon’ in a ‘larger class of similar phenomena’ has been argued to be valid for the generation and testing of theoretical hypotheses in subnational cases (Rueschemeyer 2003). In addition, China’s complex and regionally-divergent welfare structures have necessitated a tighter

provincial or sub-provincial focus in past social policy case studies (Wong et al. 2006; Lui 2012; Mok 2014; Wen & Hanley 2015; Tsai & Dean 2014; Fan 1994). While they provide opportunities for rich and granular projects because they operate at the ‘crossroads of theory and reality’ (Zartman 2005, p.3), case studies in general, and single case studies in particular, require some methodological qualifications due to the small sample analysed. Yet sacrificing this greater standard for extrapolation is justified, because in particular, it has been argued that case studies offer a comparative advantage in theorizing mechanisms that underpin an eventual outcome (Yin 2009; Goertz & Mahoney 2013; Collier et al. 2004). Within a single case, both theoretical uniqueness *and* empirical uniqueness can be accounted for, so case studies can isolate previously unidentified mechanisms (McKeown 2004) or nuance an existing theory (Savin-Baden & Major 2013). As Gerring and McDermott (2007) put it succinctly, ‘Skinner once commented that ‘instead of studying a thousand rats for one hour each, or a hundred rats for ten hours each, the investigator is likely to study one rat for a thousand hours’’ (p. 694).

The Experiment of Eight Million People suits the definition of a worthwhile case study in that it offers *both* theoretical and empirical benefit for the larger literature. It has interest for theories of Chinese policy experimentation and social policy reform, both of which are still nascent and disjointed (see the discussions in Chapter 2). From an empirical perspective, the Experiment has been only mentioned in the English language literature in a sentence or a paragraph at most in a few scattered works (Golley 2011, p.294; Scharping 2003, pp.70; Tien 1981), but there is a body of work available in Mandarin, including extensive demographic analysis of its population effects (Gu & Wang 2009). Also, the vast majority of work on the birth planning policy in China has focused on the *effects* of the policy on the Chinese population (sex ratios at birth, ageing, labour force distortions, coercive state interventions, etc.), so investigations of the policy-level dynamics that *shaped* the birth planning regime

over time is in order. And finally, as described in Chapter 3, the demographic and social effects of the Experiment of Eight Million People were known to have been positive, which creates a unique situation to analyse the variables outside of the policy itself that prevented it from leading to a national policy change. Now that the value of studying the Experiment of Eight Million People as a single case study has been established, focus will shift to the case's method: critical junctures theory.

4.3 Critical Junctures Theory

Naturally, the idea that 'big historical events have big historical consequences' (Hacker 1998, p.78) is not revolutionary to historians, nor indeed to most political scientists. Yet it took years for a theory of critical junctures to be fully explicated and accepted as a justifiable method for the examination and explanation of policy change. What is now known as critical junctures theory arose from two separate streams: first, through efforts to answer the 'big questions' like democratization in comparative politics, and second, as part of the overlap between 'new' historical institutionalism and institutional economics (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007). The first full-length work in comparative politics to popularize critical junctures widely was Collier and Collier's (1991) study of labour movements in Latin America (though they tied themselves to Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) earlier work on the origin of political parties in nations across the globe). While this stream is simple to trace back to the beginning of the 1990s, the historical institutionalism/institutional economics dialogue is somewhat more complex (in part because it arose partially in response to the comparative politics interpretation). Yet it reached the spotlight with its inclusion in Pierson's (2000) seminal article on path dependent and increasing returns processes, which drew from the work of Nobel prize winning economist North (1990) to conceptualize the ways that lock-in effects after periods can change the trajectories of policies. Although these two paths differ slightly, their combination has resulted in a theory that closely analyses the historical progression of

policies in order to exchange prior theories of stochastic change for more contextually contingent explanations (Howlett & Rayner 2006).

As such, the various definitions of a ‘critical juncture’ encompass these dual elements of context and contingency. Collier and Collier’s (1991, p.29) designation of a ‘period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies’ has been criticized for being too broad, and for failing to differentiate between relatively quick but still incremental change and a true critical juncture (Thelen 2004; Hogan 2005). As such, newer definitions emphasize junctures’ short duration and historical determinacy: Calder and Ye (2004, p.198) define them succinctly as ‘a historical decision point at which there are clear alternative paths to the future’, while Slater and Simmons (2010, p.888) are still more precise with their explanation of ‘periods in history when the presence or absence of a specified causal force pushes multiple cases onto divergent long-term pathways, or pushes a single case onto a new political trajectory that diverges significantly from the old’. While these and rival definitions differ in their degree of emphasis on transformation versus high likelihood for change, or stress slightly different aspects of the temporality, there are several agreed upon tenets. At the very least, critical junctures are relatively short periods within a specific history in which contextual factors create a moment where alternative paths are available, and where decisions among them lead to differential outcomes over time. As such, ‘critical junctures can provide a basis for cutting into the seamless flow of history’ (Mahoney 2001, p.8).

It is also important to differentiate critical junctures theory from other theories which have received relatively more attention in the literature: path dependence²⁴ and punctuated

²⁴ ‘Path dependence’ can be defined broadly as ‘the causal relevance of preceding stages in a temporal sequence’ (Pierson 2000: 252). It occurs through a process of increasing returns (Levi 1997), which means that the cost of exit increases each time a step down a particular path is taken (Peters et al. 2005).

equilibrium²⁵. Hacker (1998, p. 78) drew a line between critical junctures and path dependence with his argument that ‘the idea of path dependence is perhaps best suited to explaining the reproduction of a critical juncture’s legacy rather than the production of the critical juncture itself’, which Pierson (2000) echoed when he clarified that critical junctures do not necessarily initiate path dependent processes (Hogan & Doyle 2007). Yet this distinction is often overlooked, and it must be reiterated that critical junctures theory seeks only to explain the events within a period of time that (usually) involves a change, whereas path dependence primarily explicates mechanisms that contribute to periods of stasis between the inflection points. With regard to punctuated equilibrium, the greatest difference between the two concepts is that critical junctures theory ‘can account for less than dramatic policy changes’ (Donnelly & Hogan 2012). In effect, then, the differentiating aspect of a critical juncture is temporal scope. Punctuated equilibria explanations focus on long trajectories of stasis punctuated by brief periods of transformation that are triggered by crises, and path dependent processes explain the time following a change that reproduces itself to create stability. In contrast, critical junctures theory narrows its focus to the periods of change (or possibility for change) themselves, regardless of whether a stable or path dependent process precedes or follows it (Pierson 2004).

As the theory has developed, there has been a movement beyond cross-case analyses of only those critical junctures that trigger changes. Because ‘contingency implies that wide-ranging change is possible and even likely, but also that re-equilibration is not excluded...[and] hence, change is not a necessary element of a critical juncture’, scholars have begun investigating the ‘near misses of history’ (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007, p.352).

²⁵ In the 1980’s, Krasner appropriated a model of ‘punctuated equilibrium’ from two evolutionary biologists, Eldredge and Gould (1972). He applied this biological idea, in which long periods of stasis are broken up by relatively short times of incredibly rapid change, to political processes. This is to say that times of political crisis contribute to either the creation of new institutions or the overhaul of existing ones (Krasner 1984; Krasner 1988)

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After all, sometimes ‘society reflexively re-embraces the old orthodoxy’ (Legro 2000, p.424). These analyses of periods that appear ripe for shifts yet result in a return to the status quo are also interesting as counterfactual arguments, because in the case of the ‘nearest’ misses, there is often ‘as much historical evidence about decisions that were taken as about those that were considered, discussed, and ultimately discarded’ (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007, p.357), which contributes to robust explanations accounting for the paths that were not followed and the differential outcomes that could have occurred (Calder & Ye 2004). In this vein, an increasing number of experts are also applying critical junctures frameworks to single case studies, which adjusts the scope of comparison to a within-case longitudinal lens instead of a contemporaneous cross-case comparison (Hogan & Hara 2011). This approach offers a significant advantage in research design, because it ensures that the contexts of the different junctures are valid comparisons, which is a common criticism of comparative designs (Collier & Collier 1991). In addition, comparing when change did and did not occur within a single context can help to identify which specific factors from among the whole range of possible causes are the most central in that arena (Mahoney et al. 2009). Yet working within a single case requires extensive qualification of the uniqueness of the change’s context in order to be valid (Moller 2013), and findings from the junctures in that single case use the standard of ‘comparability’ to other cases, rather than ‘generalizability’ (Gerring 2004).

The case of the Experiment of Eight Million People and its impact on the Chinese birth planning policy is a particularly good candidate for analysis in a critical junctures framework for several reasons. First, while the general narrative of the so-called One-Child Policy in China is one of stasis, the history in Chapter 3 clarified that there were in fact numerous adjustments to its design and implementation. Because many of these changes contributed to substantial differences in the characteristics of Chinese population over time, a close analysis of these political shifts will both problematize oversimplified explanations and

provide grounding for a greater understanding of the impetus for demographic distortions. In addition, the current understanding of political factors that dictate the outcomes of Chinese social policy decisions are numerous but disjointed, so their analysis within a single case would bring together these strands of theory and highlight the most promising areas for future research. Because the Experiment of Eight Million People has a well-researched literature in Mandarin about its experimental outcomes and the advocacy efforts surrounding the findings, it provides rich data for counterfactual analysis, as well as a novel angle for identifying the moments at which alternative policy designs were discussed on the national stage. And finally, as described in Chapter 1, while other Asian states made efforts at controlling their population growth, no other country devoted itself to a birth planning policy with as much zeal for as long a period as China, so a cross-case comparison within the region would be necessarily oversimplified. Therefore, this investigation will expand upon the preceding history by identifying and exploring its most important periods: where change in the national policy seemed most likely, and when the Experiment of Eight Million People came the closest to being expanded across China.

4.4 Theories of Identifying Critical Junctures

Perhaps the most promising strain in the critical junctures literature has been the recent move towards explicitly defining and justifying the selection of the time periods under examination. A prominent criticism of critical junctures works, and the historical turn in the social sciences more generally, is that the specific foci of policy narratives are ‘pre-determined by the narrative structure attributed to the narrator’ (Howlett & Rayner 2006, p.9), and descriptions can lose their context, so that ‘one might not see the woods for the trees’ (Moller 2013). In response, recent practitioners have begun to argue for an ‘operationalization of criticalness’ (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007, p.360) This has been defined in different ways, and some of the tactics are over-formalized: for instance, Soifer (2012)

argues that a scholar should break histories into critical antecedents, permissive conditions, productive conditions, outcomes, end of critical junctures, mechanisms of reproduction, and consequences, and Boogaerts et al.'s (2016) generated a 'critical juncture index' to quantitatively calculate whether or not events constitute a juncture. These both seem to be a bridge too far. In effect, these techniques risk obscuring the very value of explicitly defining the selection criteria for a juncture – greater transparency and a decreased risk of confirmation bias – by again putting too many parts of the selection process into the researcher's black box.

However, Hogan (2005; 2006) began a drive towards a middle way by arguing for a simpler and more flexible way of justifying the selection of junctures. Starting from the contention that 'a framework within which to analyse critical junctures is of vital importance...[because] in its absence, arguments as to what is, and what is not, a critical juncture are questionable', Hogan went on to argue that it is necessary to identify the 'generative cleavages', or 'the tensions that lead to the period of change', and then to test the change itself to see whether it is 'significant, swift, and encompassing' to call a time period a true critical juncture (Hogan 2006, pp.664–667). While Hogan (2006) stopped at this point, arguing that he wanted to create a framework flexible enough to encompass the extensive range of topics under investigation in political science, he and others later expanded upon these ideas to generate working guidelines for operationalizing transparent and defensible criteria for any critical juncture that will be analysed. The first and most influential addendum to the 2006 paper came in a follow-up by (Hogan & Doyle 2007, p.904), which developed 'an improved framework, incorporating an *a priori* element, for examining critical junctures' by defining 'a broad range of observable implications, which include, and build upon, the objective and subjective criteria of previous studies' (ibid., p. 884).

This concept of *a priori* ‘observable implications’ that are drawn from the literature and tested on a series of candidates to determine which inflection points constitute critical junctures is the most valuable insight for addressing the criticisms of critical juncture selection. These implications, which ‘incorporat[e] aspects of societal/political change we would expect to find if the theory holds’ (Donnelly & Hogan 2012, p.8), serve to both justify and clarify the researcher’s criteria for the critical junctures, thereby defending against accusations of confirmation bias. In addition, the observables are formulated as a combination of either quantitative (i.e. GDP growth falling below a certain level) or easily demonstrable qualitative claims (discussion of a certain issue in the media or within policy documents, for example) so that there is less debate about the passage or failure of any given implication (Hogan & Doyle 2007). Because the observables can ‘easily be modified to examine changes in policies as diverse as foreign policy, education policy, and equality policy’ – or even social policy – the selection framework is remarkably flexible (Hogan & Hara 2011, p.18). Once these have been formulated to fit the case at hand and justified, the researcher tests the possible candidates and uses a simple counting mechanism to determine which satisfy most of the implications, and therefore are worthy of further investigation, as seen in (Hogan & Doyle 2007):

Observable Implications	America		Sweden	
	1979– 1981	1990– 1992	1980– 1982	1990– 1992
O1. A clear change agent (political entrepreneur) to inject new ideas into the policy arena is apparent.	X			X
O2. Opposition parties critique current model and propose alternative economic ideas; at elections their platforms are built around these ideas.	X			X
O3. Civil society organizations critique current model, reflecting Hall's coalition-centred approach.	X	X		X
O4. A clear set of alternative economic ideas are evident.	X			X
O5. Widespread public dissatisfaction with current paradigm, is observable through opinion polls, protests etc.			X	X
O6. External/international organizations critique current model and/or actively disseminate alternative economic ideas.	X	X	X	X
O7. Media question efficacy of current economic model and/or specific policy areas.	X	X	X	X
Ideational Consolidation	X			X

Figure 4.1: Operationalizing the Observable Implications (Hogan and Doyle 2007)

To be clear, however, the use to which I will put these techniques differs somewhat from the situation in which they were generated. Whereas Hogan and Hara (2011) and later expansions on their themes (Donnelly & Hogan 2012; Hogan & Cavatorta 2013) were seeking to bring together literature on responses to macroeconomic crises, critical junctures, and ideational changes as they relate to Hall's (1993) conception of paradigmatic shifts, my scope is not as grand. As such, I depart from the complex three-step process of generating observable implications for the existence of a crisis, the presence of an ideational shift, and the occurrence of a third-order (paradigm) change (Hall 1993). Not only would this wed the concept of critical junctures within a single policy sphere too closely to the idea of 'crisis' (Calder & Ye 2004), but the focus on only third order change would obscure the first- and second-order adjustments to the birth planning policy that had real implications for the Chinese population. Given that this project is inductive, drawing from an untapped data source surrounding an alternative policy design to leverage insights about the politics of policy design in Chinese social policy, such a large magnitude of critical junctures is incommensurate with the aims of the project. In addition, I will use the *a priori* observations

in order to identify the periods that are most likely to be critical junctures, but I will not declare them definitively as such until the inductive portion of the thesis has been concluded. Yet in this focused realm of social policy adjustments, the general insight that deriving signs of a critical juncture from the literature and testing various periods that appear to be important allows for the process to be justifiable and transparent, which is the ultimate mark of a rigorous method.

4.5 Finding Critical Junctures in the Experiment of Eight Million People

Therefore, in keeping with this strain of the literature, I have formalized a series of observable implications and tested numerous candidates from the preceding history in order to determine which periods in the chronology are most worthy of further analysis to determine whether they can be called critical junctures. The selection of the possible years was rendered more complex in this project by the necessity of considering both the Experiment of Eight Million People and the national birth planning policy's histories: as such, the selection process will incorporate both levels to identify periods in which the overlap between the Experiment and its national context was the greatest. Because these histories have already been explicated, the years will only be accompanied by a brief explanation here, but a cross reference will be provided to the relevant section of Chapter 3 for further detail. This Section will first present the eight most important years that emerged from the history of the period of promoting a general one child per couple rule with limited exceptions. Then, a series of observable implications that would presumably accompany a critical juncture within this history will be generated and justified. Finally, the eight candidate moments will be cross-referenced with the presence or absence of the observable implications to determine which of the possible times most closely align with the case-specific aspects of a critical juncture. Each of these will be the subject of intensive description in the coming Chapters,

and a portion of the Discussion (Chapter 9) will summarize the events and classify each period as either a critical juncture or a ‘near miss’ of history (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007).

The candidates for possible critical junctures necessarily start when the first of the pilots that came to be known as the Experiment of Eight Million People began, and continue until the most significant step toward dismantling the system came in the national two-child policy in 2015. These possible junctures include those times that appeared to have significant changes in the national birth planning policy and those that saw significant advances within the experiment itself. The first possible juncture is perhaps the most obvious: **1984**, when the release of Central Document 7 ushered in the beginnings of the county-level ‘late marriage and late births plus spacing’ policy pilots (see pages 74 to 76). The next year that appeared to have significant changes in both the two-child plus spacing experiments and the national birth planning regulations at large was **1988**, when China shifted towards a general one-and-a-half policy for rural couples and reduced the number of alternative experimental counties significantly (see pages 76 to 78). In **1991**, there was another shift – this time towards tightening – with the reinstatement of enforcement campaigns and the ‘one vote veto (*yipiao foujuequan*)’ system to punish cadres who did not meet their birth planning targets (see pages 78 to 79). The remainder of that decade was static, but the year **2001** again saw a change, with the simultaneous institution of a national Birth Planning Law and the first activities by the two-child advocacy group who would coin the phrase ‘the Experiment of Eight Million People’ (see pages 81 to 82). In **2004**, the advocacy group submitted their first policy proposal, which was considered by the recently reconstituted National Population and Family Planning Commission, but was ultimately rejected (see pages 85 to 86). **2009** saw the Experiment of Eight Million People group submit another policy proposal and publish a full-length volume detailing the outcomes of their experiment (see pages 86 to 89). The shift to a national one-and-a-half policy occurred in **2013**, just as the National Population and Family

Planning Commission was recombined with the Ministry of Health (see pages 82 to 83). And finally, **2015** saw the third policy proposal submission, as well as the transition to a national two-child policy, thereby ending the experience of one-child promotion (see pages 89 to 90).

Therefore, the years that will be tested below are: 1984, 1988, 1991, 2001, 2004, 2009, 2013, and 2015. In line with the identification procedure described above, a series of observable implications were also formulated to test the relative likelihood of criticalness for each of these possible junctures (Hogan & Doyle 2007; Hogan & Hara 2011; Donnelly & Hogan 2012; Hogan & Cavatorta 2013; Boogaerts et al. 2016). The first six of these observable implications deal with evidence of the likelihood of a change in the birth planning policy on a national scale:

- **O1:** An adjustment to national birth planning rules or regulations
- **O2:** A change in birth planning enforcement institutions
- **O3:** The release of a high-level birth planning policy document
- **O4:** Discussion of the Experiment of Eight Million People or two children per couple in the Party press
- **O5:** Mention of the Experiment of Eight Million People or two children per couple in *neibu* documents
- **O6:** Interview accounts describe disagreement among top leaders concerning birth planning

While there has not yet been an examination of China's birth planning policy that has utilized a critical junctures approach, these observable implications are still grounded in past works on China's history with fertility limits. Many of those investigations drew from accounts of small adjustments in regulations in order to posit that more major changes were likely (**O1**) (Hardee-Cleaveland & Banister 1988b; Greenhalgh 1986; Yi 1989; Bernman 1999). Likewise, it is generally acknowledged that shifts in the enforcement institutions – changing to the National *Population* and Family Planning Commission, for instance – signal an opening for policy change (**O2**) (P. Wang 2013; White 2006, pp.240–243). Because most social policies in China are governed by circulars from either the Party's Central Committee or the State Council, past investigations have examined their timing and content in order to determine whether they would usher in a new era (**O3**) (Scharping 2003, pp.60–65; White 1994).

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Discussions of issues in the CCP mouthpieces like the *People's Daily* are understood to have the force of Party authority, and therefore investigations of the Chinese press use an uptick of discussion around an experiment or issue (like allowing two children per couple) as an indicator of interest coalescence (**O4**) (Gao et al. 2012; Gao et al. 2013; Chung-Hon Shih & Shih 2008). Similarly, internal or *neibu* sources have been considered to be particularly valuable accounts of the policy foci of (and debates within) the CCP centre (**O5**) (Schoenhals 1985; Goldman 1994; Eaton 2013). Finally, to incorporate the human element of the history, I have included a metric for those times in which various interviewees described a divergence in elite opinion surrounding the best path forward for the birth planning policy, which has always been a window into the inner workings of the Party (**O6**).

While none of these metrics are revolutionary on their own, the presence of several of them at a single time would signal a high likelihood that the birth planning policy was under debate at the Party centre and there was an increased likelihood of change: in other words, they would suggest the presence of a critical juncture or a near miss. Yet each of these relates only to the likelihood of change in the national birth planning policy. In order to capture the interaction of the advocacy activities surrounding the Experiment of Eight Million People in the selection process, two additional observable implications were added that specifically address the ways that Chinese demographers were attempting to bring their findings to the forefront. They were:

- **O7:** A policy conference is held by the advocacy group
- **O8:** The release of a policy proposal by the advocacy group

Because these particular implications are case-specific, it is difficult to draw parallels to earlier investigations. Yet their importance to this circumstance is clear. First, the investigation showed that the advocates surrounding the Experiment were politically savvy, and they specifically timed their policy conferences and other activities at moments when they felt that their reception was most likely to be amenable (**O7**). And second, the

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submission of a formal policy proposal, signed by a group of respected demographers in China, signalled the group's belief that the time was ripe for the government to be receptive to their suggestions, and would also have necessitated consideration by the relevant authorities (O8). As indicators of the closest proximity between the Experiment's results and the national birth planning policy conversation, then, these additional observable implications are useful signals of a time that could constitute a critical juncture for this case.

Two slight caveats must be made to the testing of these observable implications over such a long period in China's history. First, the two observable implications that draw directly from formalized advocacy activities surrounding the Experiment of Eight Million People cannot be tested for any of the dates preceding the late 1990s, when the group of outside supporters began to first coalesce around the experiences of the two-child plus spacing areas. As such, the three possible junctures that precede this time (1984, 1988, and 1991) will be evaluated on only six observable implications. And conversely, the two most recent critical junctures (2013 and 2015) are too close to the current time for the *neibu* documents surrounding their circumstance to have been released: the archives at Harvard and the Chinese University of Hong Kong have only a few records of documents after the year 2010, and none since the most recent Xi Jinping-Li Keqiang administration entered office in 2012. As such, these last two junctures will only be evaluated on seven observable implications. Yet this varied series of indicators is still considered sufficient to pinpoint those periods that are most worthy of further investigation as possible critical junctures. The next section will describe the results of their testing across the available time periods outlined above. Any time periods in which more than half of the total critical junctures (i.e. four of the eight formalized for this investigation) are present will be investigated further in the coming Chapters.

4.6 Narrowing Down the Possible Critical Junctures

In order to fulfil the final step of Hogan and Doyle's (2007) process of critical juncture identification, this Section will cross-reference each of the time periods outlined above with the various case-specific observable implications that were generated. The subsections will provide a summary of the number of implications that are present in each period, thereby allowing for an eventual narrowing of the times under investigation to those that appear to be most critical according to the criteria laid out above. The final portion will collate the results from these discussions to introduce the four time periods in which more than half of the observables were present, which will be considered in depth in the subsequent Chapters.

4.6.1 1984: 'Open a Small Hole to Close a Large Hole'

The year 1984 included four of the six observable implications of a critical juncture applicable to its period. The release of Central Document 7 by both the Central Committee and the State Council in April of 1984 served to fulfil both Observable Implications 1 and 3, because it adjusted the national birth planning rules by stipulating 14 new cases in which couples were eligible for second-child permits, and it was released by one of the highest authorities within the CCP hierarchy. Some of the later de-classified *neibu* documents of the time described discussions surrounding the possibility of endorsing the late marriage and late births plus spacing policy in meetings from the summer of 1984, which also satisfies Observable Implication 5. And finally, this early time in the Experiment's history was attributed by multiple interviewees to divergences in opinion at the very highest level of the CCP concerning the future of rural birth planning regulations; for example, several informants suggested that Zhao Ziyang was a prominent advocate for alternative pilots, and Li Peng and his clique were critical of the efforts. This fact also fulfils the sixth Observable Implication of elite divide over the issue of birth planning. Due to this fulfilment of most of the observable implications of criticalness, 1984 will be the focus of Chapter 5, the first

detailed description of a selected critical juncture. Table 4.1 shows a summary of the observables present (O7 and O8 cannot be tested for this period since the advocacy group had not formed yet, as represented by the two blacked-out boxes):

Table 4.1: The Observable Implications Present in 1984

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	Likely critical juncture?
1984	X		X		X	X			YES

4.6.2 1988: Expansion of One-and-a-Half Child Policy

In 1988, five of the six metrics for criticalness were present, making it one of the most strongly supported possible junctures of the candidates tested. In that year, there was an adjustment in the national birth planning regulations to allow the rural areas of most provinces to institute the one-and-a-half child or only daughter household policy, thereby satisfying Observable Implication 1. While there was no change in the birth planning enforcement institutions, the State Council did release an influential document entitled ‘A Circular on Adjusting the List of Units for Birth Planning Experimentation (*guanyu tiaozheng jiahuashengyu gongzuo shidian de tongzhi*)’, which revised the number of centrally-endorsed two-child pilots downward from over 40 to less than 15, thereby satisfying the third Observable Implication. The pilot counties were mentioned in several of the *neibu* accounts of Party meetings and speeches across the spring of 1988, in line with Observable Implication 5. And finally, this was another instance in which multiple interviewees alluded in their accounts to strife at the highest levels of the CCP, with officials in the NFPC (specifically Peng Peiyun) and in the Politburo (Zhao Ziyang, Hu Yaobang, and Li Peng) having divergences in opinion about the best path forward for the birth planning policy (Observable Implication 6). As a result of these factors, the birth planning debates of 1988 will form the basis for Chapter 6, the second discussion of a critical juncture in the course of the

Experiment of Eight Million People. Table 4.2 provides a visual representation of these realities (O7 and O8 cannot be tested for this period since the advocacy group had not formed yet, as represented by the two blacked-out boxes):

Table 4.2: The Observable Implications Present in 1988

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	Likely critical juncture?
1988	X		X	X	X	X			YES

4.6.3 1991: Implementation of the ‘One-Vote Veto System’

Although 1991 may have appeared to be a shift in the birth planning policy from the overview in Chapter 3, it proved to only fulfil two observable implications in the derived framework. While the imposition of the ‘one vote veto (*yipiao foujue*)’ system constituted a shift in the national birth planning regulations and was communicated through a Circular jointly released by the Party’s Central Committee and the State Council (satisfying Observable Implication 1 and Observable Implication 3), there was no accompanying change in the birth planning enforcement institutions. In addition, discussions of the Experiment in particular or two-child policies in general were absent in the Party press and the *neibu* documents, and interviewees referred to the early 1990s as a time of general conservatism in the birth planning realm, without prominent debates among officials. As such, the year 1991 will not be considered as a possible critical juncture, nor will it be the focus of further investigation in the coming Chapters. This is shown in Table 4.3 (O7 and O8 cannot be tested for this period since the advocacy group had not formed yet, as represented by the two blacked-out boxes):

Table 4.3: The Observable Implications Present in 1991

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	Likely critical juncture?
1991	X	X							

1991	X		X						NO
------	---	--	---	--	--	--	--	--	----

4.6.4 2001: The Formation of the Advocacy Group

The year 2001 only exhibited two of the group of observable implications likely to accompany a critical juncture. This was the first year in which all eight observable implications could be tested, since the advocacy group was formed at this time. There was a seismic shift in regulations, as birth planning was finally codified into a national law after years of trying to build a consensus (Observable Implication 1). Yet the change seemed to be largely symbolic in practice, as there were no corresponding alterations to the accompanying institutions or the release of documents by State Council bodies to clarify the ways that the law should alter implementation of the policy. The Party press and *neibu* documents were lacking the types of discussions of the second child in general or the Experiment in particular that characterized earlier periods of internal debate, and no interview accounts suggested that there was a divide in opinion on how to move forward with the policy at this time. This period was the first to present one of the observable implications specific to the Experiment of Eight Million People's advocacy group, because 2001 saw their first policy conference in Shanghai (Observable Implication 7). Yet the conference only set the basic groundwork for later activities, and did not result in a policy proposal. For these reasons, 2001 was also rejected as an area ripe for further investigation as a critical juncture. Table 4.4 represents this summary of events (all Observable Implications were applicable to this time period, so no boxes are blacked out):

Table 4.4: The Observable Implications Present in 2001

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	Likely critical juncture?

2001	X						X		NO
------	---	--	--	--	--	--	---	--	----

4.6.5 2004: The Release of the First Policy Proposal

In 2004, four of the eight possible observable implications under investigation were present. While there were no changes in birth planning rules in that year, the National Family Planning Commission undertook its transition to the National *Population* and Family Planning Commission, which marked the first change in the population policy enforcement institutions in several decades (Observable Implication 2). The remainder of national-level observables were quiet, as there was no quantifiable increase in the discussion of two-child policies in the Party press or mentions of the Experiment in the *neibu* documents from that year. Yet the advocacy group ratcheted up its activities, holding another policy conference (Observable Implication 7) and releasing their first policy proposal (Observable Implication 8), and various interviewees described a lively debate within the relevant Party organs as to the correct response to their suggestion (Observable Implication 6). Although the framework's summation of the relative likelihood of a critical juncture at this point in the Experiment's history is somewhat more mixed at this point, the fact that the year 2004 still outpaces several of the other candidates in the presence of observable implications suggests that a further investigation of the period would not be in vain. As such, 2004 will be the subject of the discussion in Chapter 7. The selection process is modelled in Table 4.5 (all Observable Implications were applicable to this time period, so no boxes are blacked out):

Table 4.5: The Observable Implications Present in 2004

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	Likely
--	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	--------

									critical juncture?
2004		X				X	X	X	YES

4.6.6 2009: The Release of the Second Proposal and Book Publication

The year 2009 was only critical from the standpoint of the Experiment, since the two advocacy-based implications were the only ones of the possible eight to be observed. This is not wholly unexpected, since the main reasons that it was included as a possible candidate concerned the activities of the demographers and their allies, but a closer look at the national-level indicators show that their proposal did not find resonance within the CCP centre during this time. Although there was both a policy conference (Observable Implication 7) and a policy proposal (Observable Implication 8) during this year, interviewees told me that their actions sparked less internal debate than their two other proposal submissions, and there were none of the types of regulation changes, press coverage, institutional shifts, or document releases that are hypothesized to signal a tide change within the Party centre. As such, 2009 will not be considered further as a critical juncture in the history of the Experiment of Eight Million People. This rejection is shown in Table 4.6 (all Observable Implications were applicable to this time period, so no boxes are blacked out):

Table 4.6: The Observable Implications Present in 2009

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	Likely critical juncture?
2009							X	X	NO

4.6.7 2013: The Implementation of a National *Dandu* Policy

While 2013 showcased two observables relating to high-level governance of the national birth planning policy, they were the only implications present out of the possible

seven at this time (*neibu* documents were not tested because they are too recent to have been released to the public). The most important change of that year was the merger of the National Population and Family Planning Commission with the Ministry of Health to become the National Health and Family Planning Commission, an institutional change that highlighted birth planning's decreasing importance to the central government (Observable Implication 2). Later in the year, there was also an announcement that the PRC would be shifting to a national *dandu* policy, such that any couple in which one member is an only child can apply for a second birth (Observable Implication 1). Yet perhaps due to the fact that this change sprung from another series of policy experiments unrelated to the Experiment of Eight Million People, these shifts were not accompanied by an increase in coverage of two-child policies in the national media, nor were there insinuations by the interviewees of high-level support for their alternative design affecting the decision. Finally, the observable implications specifically related to the policy advocates themselves were absent, since most members of the group were focused on their strategy of media engagement during this period. As a result, 2013 will not be investigated further as an inflection point in the course of the late marriages and late births plus spacing policy pilots. This is illustrated by Table 4.7 (no *neibu* documents were accessible for this period, so O5 cannot be evaluated):

Table 4.7: The Observable Implications Present in 2013

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	Likely critical juncture?
2013	X	X							NO

4.6.8 2015: Change to a Universal Two-Child Policy

It is unsurprising that the most significant shift in the birth planning policy since 1980 was accompanied by the highest number of observables of any of the tested time periods, with six out of the seven possible implications (excluding the *neibu* documents metric)

present. The year began with the final policy conference held by the Experiment of Eight Million People group (Observable Implication 7), which was closely followed by the release of the final policy proposal (Observable Implication 8). Several interviewees described a renewed interest in the results of the late marriage and late births plus spacing pilots among top officials (Observable Implication 6), and it was echoed by an increased discussion of these areas and the possibility of allowed two children in general in the Party press (Observable Implication 4). All of these events culminated in the announcement after the Plenum in October that the national birth planning rules would be shifted to allow all Chinese citizens to have two children (Observable Implication 1), and its subsequent policy documents that further elucidated the changes (Observable Implication 3). As a result of this strong showing among the observable implications, the year 2015 will be the final possible critical juncture investigated for this project, and the findings will be covered in Chapter 8. Table 4.8 shows this selection process (no *neibu* documents were accessible for this period, so O5 cannot be evaluated):

Table 4.8: The Observable Implications Present in 2015

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	Likely Critical juncture?
2013	X		X	X		X	X	X	YES

4.7 Summary of the Critical Junctures Selection

The above discussions can be best summarized in the following Table, which shows the prevalence of the various observable implications in the time periods that were tested, and illustrates that the years 1984, 1988, 2004, and 2015 were the only ones examined that contained half or more of the *a priori* case-specific observable implications. As such, these four periods will be the subject of further investigation in the coming Chapters. Once the

inductive findings are described, the Discussion Chapter will summarize the results and declare whether or not each of these periods can be definitively said to have been a critical juncture in the course of the Experiment of Eight Million People. By doing so, this investigation will combine the best existing theory-driven methodology for identifying critical junctures with an inductive approach that takes into account the nuances of case study research. Table 4.9 showcases a summary of the results of the selection process utilized in this Chapter:

Table 4.9: Summary of Results for Observable Implications Tests

Observable Implication	Possible Critical Juncture Years							
	1984	1988	1991	2001	2004	2009	2013	2015
O1: An adjustment to national birth planning rules and regulations	X	X	X	X			X	X
O2: A change in birth planning enforcement institutions					X		X	
O3: The release of a high-level birth planning policy document	X	X	X					X
O4: Discussion of Experiment/two children in the Party press		X						X
O5: Mention of the Experiment/two children in <i>neibu</i> documents	X	X						
O6: Interview accounts of disagreement among top leaders concerning birth planning	X	X			X			X
O7: Policy conference held by the advocacy group				X	X	X		X
O8: The release of a policy proposal by the advocacy group					X	X		X
Total observable implications:	*4*	*5*	2	2	*4*	2	2	*6*

These four time periods will be investigated by pulling together the insights from various data sources: the discussions of birth planning in the Party press, the *neibu* documents recovered from two archives, the interviews that were conducted with relevant experts and policy officials, and the secondary literature that is available in English and Mandarin. In order to

fully describe the methodology of this investigation, these sources themselves and the ways in which they were gathered and analysed will be critically considered in the next section. Following a discussion of the shortcomings that were present in these various types of data and their implications for the project, the Chapter will conclude and the inductive portion will begin.

4.8 Data Sources

Now that the process of identifying the best areas for further investigation as possible critical junctures has been completed, this section will briefly describe the data sources that were used to conduct the empirical investigation of the Experiment of Eight Million People. For a longer description of the sampling and analysis, please see the Appendix (page 276). This segment will describe these sources in turn: first, the Chinese newspapers that were compiled, then the *neibu* documents that were gathered, and finally, the series of elite interviews that were conducted. The relevant portions will serve to both describe the value of the sources themselves (including how past scholars have leveraged them) and to cover the process that was followed in gathering them for this project. Then, the next section will present a critical summary of the sources to elucidate their possible biases and shortcomings in answering the questions, as well as the efforts that were made to overcome these factors.

4.8.1 Chinese Media

The first source of the data leveraged to analyse each of the possible critical junctures was from the official Chinese media. Relying on the content of government-controlled newspapers to give an overview of the policy environment in China may appear problematic at first, because it has long been known that the CCP strictly controls its official media sources as a way of influencing public opinion (Howkins 1982; Qian 1987; Brady & Wang 2009). Yet it is precisely because the CCP's centre maintains a tight hold on the outputs of the official newspapers that they are useful in this investigation. Carefully noting the times

that two prominent central Party mouthpieces, the *People's Daily (Renmin Ribao)* and the *Enlightenment Daily (Guangming Ribao)*, as well as local newspapers from two of the four pilot provinces, the *Hebei Daily* and *Gansu Daily*, discuss two children when the official Party line stressed one child per couple gives insight into trends over time and conflicting strategies and justifications for legitimation. Analysing central CCP newspapers has long been a widely accepted way to establish the internal workings of the central CCP around specific issues of interest (Qian 1987; Sun 1995; Pan et al. 2012; Tang 2012; Gao et al. 2013; Liang & Lu 2013). Due to access issues, provincial and regional newspapers have only recently become an area of focus, but they are now the site of investigations into the coordination of Party Committees at different levels in the government and are used as a proxy for information flows within the system (Wu 2000; Sun & Chio 2012; Svensson 2012; Lin et al. 2015). This new area is becoming contentious, however, as a divide develops between those who argue that there is rigid top-down control that forces the press to follow the central line (Lee 1994; Dittmer 1994; Murphy 2007; Lin et al. 2015), and others who have attempted to show that there is significant and increasing space for autonomy among subnational publications (Chang et al. 1993; Lynch 1999; Li et al. 2007; Gao et al. 2012). Although it is not a focus of this investigation, the results may allow for a comment to be made on this disagreement within the China studies community.

The newspaper sources were gathered from the two major Chinese government-controlled national publications, the *People's Daily (Renmin Ribao)*, and *Enlightenment Daily (Guangming Ribao)*, as well as two provincial newspapers from the areas where the experiment was carried out (the *Gansu Daily [Gansu Ribao]* and the *Hebei Daily [Hebei Ribao]*). These sources were searched and read in Mandarin. The national newspapers were available through the University of Oxford's subscription to Green Apple databases, which contain the complete archives of each publication since the 1950s. A series of title searches

for ten terms associated with the birth planning policy²⁶ yielded over 2,000 total articles from the *People's Daily* and *Enlightenment Daily*, ranging from 1953 to 2013. These national newspapers made four total allusions to the experimental counties in Hebei and Gansu provinces, although there was no mention of the fact that an alternative policy was under investigation there (*People's Daily* 1985; Ai 1993; Niu 2002; Lin & Geng 2005). As such, it seemed that further investigation into the provincial coverage of these local pilots was in order. There are no complete online databases of the provincial-level newspapers, so I travelled to the Chinese University of Hong Kong and physically searched through the archives of the paper copies in November of 2015. Given the necessity of greater documentation of the early days of the experiments when interview sources were less available, I examined these newspapers for the years from 1984 to 1995. This yielded an additional 700 articles from the two papers, which was a number consistent with the coverage of birth planning in the national newspapers over the same period. For this investigation, the newspapers were invaluable in clarifying the timeline of the overall experiments and the events within the various critical junctures, and at several key points, they presented themes that were found to be indicative of the central Party's ideas and that demonstrably affected policy outcomes.

4.8.2 *Neibu* Documents

Unlike Chinese newspapers, which have a long and rich history of analysis, previously classified internal government or *neibu* documents have only recently become the focus of academic study (Eaton 2013; Eaton & Kostka 2014). This is because they were unavailable to

²⁶ The ten terms were chosen because they were prominent policy slogans or phrases associated with the area of birth planning policy, and eight of these terms returned results from the online database. The seven terms that returned results were 'only child (*dusheng ziniu*)', 'birth planning (*jihua shengyu*)', 'contraceptives (*biyun yongpin*)', 'out of plan births (*jihuawai shengyu*)', 'birth control (*jiayu*)', 'one childization (*yitaihua*)', 'control the population (*kongzhi renkou*)' and 'the less children you have, the faster you will get rich (*shaosheng kuai fu*)'. The two terms that returned no results were 'more children mean more worries (*duozi duo chou*)', and 'Late marriage, late birth, few births, quality births (*wanhun wanyu shaosheng yousheng*)'.

non-Party members in the past; indeed, some of these documents were loaned to officials, who had to return them after a specified period of time with signed statements that they had not been copied (Schoenhals 1985). As a result of this intense secrecy surrounding them, the full history of *neibu* documents is not wholly clear, although it is generally thought that the transition from oral communication of sensitive information to widespread hard copy dissemination began when Hu Yaobang tasked the Theory Research Office in the Central Party School with producing the journal *Theoretical Trends (Lilun Dongtai)* to instruct Party members on revisions to Party ideology after Mao's death (Goldman 1994, p.24). It is also known that there is a strict hierarchy of secrecy governing these publications, with designations ranging from 'internal reference materials (*neibu cailiao*)' on publications like *Reference News (Cankao Xiaoxi)*, which has a circulation of more than seven million cadres, all the way to so-called 'red head reference (*hong tou cankao*)' which are handwritten to verify authenticity and seldom seen by more than a dozen of the highest CCP officials (Hood 1994, pp.40–41). The primary purpose of all *neibu* documents is to publicize 'official interpretations of the law that are intended only for Party members', as well as to communicate areas of policy focus and experimental outcomes (Lee 2000, pp.211–215).

The internal Chinese government *neibu* documents were procured from trips to archives at Harvard University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong that contain volumes of the most influential titles. Large numbers of the *neibu* journals like *Internal Reference Materials on Reform (Gaige Neican)*, *Dynamic Theory (Lilun Dongtai)*, and *Internal Reference on Economic Reform (Jingji Tizhi Gaige Neibu Cankao)*, as well as internally circulated compilations of prominent leaders' remarks on certain policies, are available for researchers there. The archives at Harvard University also yielded a confidential volume published in 1989 that contained the compiled remarks of prominent officials (all the way up to and including the supreme leader Deng Xiaoping) on the birth planning policy

across the decade of the 1980s. In addition, the libraries of Harvard's Yenching Institute included other useful Mandarin sources, including a tome entitled *A Timeline of China's Birth Planning Policy* that was invaluable for clarifying the chronology of the national-level policy shifts across the early decades of the two-child experiments and until the turn of the century (Yang et al. 2001). However, some of the *neibu* publications were incomplete in the Harvard holdings²⁷, so I also visited the archives held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which included several other *neibu* journal articles and Mandarin works like *An Introduction to Chinese Birth Planning* (Zhang 1998).

Given the unique purpose of the *neibu* documents and their position within the CCP, investigating their coverage of the birth planning policy in general and the Experiment of Eight Million People in particular is useful for several reasons. First, their purpose as a conveyor of the CCP centre's preferred interpretations of and justifications for the birth planning policy across time is particularly relevant to understanding the internal environment at the CCP centre. Second, *neibu* documents provide another avenue to test if and when results of the Experiment of Eight Million People reached the central level. Also, the inclusion of speeches from the Party's highest officials in these documents gives some insight into the different personalities and opinions within the CCP's blackest box, which were invaluable during the tumultuous mid-1980s when interview sources were relatively more scarce. Finally, any significant divergences between the content of the *neibu* documents and the publicly-available newspapers would suggest that there was disconnect between the CCP's internal discussions of the birth planning policy and the way it was presented to the general public, which can be analysed to understand to the ideational implications of discussing experiments publicly.

²⁷ For example, 'Dynamic Theory (*Lilun Dongtai*)' was complete from 1978 until 2012, but 'Internal Reference (*Neibu Cankao*)' was incomplete for some years in the 1980s and 1990s, 'Internal Reference on Economic Reform (*Jingji Tizhi Gaige Neibu Cankao*)' was only available from the late 1980s to 1993, and 'Internal Reference on Reform (*Gaige Neican*)' was held only from 2007 to 2012.

4.8.3 Elite Interviews

Given the institutional complexity and tight control on data that characterizes the Chinese government, interviews with relevant policymakers and other knowledgeable elites are a common method of gaining richer and more nuanced information about the internal workings of the CCP establishment (Heilmann & Shih 2013; Eaton 2013; Johnston 2002; Tsai & Kao 2013; Wong 1998). Elite interviews are relevant to this project because the small number of actors directly involved in the Experiment increases the importance of understanding their agency in and perceptions of the process ‘behind the scenes’ (Rathbun 2004). I interviewed 11 people, who fell into three main groups: academics involved in analysing and promoting the experiment, government officials who were familiar with its course, and relevant Westerners who worked with the Chinese experts.

The Chinese academics included the two editors of the 2009 book, Gu Baochang and Wang Feng, as well as Chen Wei (who wrote a chapter of the book, signed the proposals, and attended several of the conferences), Zheng Zhenzhen of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and Zhang Li (who has written about the results of the experiment in Yicheng). The government officials included Wang Qian of the National Health and Family Planning Commission and He Dan of the China Population and Development Research Centre. Most importantly, I was able to interview Liang Zhongtang, who has been an internal opponent of one childization since the 1970s and personally started the Yicheng experiment. I also spoke with Daniel Goodkind of the U.S. Census Bureau, who has been critical of the work that the Experiment of Eight Million People group has done, Karen Hardee, who researched the political dynamics of the birth planning policy in the late 1980s, and Joan Kaufman, who organized and funded several of the conferences and proposals from the Ford Foundation. The group with the most sophisticated knowledge of the Experiment of Eight Million People is small and the documentary evidence is comparatively rich, so these 11

interviews were able to answer many outstanding questions. Although the Chinese experts were all interviewed in person (during a two-week trip to Beijing and Shanghai or while they passed through Oxford), the Western academics were interviewed via telephone, which is justifiable due to their geographical distance, cultural similarity, and less centrality to the experiment. These factors are summarized in Table 4.10:

Table 4.10: Overview of Elite Interviews

Name	Current Position and Involvement with Experiment	Location	Length	Language
Chen Wei	Professor, Renmin University Authored book and signed petitions	Beijing	1:17	Mandarin
Daniel Goodkind	Independent Researcher Criticized Experiment publicly	Phone	0:54	English
Gu Baochang	Professor, Renmin University Leader of the advocacy group	Beijing	2:18	English
Karen Hardee	Senior Associate, Population Council Researched birth planning policy change	Phone	0:50	English
He Dan	Director, China Population Development Research Centre Headed initiative to draft new policy	Oxford	0:53	Mandarin
Joan Kaufman	Professor, Harvard Medical School Funded advocacy from Ford Foundation	Phone	0:50	English
Liang Zhongtang	Retired Shanxi Province official and Shanghai Academy of Social Science Started Yicheng experiment, advocated	Shanghai	1:47	Mandarin
Wang Feng	Professor, University of California-Irvine Leader of the advocacy group	Oxford	2:09	English
Wang Qian	Head of Migration Department, NHFPC Served on population policy committee	Beijing	0:56	Mandarin
Zhang Li	Professor, Shanghai Fudan University Researched Yicheng pilot policy	Shanghai	0:42	English
Zheng Zhenzhen	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Worked in Jiangsu, signed petitions	Phone	0:49	English

A semi-structured interview design kept the conversations focused without stifling the actors' ability to communicate their own impressions, actions, and feelings (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Savin-Baden & Major 2013). I used the central authors of the 2009 book

as a starting point, and then reached out to their contacts, which is a type of ‘snowballing’ sampling technique (Van Evera 1997; Goodman 1961). Although this procedure is controversial in some contexts due to the possibility of sample bias (Browne 2005; Noy 2008; Waters 2014), the small sample of elites with intimate knowledge of the experiment and the importance of personal relationships in Chinese culture lead me to believe that snowball sampling was vital to overcoming the issue of access that plagues elite research designs (Goldstein 2002; Mikecz 2012). Since I was still able to talk to several people who were directly critical of the advocacy work surrounding this pilot policy (most notably Goodkind and Zhang), I do not believe that this choice overly biased my interview data. The interviews were conducted in either English or Mandarin²⁸, depending on the preference of the interviewee, and all of the elites allowed their comments to be recorded. Upon completion of the interviews, transcripts were compiled in both Mandarin and English; although this lengthened the transcription process, it enriched the analysis by allowing for cross-referencing of important terms between languages and creating checks for internal validity (Halai 2007). Translation from Mandarin can be difficult given the propensity of educated Chinese people to use *chengyu*, idioms derived from classical literature and other esoteric sources²⁹; however, these were noted in the translated versions and the general meaning written to provide greater transparency.

Upon completion of the interviews, the recordings were transferred from the Olympus Digital Voice Recorder to my laptop, assigned a unique number, and uploaded to a password-protected online drive. I used these recordings to generate written transcripts of each

²⁸ I am a proficient Mandarin speaker, having been tested at an ‘Advanced’ level on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview. As such, I was able to carry out the interviews in my second language and translate them effectively into English.

²⁹ For example, if an interviewee said that the experiment did not succeed because it was *jiuniu yimao*, this would literally translate as it was ‘one hair among nine cows’. The real meaning of this phrase is that something is so small in a large group of other things so as to be overlooked or insignificant, so I would probably translate it idiomatically to English as ‘a drop in the bucket’ or more formally as ‘insignificant in light of the other things happening’, and make a note in the translated script of my translation and the actual Chinese phrase used.

interview. The English interviews were transcribed verbatim, so that the written record was a ‘word-for-word reproduction of verbal data’ (Halcomb & Davidson 2006, p.38), even though this included repetitions and incomplete sentences normal in human speech but awkward in writing. For the four interviews that were conducted in Mandarin (those of Chen Wei, He Dan, Liang Zhongtang, and Wang Qian), the English transcript was compiled directly from the recording of the spoken Mandarin, and then a separate Chinese transcript was compiled to cross-reference the translation and to verify quotes with the speakers in both English and Mandarin (Halai 2007). Because these were primarily factual interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009) and were not subject to discourse analysis, the transcripts were organized like the script in a play, and the attributes of the conversation flow itself were not marked (Wodak & Meyer 2001). Any direct quotes that are included in this document have been approved by the interviewees³⁰. The value of the interviewees’ testimonies will become abundantly clear in the empirical chapters, as it adds significant dimension and complexity to the more linear accounts that were discovered through analysis of the documentary evidence. Although this combination of newspapers, neibu documents, and interviewees’ accounts was able to create rich descriptions of the various times identified in this Chapter as possible critical junctures, they were not perfect sources of information, and their shortcomings should be acknowledged.

4.9 Shortcomings/Biases in Data Sources

These sources were incredibly valuable, and the account that they contributed to building of the internal workings of China’s birth planning establishment is by far the richest

³⁰ In keeping with the informed consent that each interviewee provided, each direct quote within this text was approved by the relevant speaker. Besides a few immaterial changes to grammar and syntax to formalize the norms of speech, each of the quotes was approved. There were a few instances in which interviewees were willing to let me use their quotes but preferred not to have the information (usually on internal Party dynamics and considered too sensitive) attributed directly to them. The ethics approval forms had provided a contingency for this, so I still included these portions, but without the names of the speaker. One government official requested that all of their quotes be anonymised to ‘a central CCP official’, so this was done in accordance with those wishes.

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English version to date. That said, they were necessarily imperfect, as are all data, and a critical analysis of the implications of their use is in order. These imperfections essentially fell into two categories: temporality and inherent bias. The most pressing of these issues related to the somewhat inconsistent availability of the various sources across the entire course of the Experiment of Eight Million People. The documents were relatively more available earlier in the history: for instance, the Chinese media gave significantly more attention to discussions of birth planning across the 1980s and early 1990s than in later years. In addition, most *neibu* documents that have been declassified are from earlier than 2000, and even those that are available in the 21st century do not stretch into the recent Xi-Li administration, since those have bearing on ongoing policy initiatives. Finally, the two timeline publications from the central Party (Yang et al. 2001; National Family Planning Commission 1989), which were invaluable in untangling the complex web of meetings and speeches and debates in the earlier critical junctures, did not extend into the 21st century. On the other hand, the interview sources are disproportionately slanted towards recent years, because most people who were experts about Chinese birth planning 30 years ago are too elderly now to be interviewed, and even Liang Zhongtang's account required triangulation with other sources to prove that his recollections were not affected by temporal distance. In addition, the main group of advocates surrounding the Experiment were all studying in the West in the 1980s, so their insights on those times are necessarily second-hand. The differential coverage of the various sources across time was considered in the selection of possible critical junctures above, and although the discussions of the junctures themselves do rely relatively more on one source or the other depending on the period, every effort was made to triangulate among them to ensure source corroboration of important events and drivers in the outcome of each possible juncture.

The second issue with the sources is the inescapable bias of each type of data, which required researcher speculation to identify, disaggregate, attribute, and counteract. Although *neibu* documents have in many other investigations been presented as impartial evidence of internal Party dynamics, there were several points throughout this investigation (most notably in Chapter 6) where other sources suggested that they smoothed over disagreements and debates, presumably in an attempt to portray the Party centre as one ruled by consensus, a major facet of Chinese governance (Saich 2004; C. Li 2016). On the other hand, the newspapers are known to be biased and indeed were chosen precisely because they were slanted, but this put the impetus on the researcher to speculate about why it occurred and what it meant; therefore, these insights required qualification since they could not always be directly confirmed. Finally, the testimonies of each of the interviewees were scrutinized for slant related to the positionality of each informant. The largest way these were counteracted was through transparency: the *neibu* document inconsistencies were acknowledged wherever they occurred (and indeed even played into the eventual findings themselves as evidence of discursive manipulation by the CCP), and newspaper interpretations were explicitly acknowledged to be the work of the researcher. For the interviews, the majority of important contentions could be cross-referenced with other sources, and the moments where there were second-hand accounts of sensitive Party dynamics are noted as possible speculation. Although efforts were made to counteract these suboptimal attributes of the sources, they must be acknowledged, and their bearing on the outcomes of the investigation will be considered again in Chapter 9.

4.10 Conclusion

This Chapter has introduced the methodological literature surrounding critical junctures theory and showed its power in providing a platform from which to delve deeper into the history of the Experiment of Eight Million People as it intersected with the national birth

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planning policy. It has focused specifically on the movement among scholars who have formulate more transparent and justifiable methods of identifying critical junctures for study, and it has followed in the path of Hogan and Doyle (2007) to formulate an *a priori* set of observable implications drawn from past investigations into the Chinese birth planning policy to select for the possible time periods that can best fulfil the elements of criticalness for this case. By leveraging these identified observable implications, four of the eight time periods that emerged from Chapter 3's history as candidates were identified as the ones most likely to be critical. These four years – 1984, 1988, 2004, and 2015 – will each be the subject of a subsequent Chapter, which will compile evidence from across the three sources to trace the path of the debate and attempt to explain the final outcome of each time where change seemed most likely. Following these Chapters, the Discussion (Chapter 9) will draw conclusions about whether each of these were critical junctures, as well as what insights these periods and their respective political factors can give into the ways that outcomes of policy experiments are used. First, however, the next Chapter will return to the very dawn of the Experiment of Eight Million People: 1984, when various would-be reformers exploited an opening at the national level to implement various late marriages and late births plus spacing pilot policies across China.

Chapter 5 Possible Critical Juncture 1: Starting the Pilots, 1984 to 1985

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter is the first of four that will describe in detail the periods most likely to be critical junctures in the history of the Experiment of Eight Million People. In doing so, it will begin to answer the micro-level research questions, *What were the critical junctures in the Experiment of Eight Million People?* and *What happened within each of these junctures?*. It is fitting, therefore, that the Chapter returns to the very beginning of the Experiment's history, when the two-child pilots arose in response to political division about the future of the birth planning policy. It will begin by summarizing the critical antecedents of this period, in order to elucidate the context and the events that defined the beginning of the juncture. The next four sections will give accounts of how the experiment started in each of the four counties. This juncture was the most difficult one for which to marshal evidence, because the intervening gap of more than thirty years meant that interviewees were nearly impossible to identify and locate due to retirement and old age, and most local documents were unavailable in online archives. Yet the exception to these data limitations was my ability to interview Liang Zhongtang, who was responsible for the beginning of the experiment in Yicheng County, and who has also kept meticulous records of the circumstances surrounding its genesis. Due to his efforts, the intricacies of the process behind the Yicheng experiment are well defined (though not yet published in English), and it will be given significant attention here. Section 6 will collate the insights from the accounts to highlight the important factors at play, which will be revisited in Chapter 9 and conclude by summarizing the main findings.

5.2 Critical Antecedents

As described in Chapter 4 (see pages 120 to 121), this investigation will explicitly specify the 'critical antecedents', or the 'factors or conditions preceding a critical juncture...[that]

shape the choices and changes that emerge during critical junctures in a causally significant way' (Slater & Simmons 2010, p.887). Doing so not only allows for a clearer definition of when (and in some cases, why) the critical juncture actually began, but it ensures that the events that preceded it are related to the processes occurring within it (Soifer 2012). For instance, in this first important period during the Experiment of Eight Million People, the generation of the two-child policy pilots in the four experimental counties was directly related to a preceding shift in the policy discourse at the highest levels of the CCP, which explicitly opened the door for lower-level officials to implement their own exceptions to the general emphasis on one child per couple. This shift was evidenced through two major events: the promotion of Wang Wei to Minister of the NFPC in December of 1983, and the release of Central Document 7 in early 1984.

5.2.1 Replacement of Qian Xinzong with Wang Wei

Qian Xinzong was Minister of the NFPC during the unpopular sterilization campaign in early 1983 (Wong 1984). In response to unsavoury details that emerged about the campaign – sterilizations of post-menopausal women, late-term abortions, botched operations – he came under fire, and he was officially replaced by his Deputy Minister Wang Wei on December 8, 1983 (Li 1983). Whereas Qian had been seen by many as a hardliner even before the sterilization campaign, Wang Wei was thought to have a more moderate approach, and was therefore considered more likely to be a Minister who would be more open to policy reform (Yi 1989). This perception was validated in his first major speech, in front of the 108th meeting of the Party Secretariat on January 19, 1984 (Shi 1988). In the address, Minister Wang Wei reaffirmed the status of birth planning as a basic national policy and argued for the government's need to ensure compliance, but he also specifically mentioned the possibility of allowing rural people to have a second birth under specific circumstances (Yang et al. 2001,

p.117). His speech was not made public at the time, but it is likely that Party officials with close ties to the CCP centre would have been aware of the coming changes in the Party line.

5.2.2 Release of Central Document 7

Because of the characteristic secrecy surrounding Wang Wei's speech to the Secretariat, it is likely that the average grassroots policy official would not have been aware of the greater openness to alternative policy options until the Central Committee circulated its 'Report on the Situation of Birth Planning Work (*guanyu jihua shengyu gongzuo qingkuang de huibao*)' on April 13th, 1984 (Yang et al. 2001, p.121). The content of the report, which was generally referred to as 'Central Document 7', closely mirrored Wang's speech at the Secretariat by calling for continuing enforcement of the birth planning policy, but also acknowledging that in order to 'close the large hole (*du da kou*)' caused by the lack of compliance with one-child limits in rural areas, it was acceptable to 'open a small hole (*kai xiaokou*)' and allow some types of couples to have two children (Scharping 2003, p.60). In addition, Central Document 7 argued that ethnic minority couples should be required to abide by birth planning regulations, although these couples could have two children; ethnic minority autonomous areas could also make alternative regulations 'in accordance with their local conditions (*genju dangdi shiji qingkuang*)' (Retherford et al. 2005). For the other three counties besides Yicheng, the circulation of this document was most instrumental to the genesis of their policy pilots.

5.3 Yicheng

The account of the pilot policy's genesis in Shanxi Province is particularly interesting for several reasons, but especially because it is the only experimental policy whose roots prove to trace back before the release of Central Document 7. I uncovered broad outlines of the process from an in-person interview with Liang Zhongtang in March of 2016 (Liang Interview 2016), as well as a close reading of his self-published account of his experiment

(Liang 2013). Wherever possible, I have added quotes or cross-referenced events with other sources; in general, Liang's account proved to be very reliable. The one exception is that he did not make any mention of Birth Minister Wang Wei's policy speech on January 19, 1984, and he instead credits his efforts to lobby central authorities starting in February 1984 to his independent analysis of the 1982 census results. Yet I consider it unlikely that he was wholly unaware of the speech, or that his actions were unrelated. Liang was a politically savvy mid-level official who had established ties to central policy dissenters, and it is therefore probable that he heard about Wang Wei's then-ground-breaking proposal through his informal networks. He had not formally lobbied to implement his pilot policy since he was denied the chance at the Chengdu conference in 1979, and the results of the 1982 census had been available for over a year prior to his report (*People's Daily* 1982). Therefore, I have included Wang Wei's speech as a critical antecedent to this explication of the possible critical juncture, because I consider it likely that Wang's rhetoric would have emboldened an internal policy objector like Liang Zhongtang.

Whatever the impetus for the exact timing, the record shows that Liang submitted a report entitled, 'Use the Law of Population Development as the Basis Upon which to Build Birth Planning Work (*ba jihua shengyu gongzuo jianli zai fazhan guiliu de jichushang*)' to the central authorities in early February 1984 (Yang et al. 2001, p.120). In the report, he drew from 1982 census data to argue that if the government continued to encourage one child per couple, but also allowed all rural couples to have a second birth at least eight years after their first child, China could meet its population goal of less than 1.2 billion people by the year 2000 (Liang 2013). Liang later heard from his contacts within the NFPC that his work was largely ignored, but it did find two important advocates in Zhang Xiaotong in the NFPC's Policy Research Division and Ma Yingtong, from the Population Research Centre (Liang Interview 2016). Zhang's father was Minister of Health Cui Yueli (Song 2013, p.53), which

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meant that he had informal access to the very top Party officials, and Ma Yingtong was a well-known statistician and population expert. The two agreed with Liang's projections, and so they included his recommendations in their report 'A Certain Number of Questions Concerning Population Control and the Population Policy (*renkou kongzhi yu renkou zhengcezhong de ruogan wenti*)'. The men presented their report directly to the State Council on July 30th, and they said that 'Comrade Liang Zhongtang's letter promoting the late marriage and late births plus spacing policy is feasible' (Yang et al. 2001, p.124). They also went a step further and argued that Liang's suggestion would allow for China to achieve its population targets even if the birth interval was decreased to four years between the first and second child.

The report on this July meeting of the Central Committee includes accounts of both Premier Zhao Ziyang and General Secretary Hu Yaobang's comments on the Zhang-Ma report and Liang Zhongtang's proposal itself (Central Committee 1984). Zhao Ziyang reportedly said,

I think that this report has merit and is worthy of more attention. So I propose that we use a few relevant places to calculate a bit. In a few real places where it may be realistic, we should suggest adoption. Their population control targets for the end of the century can be revised slightly upwards if necessary, that's all right.

And Hu Yaobang added,

I agree with Comrade Zhao Ziyang's opinion; this is a very thought-provoking and insightful report. Encouraging this to begin and then intensively studying the question before we officially issue an opinion is a good path forward, and it could help to decisively solve some outstanding questions. I stand with Comrade Zhao Ziyang in requesting that the relevant offices perform the proper calculations and then subsequently issue a new circular to be released following Politburo discussion.

Neither of these details were released publicly at the time, nor was Zhang and Ma's report.

Liang Zhongtang himself was only made aware of the high-level response to his proposal in mid-August, when he attended a meeting of demographers in Chengdu (Qian 1984). There, Li Honggui, who was then the head of the NFPC Policy Research Division and would soon be appointed Deputy Director (Gao 1986), told Liang of Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang's

support for his proposal, and he also insinuated that Standing Committee Member Wang Wen was in agreement with them (Liang Interview 2016).

Despite this encouraging news, however, there was no official notice that Liang had approval to enact his proposal; he was convinced this was due to resistance from within the NFPC to approving alternative policy designs to their preferred one child per couple (Liang 2013). So, on January 14, 1985, Liang once again submitted a request to the NFPC, this time specifically asking for permission to 1) create a group of experts to calculate the feasibility of implementing his experiment, 2) send researchers to possible field sites to survey the situation, and subsequently to 3) implement the late marriage and late birth plus spacing policy in one or two locations in Shanxi (Wang 2012). Birth Minister Wang Wei commented on Liang's report on February 12th, ordering that 'Liang Zhongtang should implement Comrade Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang's suggestions on Zhang Xiaotong's 'A Certain Number of Questions Concerning Population Control and the Population Policy' by carrying out his three suggestions' (Liang 2013). In addition, the Minister ordered Deputy Directors Zhou Boxing and Li Zhongquan to personally ensure that the experiment be implemented at the local level.

In response to Wang's order, Zhou Boxing sent a formal request to the Shanxi Province Family Planning Commission on March 11th, which read, 'Please read Comrade Liang Zhongtang's letter and Deputy Director Comrade Zhou Boxing's comments (attached). After you have read them, we ask that you support this experiment and keep us apprized' (Liang Interview 2016). Ten days later, on March 21st, Liang Zhongtang received a communication:

Comrade Liang Zhongtang, Hello!

On January 14th you sent Comrades Hu Qili and Hao Jianxiu a letter, which reached our committee in February. The Committee's Comrade Liang Jimin (Director of the General Office) has suggested that the Shanxi Family Planning Commission and you work together to implement the scheme you've conceived, and find one or two counties to experiment. The NFPC's Deputy Director Comrade Zhou Boxing agrees with this suggestion. One week ago, we sent your letter

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and the Deputy Director's comments to the Shanxi Family Planning Commission. We ask that you immediately contact Shanxi's Family Planning Commission.

Signed,
The NFPC's Policy Program Division

Liang received yet another letter at the end of the month: a personal communication from Zhang Xiaotong, his behind-the-scenes supporter in the NFPC, whom he had never met (Liang 2013). After introducing himself, Zhang explained the main reason for his communication:

Just a few days ago I once again read the letter you wrote...After I read it, I promptly passed it along to Director Comrade Liang Jimin, and he wrote comments that he wanted to see this type of two children plus spacing experiment carried out in Shanxi Province. Right now, the rest of the country hasn't adopted this type of experiment; some of them have policies that allow for families with one daughter to have another child, but if this can open a small gap, then I hope that the whole country could look to your suggestion for guidance.

Therefore, within only a few days, Liang had official confirmation that his late marriage and late births plus spacing policy was officially endorsed by the NFPC, and he also had assurances that there were important supporters behind the scenes who were open to his ideas. As such, he felt confident when he approached the Shanxi Family Planning Commission in early April 1985 (Liang Interview 2016). At the time, the Shanxi FPC Secretary was Zhao Jun, and he had three Deputy Directors, Xiao Yuying, Ji Yongyu, and Li Junxi (Gao 2015). According to Liang, they were all supportive of his plans for a rural birth planning experiment, and especially Xiao Yuying. Over two weeks, the men generated selection criteria for their future pilot site:

- The area should be average for a rural county (economically and culturally)
- It should be convenient to access (for inspections)
- It should have competent cadres with an understanding of the population situation
- The cadres should know at least one of the provincial leaders personally, so that they communicate the outcomes clearly and do not falsify information (Liang 2013)

Liang said that Secretary Zhao Jun was away in Beijing for the majority of this period, so he dealt primarily with Deputy Director Xiao Yuying. Xiao had personal connections in Gaoping County (Jincheng Prefecture), and he had encouraged Liang Zhongtang to select it

as the experimental site. Yet when Secretary Zhao Jun returned to Shanxi, he advocated just as strongly for Yicheng, a county in Linfen Prefecture where he had previously held a position (Liang Interview 2016). In order to satisfy both officials, Liang offered to travel to Yicheng and perform an inspection to see whether it seemed to match with the specified criteria. After a few days, he would call Zhao and Xiao to share his findings, and if he was unsure of Yicheng's suitability, he would continue on to Gaoping and compare the two locations.

On May 2nd, Liang Zhongtang and Zhang Guangzhu, who was a fellow demographer from the Shanxi Academy of Social Sciences, drove to Yicheng County from the provincial capital in Taiyuan (Liang 2013). They were greeted warmly by a group of family planning officials and the county's Mayor, Wu Boqin. The mayor was at first hesitant to allow the visitors to inspect the status of birth planning in Yicheng's villages, because he said that birth planning work was hard and most rural people wanted two children, so he feared that outsiders insinuating that two babies might soon be allowed would damage policy effectiveness (Yang 2009). After some persuasion and promises to be discreet, however, Liang and Zhang were allowed to conduct the inspections and examine the family planning office's records (Liang 2013). Liang says that, although he did notice some instances of families having illegal second children, the fundamentals of Yicheng's birth planning were sound. On May 4th, he called back to Taiyuan and agreed that the experimental policy should be implemented in Yicheng (Liang Interview 2016). By July of 1985, the experiment was codified into law, and Yicheng began its late marriage and late births plus spacing experiment (Liu & He 2008). An important detail of the implementation that was not clear from the documentary record but only arose through interviews was that an informal stipulation of the two-child pilot was that it be '*bu xuanchuan*', or not propagandized/publicized (Mandarin does not have separate phrases for the two concepts). National officials were worried that

spreading the news of areas where two children were allowed would dilute policy effectiveness in other areas, where one-child or one-and-a-half rules were in place (F. Wang Interview 2016; Gu Interview 2016; Liang Interview 2016).

5.4 Jiuquan

The pilot's launch in Jiuquan Prefecture, Gansu Province was more straightforward than the complex and vertically integrated process of Yicheng, because Jiuquan's experiment proceeded directly from the circulation of Central Document 7 in April of 1984. By 1984, Jiuquan had effectively implemented the one child per couple rule, and fertility growth had already declined significantly (Jian & Zhou 2008). The birth rate had stabilized, and population density was very low, at four people per square kilometre, so family planning officials were confident that they would achieve their target of 950,000 people by the year 2000 (Southern Weekend 2015). Yet their progress in birth planning work had come at a price: there were only ten people in the Prefecture's Ministry of Health, and only four of them were responsible for birth work, or what they referred to as the 'number one difficulty under Heaven (*tianxia diyi nan*)' (Lan 2015). According to an account later given by Wei Yuxi, one of the prefecture's youngest family planning officers at the time, it was generally believed that 'one [child] was too few, three were too many, and two were just right. This was a common perception among the masses, but many cadres felt this way as well' (Southern Weekend 2015). As such, the publication of Central Document 7 was welcomed warmly by citizens and officials alike in Jiuquan.

In July, the *Gansu Daily* ran an article about birth planning entitled, 'The Nation Takes Steps to Perfect the Birth Planning Policy', which listed various types of two-child exceptions that were proliferating across the country (Hu 1984). By the end of August, there was enough support to have a meeting in Jiuquan City to discuss the possibility of coming up with their own scheme of exceptions for rural families. About 120 people, including the

Prefectural Committee and Family Planning Commission and all of the village mayors and birth planning workers, met from August 27th to the 30th (Jiuquan Prefectural Administrative Office 1984). They came up with three exceptions to the one-child rule for rural couples, so that people would have a second child if: 1) the first one was disabled or could not perform household labour, 2) the parents of a single child divorce and then get remarried, or most importantly 3) if the mother waits five years after having the first child to have a second (Jian & Zhou 2008). According to Wei Yuxi, there was disagreement about this last clause, as some of the officials worried that near-universal second births would cause population growth to spiral out of control (Lin et al. 2015). At the meeting, an unnamed village mayor proposed three additional conditions for villages to be eligible to enact the second birth plus spacing, in order to make sure that control over birth rates would be maintained: there must not have been any third births in the past year, the family planning rate should be 100 percent, and family planning fee collection should be better than 80 percent (Southern Weekend 2015).

This was agreed upon as an acceptable compromise, and the new regulation was circulated as Jiuquan Prefectural Party Committee Document 57 on September 14th, 1984 (Gu 2008). Central documents show that Jiuquan's family planning officials presented their alternative policy design in concert with Gansu's provincial officials at the NFPC conference in Tianjin in early October, and it was officially approved for implementation (Yang et al. 2001, p.126). As a result of the village eligibility requirements for the late second birth provision, only 15 of Jiuquan's 60 villages enacted the late second births exception in 1985, but about half put it in place in the second year, and by 1987, all 60 villages were allowed to issue second birth permits after an interval of five years (Jian & Zhou 2008). In 1986, the NFPC conducted an extensive investigation of Jiuquan Prefecture, and it declared the experiment a success, although it did not formalize the criteria that were used to make the determination of positivity (Lin et al. 2015). Therefore, from 1986 onward, Jiuquan was

officially included in the national register of ‘two-child exploration areas (*ertai zhengce tansuo diqu*)’.

5.5 Enshi

In Enshi Prefecture, the two-child policy pilot had an additional critical antecedent besides the circulation of Central Document 7. In December of 1983, due to the fact that almost 60 percent of its citizens were from ethnic minority groups, Enshi was officially recognized as a Miao and Tujia ethnic minority autonomous prefecture, one of 32 such prefectures across the country (Shi & Jiang 2008, p.223). The classification of an autonomous prefecture in China by definition allows for greater leeway in self-governance and a higher number of provisional and experimental policies (State Council 2005b; Zhang 2012), yet it also placed Enshi in the category of areas specifically called upon in Central Document 7 to alter their birth planning schemes (Retherford et al. 2005). As such, the 1984 adjustment had different implications for this area of Hubei than for the other pilot counties, because Enshi was forced to balance between possibly loosening regulations for its Han citizens and having to implement new parity limits for its residents who were either Miao or Tujia.

There is no evidence that action was taken directly after Central Document 7 was released in April, or indeed until Hubei Province circulated its own Provincial Document 33, ‘The Provincial Family Planning Commission Forwards along A Report on Vigorously Grasping Birth Planning Work (*pizhuan shengjihua shengyu weiyuanhui dangzu guanyu dali zhujin zhuhao jihua shengyu gongzuo baogao de tongzhi*)’ on July 26th (Sina 2014). This Provincial Document reiterated the necessity of implementing birth planning for minorities and encouraged the proposal of ‘appropriate exceptions for allowing second births’ at the local level (Gu 2008). In response to this second document from its directly superior government, the officials of Enshi called a meeting to formulate a policy to address the

instructions (there is no remaining documentation of where and when this meeting specifically took place).

At the policy meeting, a provisional pilot was proposed that would solve the dual issues of Han resistance to one-child limits and future projections of high fertility among the ethnic minorities. The pilot policy was essentially the same in design to the one implemented in the other three counties: it advocated for late marriage (age 23 for women and age 25 for men) and a late first birth, and it allowed for rural couples to apply to have a second birth after an interval of three years, regardless of their ethnicity (Shi & Jiang 2008, p.225). For the remainder of 1984, the prefectural government conducted a census and investigation of its villages in order to determine the feasibility of their proposed experiment, and then presented a full report to the prefectural Standing Committee at their meeting in December (Standing Committee of the Enshi People's Congress 2008). As a result, in January of 1985, Hubei Province circulated a document entitled 'Provisional Birth Planning Regulations for Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous District (*Exi tujiazu miaozu zizhizhou shixing jihua shengyude zanxing guiding*)', which officially legalized the policy for Enshi and effectively compromised between the policy requirements for its different ethnicities (Gu & Wang 2009, p.9).

5.6 Chengde

Although there does not appear to have been any official documentation of alternative policy designs' implementation, family planning officials in Hebei province claim to have been searching for a way to allow rural families in Chengde Prefecture (along with other very low-income areas) to have exceptions for two children per couple as early as mid-1983 (Wang 2008). The family planning officials in the prefecture had claimed that implementing the one child per couple rule was nearly impossible due to the traditional beliefs and hardscrabble agricultural existence prevalent in the 'mountainous, old, minority, and poor

(*shan, lao, shao, qiong*)’ areas, which necessitated greater provision of household labour, and especially sons (Li 1995). However, it was not until the circulation of Central Document 7 that the would-be reformers within Hebei’s provincial government had a legal basis for allowing such alternative policies at the local level. After April 1984, the officials quickly formulated their own pilot policy, which they began implementing in mid-1984 (Gu & Wang 2009, p.4).

The Chengde policy stipulated that women had to be at least 23 when they married, meaning that the first birth could not occur before age 24, and it also required a space of at least four years before application for the second birth, so that the mother would be 28 at the second birth (Li 1995). In addition, it differed slightly from the other policies in that it required a 500 Renminbi ‘social maintenance fee (*shehui buchang fei*)’ to be paid by families that could afford it, although the minimum level of income specified precluded the vast majority of families in Chengde from having to pay (Zhang & Pei 2000). There is also some evidence that the informal ‘*bu xuanchuan*’ provision was also in place for the experimental county in Hebei as well. In 1985, the *People’s Daily* ran an article about a visiting delegation from Rwanda, and it mentions that they went on an inspection visit to Chengde (*People’s Daily* 1985). While the article says that the Rwandans were impressed by the birth planning policy and its results there, it makes no mention of the fact that there was a two-child exception in place. The reality that the pilot county was selected by the central authorities for a visit by a foreign delegation and was reported on by the primary CCP media mouthpiece proves that the central authorities were aware of (and to some degree approved of) the Chengde pilot policy before it was named a ‘national two-child exploration area’ in 1986. However, the omission of the alternative policy design in the publicized accounts corroborates interviewees’ claims that the existence of the two-child pilots was to remain secret.

Table 5.1: Important Events During Possible Critical Juncture 1

Date	Event
February 1984	Liang Zhongtang submits report arguing for a two-child plus spacing pilot
April 13, 1984	Release of Central Document 7 offering new opportunities for experimentation
July 26, 1984	Hubei Province circulates Provincial Document 33 calling for new fertility regulations in Enshi autonomous minority prefecture
July 30, 1984	Zhang and Ma give a report on birth planning to State Council, Zhao approves
July 1984	Chengde (Hebei) begins implementing a two-child policy experiment
August 30, 1984	Jiuquan Family Planning Commission approves two-child plus spacing design
September 14, 1984	Jiuquan Prefectural Party Committee Document 57 legalizes Gansu pilot
January 14, 1985	Liang submits another report/request for pilot approval to the NFPC
January 1985	Enshi's two-child pilot approved by Hubei province
February 12, 1985	Birth Minister Wang Wei approves Liang's request
March 11, 1985	Shanxi Family Planning Commission receives instructions to support Liang
May 4, 1985	Liang confirms that Yicheng County will be the site of his pilot
July 1985	Yicheng experiment becomes a law

5.7 Insights from Critical Juncture 1 and Conclusion

From the four accounts of the formulation and implementation of the various late marriage and late births plus spacing policies described above, and especially from the well-documented intricacies of the Yicheng pilot's inception, there are several notable commonalities. First was the importance of utilizing vertical lines of communication across levels within the CCP government structure, from the local to central authorities. Although this is most evident in Yicheng's case, where Liang Zhongtang's personal status gave him the ability to reach the NFPC and even all the way to the State Council through his networks, the other three counties showed some vertical communication as well: officials from Chengde and Enshi were able to effectively lobby their provincial governments, and Jiuquan presented its provisional policy directly to the NFPC for approval. It should be noted that these

connections were not necessarily formal; Liang's in-depth account shows that he had several powerful allies who aided his cause without having any direct governmental association with him. Second was the significance of identifying and taking advantage of opportune moments for policy change. Just as the officials in Chengde recognized the importance of Provincial Document 33, so did the Enshi leaders understand the unique opening presented by their reclassification as an autonomous minority area, and Jiuquan's government pulled together its conference less than a month after a pro-second birth editorial in the provincial newspaper. And finally, each of the four counties supported their case for experimental status with in-depth surveys, censuses, and interpretations of their demographic situations. This marshalling of scientific knowledge in order to advocate for policy change was somewhat nascent in this early stage, but it was a harbinger of things to come. These three factors – deep connections across levels of government, comprehension of Party signalling, and presentation of demographic analysis – were only just noticeable from this early period in the history, but they would go on to be significant aspects of the later advocacy surrounding the Experiment of Eight Million People.

This Chapter has covered the first of four critical junctures within the course of the Experiment of Eight Million People. Despite the data constraints introduced by thirty years of distance and the obscurity of the birth planning regime's inner workings at the time, it has presented evidence on the circumstances surrounding the beginning of the pilot policies in Yicheng, Jiuquan, Enshi, and Chengde. Especially valuable was the work that Liang Zhongtang has personally conducted to document his actions and the responses they elicited in the early days of the Yicheng experiment, a story which has not yet been published in English. From the four accounts, three prominent themes were identified: the importance of working across multiple levels of the CCP's vertical structure, the centrality of proper timing for advocacy activities, and the significance of presenting demographic data effectively.

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These insights will be re-visited in Chapter 9, in order to determine whether they retained their importance across the remaining history of the policy. First, though, it is necessary to discuss the next critical juncture: the 1988 decision to discontinue most of the two-child policy pilots, and why these four particular counties were given clearance to continue.

Chapter 6 Possible Critical Juncture 2: Competing for Expansion, 1987-1988

6.1 Introduction

This Chapter will provide an account of the second possible critical juncture identified in the course of the Experiment of Eight Million People: the time at the end of 1987 and the beginning of 1988 when the late marriages and late births plus spacing policy was under consideration for experimental expansion. It will therefore take another step toward answering the two micro-level research questions of the project. This period proved to be particularly pivotal, because the investigation showed that the Experiment of Eight Million People was only competing with one alternative policy design for central endorsement: the ‘one-and-a-half’ or ‘only daughter household’ policy (see page 77), in which rural couples whose first child was a girl were allowed to have a second birth. The one-and-a-half policy had been implemented in a small number of counties since 1982, and for a variety of reasons described below, it was declared the policy for rural China in May of 1988. Yet the implementation of this alternative policy exception across rural China, which was still heavily patriarchal (Chow & Chen 1994; Murphy 2003) and gaining access to Ultrasound-B machines (Li & Zheng 2009; Chu 2001) was one of the biggest triggers of the rise in sex ratios that has resulted in the millions of excess men, one of China’s most concerning demographic distortions (Poston et al. 2011; Basten 2012; Cai & Lavelly 2003; Sharygin et al. 2013; Greenhalgh 2012). As such, this second critical juncture also serves as a counterfactual thought experiment: what would China’s demographic situation be today if there had been a different shift in 1988?

This Chapter will first present a series of critical antecedents or generative cleavages that laid the groundwork for this period of heightened contingency and also signalled its beginning. These antecedents were less closely clustered than those for the first critical

juncture, but the period of policy competition itself did not begin in earnest until a pair of pivotal conferences took place in Dalian (Liaoning) in August and Yicheng (Shanxi) in September 1987. Section 3 of the Chapter will describe these conferences and the various responses to them throughout the close of that year, and Section 4 covers the activities in 1988, starting with the first birth planning policy conference, when Peng Peiyun replaced Wang Wei as Minister of the National Family Planning Commission (hereafter ‘NFPC’). Section 5 will relate the evidence on how the policy pilots in Yicheng, Jiuquan, Chengde, and Enshi were allowed to continue. The various inferences that can be drawn from the events of this period are covered in Section 6, which will also conclude by providing a brief summary of the Chapter.

6.2 Critical Antecedents

Unlike the first critical juncture, which began abruptly, the underpinnings of the shifts in early 1988 were several years in the making. The foundations for the high-level debate on the proper design for rural two-child exceptions were twofold: first was spreading the knowledge of results from the late marriage and late births plus spacing policy. This occurred in spurts, and it was necessarily internal due to the prohibition against public promotion of the pilots. The second was the calculation and interpretation of an undeniable reality: that birth rates in China were on the rise throughout the late 1980s. These two factors combined to both trigger the beginning of the policy debates in 1988, and (at least partially) foreshadow their outcome.

6.2.1 *Neibu Cankao* Article on Yicheng

On October 18, 1985, the internal Party newspaper *Neibu Cankao* (*Internal Reference*) ran an article entitled ‘Demographer Liang Zhongtang’s Implementation of the ‘Late Marriage and Late Births Plus Spacing’ Method in Yicheng has Satisfactory Results’ (Liang 1989). The article gave an overview of the reasoning behind the pilot: that rural people were willing to defy a strict policy to have more than one child, so implementing a more

acceptable design had a similar demographic effect while also easing implementation problems. It included accounts by Yicheng's citizens and policy officials describing the improvements in the first year of the pilot and focused specifically on the creation of an atmosphere of 'closer relations between the Party and the masses (*dangqun guanxi miqiele*)'. While the article was positive, and the focus on the doctrine of cadre-mass relations was powerful, the most important facet of the piece was its inclusion in the important publication. *Neibu Cankao* is a twice-daily report distributed to CCP officials at the ministerial level and above (Hood 1994), and it is thought to have a readership of several thousand (Hazelbarth 1997). Throughout the 1980s it was considered 'the most important controlled-circulation information bulletin in the People's Republic of China', and one of its six primary functions was to share 'work experiences whose unripe or experimental nature makes them unsuitable for open reporting' (Schoenhals 1985, pp.64–66). So the fact that the two-child plus spacing policy was included in the *Neibu Cankao* hints that there was sufficient patronage of the experiment to make it a part of the daily required reading for officials.

6.2.2 Zhao Ziyang's December 1986 Speech

While the inclusion of Yicheng's pilot in *Neibu Cankao* insinuated high-level support for its policy design, it was not until December of 1986 that there was an emphatic confirmation of its appeal to actors at the very centre of the CCP. On December 2nd, at the State Council's Conference on Birth Planning Work, Premier Zhao Ziyang made a speech about birth planning to an audience of over 100 provincial and central officials from the NFPC and the State Council (Yang et al. 2001). The internally-circulated 1989 book the Party compiled on birth planning contains only a brief excerpt from this address, under the title 'Birth Planning Work Must Continue to be Grasped Closely and Not Be Shaken' (National Family Planning Commission 1989). The passage from this official account contains only boilerplate statements about the severity of China's population problem. Yet Liang Zhongtang later

found a full transcript of Zhao's speech in Shanxi's provincial archives, in which China's General Secretary explicitly acknowledged the debate within the Party as to the best path forward for the birth planning policy:

Among other things, there is a debate on the population ... There are some experts who argue that rural people should have two children, and as long as they practice late marriage, late births, and spacing between births, the outcomes would be the same as 'just one child' ... I think that this theory can't easily be negated at this time, but I also can't confirm that it is this way, because it hasn't been sufficiently put into practice. I'm not saying we should popularize it now, and I'm also not saying that we should uproot the current birth policy. But we should pay attention to the places that have implemented trials, all of those territories that have experimented, so that we can clarify the questions...

There are already a few of these places, and Yicheng County has been engaged in this practice for more than a year. There are a few other designated places across the country. They shouldn't be propagandized, but we should still put stock in them. If these few places end up showing good results, align with the hopes and wishes of the people, and if they can control population growth, then they are obviously good, and we should go ahead with it! But we're just not certain at this time. I have spoken in support of these comrades' views, and I think that if we can get some proof, if things truly are this way, then it's wonderful of course, and it's a very good policy, one that would solve some big problems. But right now it's not just that we can't tell whether or not we should agree with this group of cadres, it's also that we can't easily say whether their ideas should be expanded across the country, because the outcomes aren't clear – so we should experiment. (Liang 2013, pp.65–66, emphasis added)

This speech is central to this second critical juncture for two reasons. First, the fact that one of the most powerful officials in China mentioned the Yicheng experiment before a gathering of a large group of powerful birth planning officials further suggests that awareness of the two-child plus spacing policies was widespread (although not publicly available), and that there were powerful proponents of its continued experimentation. Second, the fact that the official account excludes this portion of the speech suggests that the later narrative of the progression of the birth planning policy was smoothed to some degree, in order to suggest that there was less disagreement among government officials as to the correct way forward. This would be in keeping with the CCP's focus on maintaining an appearance of rule by consensus, which is a main facet of their governance and source of legitimacy (Saich 2004; C. Li 2016). Incidentally, Zhao's speech also confirms interviewees' accounts that there were

specific prohibitions against disseminating information about the alternative birth planning regulations.

6.2.3 The ‘Third Population Peak’

The final factor that precipitated the second critical juncture in 1987 was the increasing attention being paid to the ‘population peak (*renkou gaofeng*)’ occurring in China. This was unsurprising in demographic terms, since it had been roughly 25 years since the disproportionately large birth cohorts that followed the Great Leap Forward famine (Orleans 1962), and therefore the approximately 40 million babies who had been born in the years 1961 and 1962 were reaching the legal marriage age and beginning to bear children (Jowett 1991). Yet after the CCP had begun to see results from their strict antinatalist efforts, with total births decreasing by more than a million per year since 1982 (Statistics 1987), the possibility of another uptick in fertility was daunting, especially after the population target for the year 2000 had already been revised from ‘no more than 1.2 billion’ to ‘about 1.2 billion’ in recognition of the fact that even despite the extreme policy, the threshold was unattainable (Huang & Yang 2004). As early as May 1986, national Birth Minister Wang Wei was mentioning in his speeches that a population peak was imminent; he even cited controlling the effects of the peak as the central focus of birth planning work in the Seventh Five Year Plan period (from 1986 to 1990) (Wang 1986). And while the compilation of birth planning speeches released by the Party did not include Zhao Ziyang’s December 2nd musings on Yicheng, the excerpt noted that the Secretary cautioned listeners about the coming population peak (National Family Planning Commission 1989).

These allusions to the problems of the population peak and its associated increases in birth rates accelerated throughout the spring and summer of 1987, as it became yet another reason to admonish birth planning workers to carry out their work wholeheartedly. On March 26th, Wang Wei spoke before the National People’s Congress and mentioned that China’s

birth rate had ‘rebounded (*fantan*)’ as a direct result of the population peak. In April, the Party journal *Semi-Monthly Forum* ran an article entitled ‘There is No Change in the Birth Planning Policy’ to dispel rumours that a nationwide reform was coming, and it specifically mentioned the population peak as a reason why nothing could be done to alter the current line (Gao 1987). A whole slew of activities were planned in early July to commemorate World 5 Billion People Day, including a press campaign that saw three articles in the *Enlightenment Daily* warning of the dangers of the peak (Commentator 1987; Fan 1987a; Peng & Fu 1987). On July 11th, Wang Wei gave a speech in which he said:

Since we are facing the third peak of population growth, and the population situation is so severe, we must strictly control the growth of the population, continue to keep a tight hand, and allow no slackening of efforts in our work (quoted in Hardee-Cleaveland & Banister 1988a).

Of the three factors covered here, this problematizing of China’s increasing cohorts at childbearing ages is most representative of a generative cleavage in the way that Hogan (2006) intended, because it involved the greatest element of crisis in the context of Chinese birth planning. CCP officials were still dead set on coming as close as possible to their target of ‘about 1.2 billion (*shi’eryi zuoyou*)’ people by the year 2000, and the threat of jeopardizing that achievement due to China’s distorted population age structure would prove to be a powerful negative incentive to policy change. The next section will trace the course of events across the roughly ten-month rivalry between the two rural second-child exception policies.

6.3 August 1987: Beginning the Competition

The true beginning of the competition for supremacy between the late marriage and late births plus spacing policy and the one-and-a-half policy began in Liaoning Province in August of 1987. From July 28th to August 2nd, the NFPC held its annual National Birth Planning Grassroots Propaganda and Education Work Conference in Dalian City (Yang et al. 2001, p.160). The location of this event was pivotal, because Liaoning was one of only five provinces (along with Guangdong, Shandong, Zhejiang, and Guangxi) that had been

experimenting with the only-daughter household policies in rural areas; one such pilot county, Fengcheng, was only just to the north of Dalian (Greenhalgh 1986). Although official reports of the conference are dry, relating only that innovations in propaganda and education were important during the Seventh Five Year Plan period, the selection of the location in a province with extensive policy experiments was important for both symbolic and practical reasons. On the one hand, the location of such conferences often hinted at central endorsement of (or at least interest in) surrounding policy pilots (Heilmann 2008). On the other, future Birth Minister Peng Peiyun confirmed in later interviews that teams from the NFPC had gone down to Liaoning's experimental counties to inspect the work with the one-and-a-half policy and had compiled positive reports in the late summer of 1987 (Ma 2015).

At the beginning of September, however, the NFPC appeared to signal that it was still open to alternative designs. A conference was convened in Yicheng, called 'A Discussion on China's Rural Birth Planning Policy (*Zhongguo nongcun jihuashengyu zhengce de taolun*)', which brought together officials from 11 rural areas with a provisional two-child plus spacing pilot in place to share their experience (Mei & Liang 2010; Wu 2011). Although Liang Zhongtang did not compile the same fastidious records of this conference as he did of his efforts at the very dawn of his Yicheng pilot, he did recall that Jiuquan in particular had sent several officials to the conference, and their Provincial Party Committee gave an incredibly positive presentation on the benefits that the policy had on their birth planning work since its implementation (Liang Interview 2016). Liang has always maintained that the National Birth Minister himself, Wang Wei, attended this conference, although this fact was not corroborated by the Party's official accounts of the NFPC's activities for that year (Liang 2013).

These meetings were central to the one-and-a-half versus two-child plus spacing policy debate for several reasons. First of all, the convening of an 'experience communication

meeting (*jingyan jiaoliuhui*)' in both Yicheng and Liaoning was vital, because it signalled central support for the types of policy under construction there. These conferences 'were usually held in localities that had done especially well' (White 2006, pp.90–93), and they often precipitated the expansion of a policy experiment to additional areas, or the formalization of a set of 'experimental points (*shidian*)' (Heilmann 2008, p.10) to be shared at the national level. The fact that a conference was held in each of these locations suggests that both designs had at least some level of support for their expansion. In addition, the fact that the official Party records of the birth planning policy during this period (National Family Planning Commission 1989; Yang et al. 2001) allude to the Dalian meeting but do not mention the Yicheng conference suggests that there were efforts to gloss over the debates occurring behind the scenes during this period. The omission of Yicheng from these records seems to once again give the impression that the Party omitted the real disagreements happening within the Party about the best way forward for rural people.

While the experience communication meetings in August and September appeared to be a sign that China's birth planning leadership was giving more credence to the possibility of expanding the two-child plus spacing and/or the only-daughter policy, indications from the remainder of the year were mixed. It also seemed that Zhao Ziyang's public support for policy loosening was wavering somewhat during this time. On September 23rd, at the Assembly of the Asian Forum for Population and Development, Secretary Zhao referenced the difficulties that Asia's high population numbers would introduce into China's development process, and warned that Asia's population would surpass three billion people while a population peak was simultaneously beginning (National Family Planning Commission 1989). At the 13th Party Congress on October 25th, as his last speech as Premier before becoming the General Secretary of the Party, he made a similar speech connecting 'population control, environmental protection, and ecological balance (*renkou kongzhi,*

huanjing baohu, he shengtai pingheng)', and he argued that the beginning of a new birth peak necessitated continued focus on enforcing the existing birth planning policy (Yang et al. 2001). Zhao's words were not necessarily ringing endorsements of upholding the status quo, but they were still vital due to his previous outspoken support for policy loosening. This problematization of China's population situation was complicated further by the release of the annual Statistical Yearbook at the end of October. The figures collected from across China showed that the crude birth rate increased from 17.8 to 20.77 births per thousand from 1985 to 1986, leading to a three-point growth in the natural rate of population increase, a rise in the TFR from 2.1 to 2.4, and an estimated four million extra births in the year 1986 (National Bureau of Statistics 1987).

Although these figures were undoubtedly cause for concern, they were not publicized widely at the end of 1987. Rather, after the release of the Statistical Yearbook, it appeared that the centre shifted its focus away from the policies governing the rural population; the record does not suggest whether this was due to the impending leadership transition, a lack of agreement surrounding the best path forward, or another factor. The two remaining conferences held that year dealt with financial management in the birth planning system and advances in contraceptive science and technology, respectively (Yang et al. 2001). There were not any high-level speeches by State Council or Central Committee members that addressed the future of the birth planning policy, and there was only one article in either of the main Party mouthpieces about the results of the Statistical Yearbook. This article, which ran in the *Enlightenment Daily* in mid-December, included the detail that the NFPC had apportioned the relative blame for the rise in births: it was decided that 50 percent of the increase was attributable to the population peak, 20 percent was due to the greater number of two-child exceptions granted to rural families, and 30 percent due to poor implementation of the policy in backwards locations (Fan 1987b). As a result, Family Planning Commissions at

all levels were instructed to respond by ‘recognizing the grim situation of population growth, enhancing their sense of urgency, and resolutely correcting the phenomenon of relaxation’. This interpretation, which accorded a full one-fifth of the increase to the increase in rural two-child exceptions, suggested that perhaps policy loosening was not on the horizon after all.

6.4 January to May 1988:

If the autumn of 1987 implied the beginnings of a competition between the Experiment of Eight Million People and the alternative one-and-a-half policy, the spring of 1988 saw its main portion and definitive conclusion. The first major event of the New Year occurred from January 16th to the 22nd, when the National Family Planning Conference in Beijing brought together the top 200 birth planning officials from across the country (Yang et al. 2001). There, Birth Minister Wang Wei officially stepped down from his post, and Peng Peiyun was confirmed as the new Minister of the NFPC (Scharping 2003). While some observers of the time saw this as a sign of the CCP rejecting the reformist agenda that Wang Wei supported (Hardee-Cleaveland & Banister 1988b), it has been subsequently noted that Wang Wei was past his retirement age, and the move was in line with the CCP’s established norms for succession (Yi 1989). Yet some scholars believe the alternative narrative that Wang Wei formally requested clarification on the path forward for the two-child pilots in December, sparking a backlash from hardliners that cemented his fate (Scharping 2003, pp.65–68). Whatever the impetus, the new Birth Minister Peng came from a propaganda and education background (having worked under then-Premier Li Peng while he was Minister of Education), and she believed that her appointment was because ‘Mr. Li deemed it important to place a person with substantial experience in education in charge of the Family Planning Commission’ (Tien 1989). It was fitting, therefore, that Li Peng gave a speech at the same conference, in which he said ‘while family planning remains a basic national policy in China...it is work involving the masses and should be carried out primarily through

propaganda and education and on a voluntary basis' (Hardee-Cleaveland & Banister 1988a, p.37).

Because the January conference set out the date for the NFPC to give its report on the future direction of birth planning before the 7th National People's Congress on March 31st, the interim period was concerned with compiling that data and less focused on high-level policy change. The main policy goal in February was formulating a response to the rise in illegal early marriage and birth behaviours. Yet on the 16th, the *People's Daily* ran an article that to close observers was a bellwether of things to come: it was entitled 'NFPC Spokesman Says that the Population Situation is Grim' (Ai 1988). It includes an account roughly consistent with the results of the 1987 Statistical Yearbook: due to the population peak, the number of births increased in 1986 and 1987 and could be expected to increase in 1988, so stringent work was needed. Yet it was the identity of the spokesperson that was pivotal: the gravely concerned speaker was Liang Jiemin, the same official whose support of the Yicheng pilot had been vital in its central endorsement (Liang 2013). This suggestion of high-level supporters closing their minds to rural loosening was echoed when Birth Minister Peng Peiyun presided over her first major conference as National Minister and February 26th to 28th, and gave a talk ostensibly about illegal early marriage behaviours but also her attitude towards China's situation, 'The population is in a period of birth peaks. Family planning work cannot be relaxed in the slightest. Otherwise, it would affect the realization of the goals we've set' (National Family Planning Commission 1989).

March of 1988 proved to be the most pivotal month in the rivalry between the two rural policy designs. On March 6th, an editorial ran in the *Enlightenment Daily* that vehemently decried the 'existing policymaking structure' (Liu 1988). The article specifically cited the thoughts of 'a small research group under Song Jian's purview', and argued that the rebound in birth rates was the direct results of the various policy loosening efforts since 1984. Liang

has said that he and other supporters of the late marriage and late births plus spacing policy took this as an ominous sign that Song Jian, the very same man whose cybernetic projections were so important to the original adoption of the one child per couple rule, was throwing his significant support and lobbying efforts against the adoption of their more lenient policy (Liang 2013; Hardee-Cleaveland & Banister 1988b). On March 10th to 13th, another policy experience conference took place in Tieling, Liaoning; although its focus was ostensibly to share the ‘Three Priorities (*san weizhu*)’ pilot of propaganda and education work there, the official report says that other policy pilots (presumably including ones concerning the only daughter household policy) taking place in the province were also under consideration (Yang et al. 2001). March 25th, Li Peng again made a speech referencing the necessity of implementing a very strict birth planning policy to successfully achieve the 1.2 billion target by the year 2000. He specifically argued that ‘in order to keep population within 1.2 billion by the end of the century, the existing policy of promoting one child per couple must be implemented...even in rural areas, besides those people in practical difficulties who need some limited concessions, this should be the standard’ (National Family Planning Commission 1989)

On the NFPC’s day of discussion at 7th National People’s Congress on March 31st, these factors – the results from the different types of two-child policies and the recognition of the difficulties of achieving the population targets – all came to a head. The summary report from the meeting shows that the first point that was decided upon was to ‘build birth planning on a firm and feasible foundation’ by allowing rural families whose first child is a girl to have a second child after an interval of two years, although the same report cautioned that this policy change must not be allowed to be seen as reinforcing China’s traditional chauvinism (Yang et al. 2001). This revelation appeared rather abrupt, but in a May 12th speech before Directors of

Family Planning Commissions from across the country, Birth Minister Peng Peiyun gave an in-depth account of the behind-the-scenes events of March 31st:

Some comrades believe that, from the perspective of the preferences on the part of the masses with regard to childbirth, it would be best for us to permit people to have two children generally, and they also believe that in this way the work will be easier than to have 'single-daughter households.' This argument, naturally, has some force, but for now we still cannot do this.

At the meeting on March 31, I reported that from what we have seen in the pilot experiment projects at certain localities, if we could take a firm grasp of our work, we could reap good results by adopting the method of combining late marriage and late childbirth with setting intervals between the first and the second baby, whether we are talking about a place where the family planning work has already been advanced, as in the case of Yicheng County in Shanxi Province, or a place where the work has been relatively backward, such as Xinrong District in Datong Municipality in Shanxi Province. That is why some comrades have proposed that we gradually expand the scope and coverage of these pilot experimentations.

I have asked for instructions from the centre with regard to the question of whether or not it agrees with the idea of expanding the scope of the experimentation. *The leading comrades at the centre have given me a clear and unequivocal response, which is that for now it would not be appropriate to expand the experiment letting people have second babies, because at the moment we do not have any assurance or confidence that after we allow for second babies generally we would still be able to limit the population growth.* If we expanded the scope of the experimentation, we would give people the impression that we are going to broaden and popularize the policy of letting people have two babies. That could easily lead to further turbulence and repercussions. That is why for now we need to maintain the existing policy. Nonetheless, at the small handful of localities where pilot experiment projects have already begun, we should continue and uphold these experiments and do an earnest job of promoting them so we can sum up their experiences and learn from them for the future (Peng 1992, emphasis added)

So, in this more detailed account, it seems that the determining factors in the decisions were the same anxieties that had been plaguing CCP officials across this entire period: the impact of policy loosening during the population peak on achieving China's population targets. Only a week after the pivotal March meeting, starting on April 7th, there was a conference in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning Province, to bring 50 officials and experts from across 28 rural provinces to study the results of the only daughter households policy there. Birth Minister Peng Peiyun spoke at this meeting to relay the decisions handed down in the March 31st meeting and stress the importance of implementing this new policy as widely as possible (Yang et al. 2001). This meeting served as a powerful reaffirmation of the

centre’s commitment to expanding the one-and-a-half policy across the country. Once again, however, the same meeting report included admonitions against allowing the policy to be used to discriminate against women and girls. This detail suggests that even if there was not documentation of abnormal sex ratios under the one-and-a-half child policy at the time (and none of this type of evidence was found), the policymakers were aware that the design involved the risks of such imbalance. This acknowledgment of the dangers of promulgating a policy in which the design reinforced existing gender norms is important, because it had previously been thought that the Chinese government only understood the risks of an unbalanced sex ratio starting in the 1990s (Gu & Roy 1995).

When the NFPC Board of Directors met in Beijing at the end of April, they again discussed specifically the positive results of the only daughter household pilots in Shandong and Liaoning, and the necessity of promoting the design across the country (Yang et al. 2001). This meant that the highest of all birth planning officials had now been given an incontrovertible order. The logical conclusion, then, of this changing of the tide around the design of the rural second child exceptions was a reduction in the number of the alternative late marriage and late birth plus spacing policies allowed by the central government. This came in the form of a document released by the NFPC on May 20th. ‘A Circular on Adjusting the List of Units for Birth Planning Experimentation (*guanyu tiaozheng jiahuashengyu gongzuo shidian de tongzhi*)’ officially reduced the number of centrally-sanctioned two-child plus spacing experiments across the country to only 13, including the four counties that this project investigates.

also ordered the former pilot follow provincial which were



The Document remaining localities to regulations, standardizing

the only daughter households design across China (National Family Planning Commission 1988). This effectively ended an additional 32 two-child plus spacing policies that had been running, as represented by Figure 6.1:

Figure 6.1: The Two-Child Plus Spacing Pilots before and after the May 20th Circular (Wei & Zhang 2014)

Jiuquan, Yicheng, Enshi, and Chengde were each included on their reduced list, and their policies continued. Yet with the demise of the other pilots across China, valuable alternative data were lost, and the strength of marshalled evidence from various local conditions was significantly diluted for advocacy efforts in the future. Indeed, a portion of the small number of pilot policies remaining were also eventually ended, further narrowing the field.

Even after the final decision was made, however, Birth Minister Peng Peiyun herself appeared to have remained conflicted about the choice the government had made. In a speech before the International Population Program Management Committee that was carried in a May 4th article in the *People's Daily*, the Minister was quoted as supporting rural two-child exceptions for couples 'in difficulty (*kunnan*)', an umbrella phrase incorporating several exceptions rather than specifically households with only daughters (Xie 1988). And in a candid interview with prominent demographer Tien later in 1988, 'Madam Peng observed that now, as in the recent past, some insist on one child while others call for two children...Official reference to 'two children' would enhance the likelihood of still more

third births. [And] using ‘1.5 births’ is adequate for population projections, but makes no sense at the behavioural level. Adding to the dilemma, she noted, are the implications of formally allowing second birth when the first child is a girl. The practice contravenes the principle of gender equality’ (Tien 1989, p.423). These small signs of her discomfort with the decision in early 1988 foreshadow her later outspoken advocacy of the Experiment of Eight Million People’s results. Also, this construction of ‘allowing two births encourages three’ that Birth Minister Peng Peiyun referenced in the quote would become a rallying cry for opponents of loosening in the future.

One other interesting fact emerged from my interviews about this pivotal time in China’s birth planning history. This juncture effectively ended with the promulgation of the revised list of 13 counties allowed to experiment with the late marriages and late births plus spacing policy in May of 1988, but several interviewees alluded to the fact that Secretary Zhao Ziyang had been outnumbered in the competition with the only daughter households policy, yet he had no intention of ending his advocacy for his preferred alternative design (Liang Interview 2016; Kaufman Interview 2016). Specifically, as Wang Feng related, there were plans to hold another policy conference in Yicheng to directly compare the results of the 13 counties that had continued the two-child plus spacing policy with the only daughter household policy, but they were derailed after the Tiananmen Incident in early 1989:

When Peng Peiyun was the head of the State Family Planning Commission, Zhao Ziyang told her personally that she should go to Yicheng. There was a meeting planned in November 1989 in Yicheng to look at how they do their birth control. Peng Peiyun was going to go. But then June 4th happened, Zhao Ziyang was removed, and this thing never happened. (F. Wang Interview 2016)

Although this plan did not come to fruition, the fact that it was in the works suggests that Zhao Ziyang was not ultimately dissuaded from his support for the Experiment of Eight Million People’s policy design, but that his advocacy was simply not enough to sway a majority of his peers in the midst of dire perceptions of China’s population situation during early 1988.

6.5 Local Responses: Keeping Two-Child Plus Spacing Alive

Even inclusion on the list of 13 centrally-endorsed two-child plus spacing pilot counties did not guarantee that an experiment would continue after the majority of rural areas in China shifted to the only-daughter household policy. Several of the pilots on the list subsequently ended their experiments: Changyang, another experimental Tujia region in Hubei Province, brought its alternative work to a close at the end of 1988 in an effort to generally tighten birth planning regulation across the province (Feng 2011). I pressed the interviewees on what differentiated the pilot areas that continued from those that did not, and Gu Baochang gave the most specific answer:

[They] stopped for...mostly two reasons. One of these is the people. Because at that time, if there was a person [in the locality] insisting on the experiment over the years, then it continued. But sometimes that person is replaced, shifted away, and another person came in who was not interested. 'Why would I want to have trouble for myself? Whatever you ask me to do, I just do it.' They don't want to be innovative, because innovation means more risk-taking. ...And another reason is that the top leaders, particularly the provincial leaders, feel uncomfortable. 'For the whole province we have the same model, the same policy, the same approach to our work, but you are exceptional and you make my work very difficult in terms of the evaluations, the assessment of performance!' (Gu Interview 2016)

These dual factors were both evidenced in the account of Wei Yuxi, the veteran birth planning official from Jiuquan, Gansu, who gave a full-length description of the experiment there (Southern Weekend 2015). Although Jiuquan was officially included in the list of centrally-endorsed counties in the 'Circular on Adjusting the List of Units for Family Planning Experimentation', Gansu Province made its own plans to shift all rural areas to the one-and-a-half policy at the end of 1988. Family planning officials in Jiuquan were told that they would only be allowed to maintain their alternative policy if they could find a 'legal basis (*falü yiju*)' for it. Fearing backlash from their constituents if they attempted to tighten the policy again, Jiuquan's local officials called a meeting to determine the future of their pilot. There, a member of the Ministry of Justice pointed out that the 'second child contract (*ertai hetong*)' program that had been running for two years, in which citizens promised in

writing to wait four years to have a second child in exchange for tax exemptions, could be seen as a legal basis. The Jiuquan Family Planning Commission expanded on this argument and compiled evidence of more than 30,000 instances of these second child contracts, which they brought to the provincial birth planning work conference at the beginning of 1989. The provincial officials agreed that the evidence of the contracts was sufficient to allow the pilot to continue, but they did require the birth interval be increased from four to five years for the next decade to ensure that population growth stayed under control in Jiuquan Prefecture (Jian & Zhou 2008).

A notable wrinkle in this account of local level initiative and provincial obstructionism occurred in Yicheng, which found a special loophole through its unique elite support. As one long-time NFPC official put it in our discussion of the pilots, ‘In places like Shanxi’s Yicheng, they received permission from the highest levels for their experiment. So if Hu Yaobang agrees, no matter what the province thinks, they can continue to do the experiment. They’re allowed to do it.’ Yet despite this confidence that Yicheng’s high-level support insulated it from the drawdown on two-child plus spacing experiments in 1988, Liang’s own actions belie a greater anxiety about the future of his project. Following the release of the May 20th document, he took up an advisory post within Yicheng’s Family Planning Commission, in a move to oversee it more closely (Liang 2013)...and presumably, to also ensure on a first-hand basis that the policy pilot he had worked so hard to begin would continue during the policy tumult of the late 1980s.

Table 6.1: Important Events During Possible Critical Juncture 2

Date	Event
August 2, 1987	Birth planning experience conference occurs in Liaoning
September 1987	Birth planning experience conference is held in Yicheng (Shanxi)
September 23, 1987	Zhao Ziyang speaks about China’s high population numbers and peak period

October 25, 1987	Zhao Ziyang gives a speech arguing for enforcing the existing birth policy
October 31, 1987	Release of 1987 fertility data (shows an increase of 4 million births)
January 16, 1988	Peng Peiyun becomes Minister of the NFPC
March 6, 1988	<i>Enlightenment Daily</i> op-ed suggests that Song Jian resists policy change
March 10, 1988	Second policy experience conference in Liaoning
March 31, 1988	Birth Minister Peng Peiyun presents two-child plus spacing policy to the State Council, is told that the policy change would be too likely to increase population growth
April 7, 1988	Policy meeting is held in Liaoning to promote only daughter households policy
May 12, 1988	Birth Minister Peng Peiyun announces intention to shift to only daughter household policy at national birth planning meeting
May 20, 1988	NFPC releases a document decreasing the number of two-child plus spacing pilots

6.6 Insights from Possible Critical Juncture 2 and Conclusion

The account of this second critical juncture along the course of the Experiment of Eight Million People highlighted several factors that were instrumental in the ultimate decision to proceed with the one-and-a-half policy. First was the recurring anxiety about the possibility of achieving the target of 1.2 billion people by the year 2000, and how it interacted with the reality of large cohorts reaching childbearing ages. At times, it seemed that this echo of the late 1970s narrative of China's population explosion would preclude any rural exceptions, and it appeared to have eventually been a main reason that a policy considered more gradual (allowing a second child to roughly fifty percent of couples instead of a hundred percent) was eventually chosen, even with the realization that doing so could be detrimental to females. Second was the importance of vertical ties through the Chinese government in shaping policies: local officials in Liaoning showed that they had channels to the centre through the multiple policy conferences they succeeded in hosting, Birth Minister Peng Peiyun was brought into her job by Li Peng (who was expressly against policy loosening and favoured increased education activities), yet Liang Zhongtang was allowed to maintain the Yicheng

policy partially as a result of his association with Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. And finally, there was increasing evidence that the CCP was *post hoc* rationalizing its accounts of this period in order to control the discourse and create the impression that there were less vehement debates over the future direction of the rural two-child exceptions than alternative sources suggest. These factors will be revisited in Chapter 9 to consider their relative importance to understanding Chinese social policy governance.

This Chapter has described the events of the second period that has been deemed likely to be a critical juncture, when the late marriages and late births plus spacing policy was compared with the only daughters household policy for possible expansion across the rural areas of China. Beginning with the antecedents of knowledge dispersion about the existence of the policy itself and the growing evidence that China was experiencing an abnormally high number of women at childbearing ages and then entering the juncture when two different experience conferences were held in Shanxi and Liaoning provinces in 1987, this period represented a time when there were multiple paths forward under consideration at the Party centre. Although the experimental outcomes from both types of pilot counties were brought to the highest levels of the CCP establishment in order to attempt to influence the eventual outcome, the decision was ultimately made to take what appeared to be a more gradual approach to policy loosening, by allowing only those families whose first child was a girl to proceed to another birth after an interval of several years. From the transcripts of various speeches, newspaper articles, and other documentary evidence, it seems that this decision was due in large part to anxiety about the attainability of the 1.2 billion by the year 2000 target. This theme, as well as the others that emerged from the narrative above – the importance of vertical connections through the CCP establishment and mounting evidence that the Party smoothed its narratives to hide disagreements – were summarized. They will be revisited in

Chapter 6

Chapter 9, but first the remaining candidates for critical junctures (the years 2004 and 2015)

will be described.

Chapter 7 Possible Critical Juncture 3: Response to the First Policy Proposal, 2004 to 2005

7.1 Introduction

The decision to promote the ‘only-daughter households’ policy in 1988 ushered in a long period of stasis for the rural birth planning policy design. Although the years 1991 and 2001 were tested as possible critical junctures in Chapter 4, there were not enough observable implications present to justify a closer examination of the happenings in those periods. As such, it was not until 2004 that there was again sufficient overlap in the history of the two-child plus spacing policies and the national birth planning policy discourse to render a major policy shift likely. Once this time came, however, there was a new layer of complexity added to the landscape: the group of demographers who had coalesced around the experience of the two-child plus spacing policies began to play a central role in gathering and presenting evidence from these areas to the Party’s centre. This Chapter will describe the period surrounding the submission of their first proposal to the Party centre, when many believed that change was likely, and therefore continue to push toward the answers of the two micro-level research questions. Yet events in the year after the submission complicated the process and ultimately prevented the central authorities from moving towards a more lenient policy design. As Gu Baochang put it, ‘We thought that it was very simple, that once we proposed the policy change, it would be accepted by the government, and we would switch to do something else... But that was not the case’ (Gu Interview 2016).

This Chapter will open by highlighting the most important critical antecedents of this period in Chinese birth planning. Then, beginning with the lead-up to the submission of the first ‘Suggestion on Adjusting China’s Fertility Policy’, the main body of the Chapter will trace the events in its aftermath and the factors that finally led to a decision not to enact the advocacy group’s suggestion to expand the experiments over a wider geographic area a year

later. Section 7 will compile the insights surrounding the factors that emerged from this narrative and will summarize this period and bridge to the fourth and final possible critical juncture: the year 2015, when the national policy was changed and the end of birth planning began.

7.2 Critical Antecedents

For this period, the critical antecedents could be traced as far back as the relative success of the first round of NFPC – Ford Foundation cooperation on the ‘Quality of Care’ initiative (Kaufman et al. 2006), or at least the establishment of the group focused on the feasibility and likelihood of ‘administrative changes’ in 2001 (Hvistendahl 2010). However, in the interests of keeping tight attention on the period of interest, only the most crucial factors will be covered here. These were threefold: the institutional shift from the National Family Planning Commission to the National *Population* and Family Planning Commission in 2003, the availability of ‘channels’ to the high levels of the Party that convinced the advocacy group that 2004 was the correct timing for submitting the proposal, and the debates surrounding China’s actual fertility level that the advocates wanted to settle and their opponents leveraged to their advantage. Each of these factors provided the context and precipitated the contingency for this next period of interest during the Experiment of Eight Million People.

7.2.1 Transition to the National Population and Family Planning Commission

In March 2003, the National Family Planning Commission was officially renamed the National *Population* and Family Planning Commission (National Population and Family Planning Commission 2003). Although this shift may appear pedantic, it involved a significant shift for the bureaucratic face of China’s birth planning policy. Because the Commission was now ‘tasked with a broader range of population issues (e.g., ageing, migration, employment, gender equity, education) and expected to contribute to a coordinated

and coherent national program to manage their interlocking population dynamics' (Scharping 2003, p.241), it was given significantly more institutional heft at a time when its future had seemed relatively uncertain. For the purposes of this juncture, the most important facet of the new Commission's mission was its main commitment to 'stabilize the low fertility level (*wending di shengyu shuiping*)' (Yang 2003). The Commission's Minister, Zhang Weiqing, described this as the bureau's central aim in January 2004: 'our main task must be to pay close attention to stabilizing the low fertility level and maintain a high degree of concern about population security. We should firmly grasp this core unambiguously and be unwavering in adhering to the current birth planning policy by continually grasping work at the grassroots' (Zhang 2004a). Yet the Commission also set about putting forward other programs that both enhanced its scope and suggested the outlines of the future population policy; for example, by the end of 2003, they had launched a major Care for Girls Action (*guan'ai nü'er xingdong*) (State Council 2005a), and started a pension scheme specifically for the rural elderly who had only one child or two daughters (Zeng & Wang 2014). Consequently, the ranks of its personnel continued to grow: by 2005, the NPFPC employed over 500,000 people directly, and it also involved another six million workers responsible for grassroots implementation (Hvistendahl 2010, p.1461). While the new mandate gave hope to some demographers that the institution would become more amiable to a policy design that allowed for a greater balance among its various aims, the swelling size of the bureaucracy also increased the inertia of the organization, whose 'whole *raison d'être* was the population policy' (Kaufman Interview 2016).

7.2.2 Political 'Channels'

When I pressed members of the advocacy group as to why they had decided that 2004 was the opportune time to release their policy proposal to the NPFPC, a common theme that emerged was that they had favourable connections to the highest echelons of the CCP at that

time. As Wang Feng put it, ‘one of our questions was, how do you get the policy proposal to the desks of the top leaders? You need to have channels. So we had those channels to get it to the leaders then.’ All interviewees seemed to agree that former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun was their most valuable connection: by this time, she had served as the Vice Chairman of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, the President of the All-China Women’s Federation, and the President of the Chinese Population Association (China Vitae 2008), so she was well-connected and devoted to changing the policy. Another interviewee (who asked that I anonymize this quote due to its relationship to internal Party dynamics) pointed to the centrality of Zhang Erli, the former head of Planning and Statistics at the NFPC, who had undergone a self-professed transformation to supporting a humanistic approach to the policy (Zhang 2001):

Wu Bangguo, who was Chairman of the Standing Committee at that time, was a Qinghua graduate, and one of our key team members, Zhang Erli... was either a classmate of, or knew Wu Bangguo. So basically, we’d just say, there are nine members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, how do we get this to their hands?

These types of connections were invaluable in trying to unseat the basic national policy (*jiben guoce*) of birth planning, a designation that insinuated support from the very highest levels of the CCP establishment was needed in order to change its course (Merli et al. 2004). These types of justifications for the timing of the proposal also reinforced the fact that the demographers were very aware of the political realities of the time, and they were actively attempting to work with and not against them in their advocacy.

7.2.3 Statistical Debates

The final factor that both ushered in the beginning of the critical juncture and shaped its eventual outcome were the deep disagreements over the state of China’s population. Of course, debates over the validity of statistics had characterized the entirety of the birth planning period, but the advent of the ‘one-vote veto (*yipiao foujue*)’ system in the early 1990s had directly tied grassroots cadres’ promotions to their birth planning targets, which

therefore encouraged widespread misreporting and eroded confidence in the official statistics (Goodkind 2004). As early as 1992, the national fertility survey results led to estimated TFRs ranging from 1.52 to 2.1 children per woman (with the highest variant therefore being 1.4 times the lowest) (Zhang & Zhao 2006). Yet the problem worsened significantly with the results of the official 2000 census, which showed an incredibly low 1.22 TFR (National Bureau of Statistics 2001). While nearly all experts agreed that this figure required at least some adjustment due to underreporting, the final reports varied even more wildly than earlier corrections, with scholars consistently arguing that the figure was closer to 1.5 while the Chinese government stubbornly refused to accept estimates lower than 1.8 and often resorted to slogans like ‘close to replacement rate’ (Zhang & Zhao 2005). In fact, the NPFPC and the National Bureau of Statistics reported the TFR at exactly 1.8 for almost a full decade, relying on ‘fertility estimates prepared by the Commission’s handpicked experts for their National Strategic Study of Population and Development’ (F. Wang 2015, p.19). Therefore, the Experiment of Eight Million People group could join these debates with their proposal, but their detractors could simultaneously undermine their findings with alternative calculations of China’s fertility, and therefore draw widely diverging conclusions about the possible implications of any policy change. These three factors – the shift to a National Population and Family Planning Commission, the existence of channels to bring reform suggestions to the highest leaders, and debates over statistics – would prove to not only signal the beginning of this juncture, but also foreshadow its conclusion.

7.3 The First Policy Proposal

The advocacy group began to put together the first ‘Suggestion on Adjusting China’s Fertility Policy’ in the summer of 2003. From September 28th to 29th, they held the second major meeting of the core group at Renmin University in Beijing, where they compiled results and outlined an official first draft. Gu Baochang has said that they made every effort



Figure 7.1: Members of the Advocacy Group Prepare a Draft of the Proposal (Gu 2010)

to ‘be brief and to the point, to be rational and convincing’ (Gu 2010b) in the proposal. They took comments on this draft from within the group throughout the fall, and in early January they passed a working version to Minister of the NPFPC Zhang Weiqing, as well as to all of his Vice Ministers (Gu Interview 2016). The leaders of the advocacy group received comments from these central actors after about a month, and then updated and circulated it again, before finally submitting the agreed-upon version (which included abstracts of the various papers that had been published incorporating the research that had contributed to its formulation) to the NPFPC and the State Council on April 12, 2004. Although the document was not released publicly out of fear that doing so would be seen as an attempt to undermine the government’s authority (Chen Interview 2016), Gu Baochang gave me a copy from his records.

The full ‘Suggestion on Adjusting China’s Fertility Policy’ document was 33 pages long, although the text of the proposal itself only covered the first six pages. It opened by quoting an excerpt from the 1980 Open Letter on Controlling Population Growth, which had specified that the birth planning policy would be re-evaluated after twenty or thirty years. It

then went on to argue that because the TFR was around 1.6 children per women and the natural growth rate of the population at large was under one percent per year, the policy could be loosened without China's total population ever surpassing 1.4 billion. It then brought up the new problems of population ageing and elderly poverty, increasing Sex Ratios at Birth, and imminent shrinkage of the labour force that had emerged as unintended consequences of the focus on one child per couple, and could endanger China's continued economic and social development. The proposal then proceeded through five reasons it was time to adjust the policy:

- The Sex Ratio at birth had been too high for 20 years
- The results of the 2000 census showed that population ageing was a problem
- Each level of government had to deal with out-of-plan births, which caused contradictions between the cadres and the masses
- The policy could be changed over 15 years through a process of 'classification and implementation, pursuing openness, and step-by-step progress'
- The policy could be adjusted without allowing the population to get out of control

For these reasons, the proposal closed by arguing for a gradual shift in which, from 2005, couples where one member is an only child would be allowed to have two children with monitoring of the population outcomes, and in 2010 all couples would be allowed to have two children. After the list of the 18 signatures from the demographers³¹, the rest of the booklet was devoted to in-depth analysis (including numerous charts and graphs) of China's fertility trends since 1950, the changes in the Sex Ratio at Birth and Female Infant Mortality Rates after the shift to the one-and-a-half policy, projections of China's population size and structure depending on how the policy was shifted, and the policy fertility analysis (Gu et al. 2007). The final portion contained 16 abstracts from papers written by various signatories or groups of signatories on specific issues and results from the previous years' analysis.

³¹ The full list of signatories was as follows: Gu Baochang, Zhang Erli, Guo Zhigang, Zheng Zhenzhen, Li Jianmin, Zuo Xuejin, Peng Xizhe, Gui Shixun, Liu Yongliang, Chen Wei, Xie Zhengming, Li Baihua, Feng Xiaotian, Gao Ersheng, Wei Chuzhu, Li Shuzhuo, Zeng Yi, Zhai Zhenwu.



Figure 5.2: Xu Kuangdi, Jiang Zhenghua, and Song Jian (China Vitae 2014)

Yet between the time that first draft and the final version were submitted to the Commission, there were already signs that at least some actors within the birth planning policy establishment were mounting a defence against policy loosening. In the spring of that year, the NPFPC announced the formation of a National Population Development Strategic Research Group (*Guojia renkou fazhan zhanlue yanjiu ketizu*), which was tasked with analysing population data to create a unified plan for the Eleventh Five-Year Period (2006 to 2010) (Zhang 2004b). This could have been considered an encouraging sign of possible change on the horizon, were it not for the composition of the group's leadership. There were three main actors who were tasked with overseeing more than 300 experts who would critically examine China's birth planning policy. The first was Song Jian, the very same cyberneticist whose projections were used in 1980 to justify the necessity of a drastic focus on promoting one child per couple (Greenhalgh 2008), and whose continued opposition to loosening the policy has been documented across the birth planning period (Wee & Li 2013; Greenhalgh 2005). Former Vice Minister of the National Family Planning Commission, Jiang Zhenghua, was also included. Jiang had written essays and given speeches arguing that China needed to stay the course of one childization and that the vast majority of two-child rural pilots had been failures in his opinion (Hu et al. 1980; Ai 1995; Liang Interview 2016). The final leader, Xu Kuangdi, had less of an antinatalist track record than his peers, but he

was another engineer (not a trained demographer), and he had been posted in Shanghai, one of the areas with the lowest fertility in the country, for most his career (China Vitae 2014).

According to Wang Feng, the formation of this group was an early and ominous sign that there was internal resistance to the proposal among the NPFPC's highest leaders:

I think that partly was galvanized by all of these activities that we were doing, and partly because of the Minister at that time, Zhang Weiqing, smelled something else. And many people believe that it was his own political ambition... he was not satisfied with just being the Minister of Population and Family Planning Commission. And he wanted to make population more important, in the whole national and political arena. And that could position him to follow Madam Peng Peiyun's step to become a member of the State Council. To become a member of the State Council, you need to be either a Vice Prime Minister, or a Minister from an important Ministry... Population and Family Planning, back in the eighties, nineties was atop the policy agenda. And he felt that he needed to revitalize that, because I think that he sensed that in the nineties and the early two thousands, the urgency of controlling the population was not as high, and he sensed that things were changing. But he wanted to turn this around in a different framing, which was to make population a more important issue for the whole national strategy. So instead of pursuing what we hoped to be followed up after 2004, 2005... he assembled 300 people, so-called experts, and spent 20 million RMB – at that time, China had already started to have money, but still that was a lot of money – and they produced hastily a report that is mostly a political thing (F. Wang Interview 2016).

This interpretation of Minister Zhang Weiqing's resistance to the group's policy proposal was corroborated by the testimony of Gu Baochang that he and Zhang Erli, the only signatories from the first proposal who were still members of state bodies associated with the NPFPC, were roundly criticised by the Minister himself upon its submission (Gu Interview 2016).

But it was not only leaders of the NPFPC who had seen the proposal: former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun and other channels had ensured that it also reached the desks of several State Council members, including the highest leaders of that time, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. They followed the usual procedure of attaching comments to the reports and then returning them to the NPFPC for comment (Jin et al. 2005). According to Wang Feng,

Hu Jintao said, are there other ideas? Or proposals? Are there other opinions?...[but this was] also a way of not doing anything. Right? To postpone, by basically shifting the responsibility to other people and then seeing what to do. It was very characteristic of his whole ruling, during the ten years. Wen Jiabao said, oh, this is not something that can be accomplished in one term by the government (F. Wang Interview 2016).

Other interviewees re-iterated the fact that this level of caution was typical of the Hu-Wen administration, and lamented that such reliance on more experiments was actually a way to filibuster real reforms (Chen Interview 2016). One of the central planning officials unconsciously referenced this tactic when he said, ‘After you’ve put this [proposal] out, do you expect the government to change immediately?... the government may think, ‘Hm, maybe we should wait a while’... So it’s not that once the experts put forward a proposal, it can be immediately said that it’s agreed! Or that we disagree! It’s a process’. However, powerful supporters of the policy advocates immediately set about trying to overcome this inertia.

7.4 Baoding Conference, 2004

The leaders of the Experiment of Eight Million People group told me that their ideas sparked significant interest within the Chinese Population Association. Partially to spread awareness of the proposal and to attempt to shorten the timeline of examining other options per Hu Jintao’s orders, and partially in response to the perceived receptivity of this group, former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun proposed a conference, which was held in June in Baoding (Hebei) with the Minister of the NPFPC, Zhang Weiqing, and two Vice Ministers in attendance (Fudan University 2014). The research group’s two main organizers, Gu Baochang and Wang Feng, were able to go and present the findings of their research and the rationale of their policy proposal at the Baoding conference, which marked the first time in their three years of work that they were face-to-face with a large number of NPFPC officials (Gu 2010a). Gu Baochang later wrote that, while their ideas were well-received, there were roughly three outstanding questions that were raised in different shapes or forms, and which led some to hesitate about their suggestions. These were broadly:

- The relationship between the fertility level and the policy (i.e. would birth rates go up with a policy loosening?)
- The relationship between the sex ratio at birth and the policy (could it be proven that changing the policy would alleviate male-female imbalances?)

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- The relationship between birth planning work and the policy (would changing the policy undermine the authority of birth planning workers?) (Gu 2010b)

Although Gu Baochang and Wang Feng felt that they lacked data to definitively answer each of these questions, they became convinced that they could help to raise awareness of the issues as they had been studied in other contexts, and thereby ameliorate some of the concerns. In that vein, they approached Zhao Baige, the head of the NPFPC's International Cooperation Department and the Deputy Director of the Commission, about holding a conference with Chinese officials and Western experts on low fertility (China Vitae 2012; Zhao 2002). Zhao was very supportive of the idea, so they began to move forward with planning a conference outside of China to expose NPFPC officials to alternative demographic teaching.

After the Baoding Conference, there was a long period of relative quiet from within the NPFPC regarding the proposal. Although the work behind the scenes to hold another conference was ongoing, it seemed that the main focus of the central government was on promoting the other initiatives that had been shown to stabilize the low fertility rate, like the 'fewer children means faster prosperity (*shaosheng kuai fu*)' campaign. On June 11th, the NPFPC announced that they would expand the pilot, which had achieved success in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous region by implementing propaganda campaigns and exclusive pension policies for elderly people that had signed one-child certificates (Sun 2004b). And when the State Council released a statement endorsing the expansion in July, it specifically did so on the grounds that the policy helped to stabilize the low fertility across China (Sun 2004a). This idea of new antinatalist initiatives and their relationship to the Commission's stated goal of stabilizing low fertility extended across the rest of the year, touching on the promotion of the fewer children/faster prosperity campaign as well as a 2000RMB reward in Jilin (Jiang 2004), old-age provision for two-daughter households in Guizhou (Hu 2004), a poverty relief scheme in Hebei only available to one-child households (Geng & Lin 2004),

and ‘birth control awards’ in Guangdong for sterilizations and other reproductive procedures (Zhang & Wu 2004). There was also a meeting in October over which Zhang Weiqing presided and that was specifically focused on ensuring that the members of China’s ‘floating population (*liudong renkou*)’ did not overrun their fertility limits. In sum, then, while the advocates busied themselves preparing to spread pronatalist ideas within the Commission, the public signals it emitted were still tightly focused on decreasing the number of births across rural China.

7.5 ‘Forum on Emerging Population Challenges in China and East Asia’, April 2005

It did not take long for the advocates to find supporters of their ideas for a policy conference. Zhao Baige had suggested to Gu Baochang that the most valuable framing for the event would be as a forum to bring mid-level birth planning officials up to date with the current state of global population research; since these officials had some power within the Commission (and would likely go on to lead it), but were not yet fully invested in the current policy, they would be easiest to reach and most impactful (Gu 2010a). And since both Wang Feng and Gu Baochang had worked with the East-West Center in the past, and the Centre itself had deep ties to the Commission, they thought that it would be the best venue for such a discussion (F. Wang Interview 2016). Since Joan Kaufman had at that time moved on from the Ford Foundation, they approached the UNFPA in Beijing and secured funding for a two-part Forum, with one leg to be held in Hawaii and a second in Beijing in the spring of 2005 (Kaufman Interview 2016).

So, from April 13th to 14th, 2005, a delegation from the NPFPC met with a group of prominent demographers in Hawaii at the East-West Center, for the ‘Forum on Emerging Population Challenges in China and East Asia’. Although the plan had been to bring more NPFPC officials, only four delegates attended. The two highest-ranking members of the Commission were Ma Li, who was Head of the Population Information Research Centre, and

Chen Li, who had taken over Zhang Erli's position as head of the Department of Development and Planning and Statistics (East-West Center 2005). They were joined by an impressive array of the most famous experts on low fertility around the world, including John Bongaarts (Bongaarts & Potter 1983; Bongaarts & Bulato 2000; Bongaarts 2004) and Wolfgang Lutz (Lutz 1989; Lutz 2007). Yet even before the conference began, there were signs of trouble, centred on Wang Feng's plan to present a paper entitled, 'Can China Afford to Continue its One-Child Policy?' (Wang 2005). As Wang Feng related:

When Chen Li saw the title in the agenda, of my paper presentation, he called back to the Commission and complained. So Zhao Baige actually called Bob Retherford, who was the Director of the East-West Center's Population Program, at two o'clock in the morning, to say that I could not talk about this...I think she was very worried that this would be criticized...at the end, I was able to give my presentation, because the East-West Center people also discussed and they said, no, this is ridiculous... so my paper was published there, and I gave the talk [under the alternative title 'What would happen if China relaxed its one-child family policy?'] (F. Wang Interview 2016).

Although Zhao Baige was the force behind the Forum within the Commission, even she could not head off these types of attacks from within. And indeed, this interaction foreshadowed Chen's entire involvement with the project. While he personally thanked Gu Baochang for the invitation, because he said that 'the only reason he came to this Commission was to change this policy', he roundly criticized the proceeding upon his return to China (Gu Interview 2016). Wang Feng said that he believed Chen was more concerned about his own political aspirations than actually serving as an internal reformer, and saw support of the proposal as too risky (F. Wang Interview 2016).



Figure 7.3: Official Conference Picture from the East-West Center (Gu 2010)

Despite the early suggestion that even the supposedly open-minded officials the NPFPC had sent were not necessary reliable allies, however, the conference proceeded relatively smoothly. The agenda included reports on the issues of low fertility and importance of pronatalist policies in Japan, Singapore, Thailand, and Korea by high-ranking officials in addition to the reports by the East-West Center's experts and the well-known demographers (East-West Center 2005), and according to multiple interviewees, the Chinese policy officials seemed engaged and receptive. Although it was only a two-day affair, the main organizers stated that they left the conference heartened, and decidedly optimistic about their chances of bringing their message to a wider cross-section of officials back in China in only a few months.

7.6 Beijing Conference, June 2005

In June, the Chinese leg of the forum took place. Although the organizers had originally been under the impression that the meeting would be held at the NPFPC's central headquarters in downtown Beijing, which would have been a significant signal of central

approval, it was moved for unknown reasons to Xiaotangshan, an area almost an hour outside of the city (F. Wang Interview 2016). While this worried the demographers, they were heartened by the fact that the heads of ten provincial Family Planning Commissions still attended the meeting, and Minister Zhang Weiqing personally gave the opening address to the group of assembled delegates (Chen Interview 2016). Although I was not able to locate the agenda for this leg of the event, I was told that the slate of Western demographers was similar, but the number of NPFPC officials was roughly double those that had attended the meeting in Honolulu (Gu 2010a). The general tone and message of the conference was the same: fertility in other East Asian contexts had dropped very low and was a cause for concern, pronatalist policies around the world did not necessarily achieve significant results, and therefore China needed to transition away from its continuing antinatalism before it, too was caught in the trap of low birth rates (Kaufman Interview 2016). And once again, the officials seemed to listen and engage, which greatly encouraged the advocates.

Yet when the Experiment of Eight Million People group closed the conference by asking the NPFPC to give them permission to expand their preferred policy design incrementally, the answer came swiftly and emphatically:

They said it was nonsense. Why did we have low fertility? Because we had a strict policy. If you loosen the policy, fertility will rebound, and there will be chaos. It will destroy the modernization of the country, and you will be responsible. That was huge...So, no. We shouldn't have an even bigger experiment. Once we expand the experiment it will continue spread out and destroy the whole situation. No. (Gu Interview 2016).

As a result, the advocates regrouped and settled on a two-pronged response to the signals. On the one hand, they ramped up their investigation into the experiences of Yicheng, Chengde, Jiuquan, and Enshi, beginning the in-depth evaluations that would form the bulk of the 2009 book (Gu & Wang 2009). On the other, they approached the head of the Population and Family Planning Commission for Jiangsu Province (who had attended the Beijing conference), to see if they could investigate the results of the unique local policy, which was

quickly becoming a natural experiment. Jiangsu had been one of only two provinces (the other being Sichuan) that had maintained a universal One-Child Policy across its rural areas, but theirs had an interesting loophole: if both members of a couple were only children, they were allowed another child (Zheng et al. 2009). At the beginning of the policy, the number of eligible families was negligible, but it was naturally rising after decades of enforcement, so the advocacy group decided it would be the perfect context to investigate whether fertility ideals were truly low for women who had the legitimate option to have a second child (Zheng Interview 2016). These efforts were not as fruitful as expanding the actual experiment would have been, but it was their only recourse after their more ambitious plan was thwarted by the NPFPC. Once again, this period ended without a successful expansion of the Experiment of Eight Million People. Table 7.1 shows the most important events during this period:

Table 7.1: Important Events During Possible Critical Juncture 3

Date	Event
September 28, 2003	Meeting of advocacy group held to begin drafting first policy proposal
January 2004	First draft submitted to the NPFPC for comments
February 2004	National Population Development Strategic Research Group formed
April 12, 2004	Final draft of first policy proposal submitted to NPFPC and State Council
June 2004	Baoding meeting of China Population Association convened by Peng Peiyun
April 13, 2005	Forum on Emerging Population Challenges held in Hawaii
June 2005	Beijing conference of demographers and NPFPC officials

7.7 Insights from Possible Critical Juncture 3 and Conclusion

In 2004, there were several important themes that emerged, primarily: the centrality of political connections like former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun to advocacy efforts, the divergence in opinion between various Chinese demographers and the NPFPC, and the need for ever more data to corroborate alternative plans for the birth planning regime. The

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description above shows the importance of Birth Minister Peng Peiyun's intervention at key points, like the original submission and the Baoding Conference, and this suggests that informal relationships to high-ranking officials was one of the major advantages of the policy proposal's authors. The fact that even the third-party demographers involved in the China Population Association were significantly more open to the possibility of change or at least experimental expansion than most NPFPC workers suggests that there was something about the Commission's interests or ideational slant that precluded serious consideration of the results and privileged their own interpretation of the demographic situation over the opinions of varied experts. And finally, the inability of the advocacy group to sufficiently represent the situation on the ground using their own analyses of the demographic situation appeared to have been a serious weakness during this juncture, the understanding of which was evidenced by the decisions to collect and analyse significantly more data as another rhetorical strategy. These factors will be compared with those that have been present in other junctures in Chapter 9.

This Chapter has expounded upon the events within the third critical juncture during the Experiment of Eight Million People, which took place in the roughly one-year period following the submission of the first policy proposal, 'A Suggestion on Adjusting China's Fertility Policy' in 2004. It has traced the proposal's origins and path to submission, and then covered the major events that it triggered once it entered the circles of elite Chinese politics. First, it described the China Population Association conference at Baoding, and then continued to cover the two East-West Center forums, in Hawaii and Beijing, as well as the evidence from the media covering the other initiatives undertaken by the NPFPC contemporaneously. Finally, it gave an overview of the decisions that the main advocates made concerning the next steps for their attempts to convince the central government to implement a more demographically savvy policy design, and analysed what these acts

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insinuated about their understanding of their context. The three important factors that emerged as explanatory during this particular juncture were outlined, and these will be revisited in the Discussion. First, however, it is prudent to continue to the most recent (and perhaps most critical) of the periods during the Experiment of Eight Million People: 2015, when the efforts of these advocates and others finally paid off with the government's decision to transition away from their focus on promoting one child per couple.

Chapter 8 Possible Critical Juncture 4: The End of ‘One Child Per Couple’ 2015

8.1 Introduction

It is fitting that the last period under examination for this empirical portion of the project is 2015, because this year also marked the last days of China’s national promotion of one child per couple. Although this change to a two-child policy has been widely covered in the popular press as a rapid and unexpected reversal, there were in fact several indications that change was coming. While there have been several academic pieces ruminating on the likely outcomes of the policy shift (Zeng & Hesketh 2016; Sun et al. 2016; Cheng & Duan 2016; Gong et al. 2016), there have not yet been any in-depth accounts of the mechanisms that underpinned the implementation of a universal two-child policy. This is presumably due to a combination of the temporal proximity to the shift and the difficulty of gathering data about a change so close to a reversal in such a sensitive ‘basic national policy’. As such, this Chapter is not only the completion of the investigation surrounding the two micro-level research questions, but also a major step toward understanding China’s recent policy change, although the relative dearth of documentary evidence that has been released necessitates a stronger reliance on interview data than the earlier empirical chapters. The portions where data could be only triangulated among interviewees and not cross-referenced with documents have been noted in the text.

As with the other accounts, the Chapter will begin by introducing the critical antecedents of this period in the history of China’s birth planning, which are threefold: the change of the National Population and Family Planning Commission to the National Health and Family Planning Commission in 2013, the implementation of a ‘*dandu*’ two-child policy in 2013, and the lack of a corresponding fertility rebound in 2014. Then, beginning with a conference at Shanghai Fudan University in December of 2014 that resulted in a third policy proposal

submission by the Experiment of Eight Million People advocacy group, the main body of the chapter will lay out the evidence about the response the submission triggered from within China's highest levels of government. A final section will compile the insights that emerged from this account and segue to the Discussion Chapter's summation of all the four accounts.

8.2 Critical Antecedents

For this last juncture, the critical antecedents or generative cleavages trace back to the early signs of a possible complete loosening in China's birth planning policy, which occurred in 2013. The new Xi Jinping-Li Keqiang administration showed that they were more active than past leaders and more open to change in the basic national policy of birth planning by shuffling its governing institutions and altering the national policy line in their first year in office. The implications of this institutional realignment and the shift to a *dandu* regime, as well as the disconnect between the projected and actual responses to the national policy change, combined to both loosen the internal resistance to the advocacy group's efforts and to corroborate their diagnosis of China's fertility situation and its implications. These two factors were central in opening this last juncture and ultimately ushering in the final change to a 'universal two-child policy (*quanmian lianghai zhengce*)' in October of 2015.

8.2.1 Transition to National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2013

On March 10th, 2013, Vice Premier and head of the National Development and Reform Commission Ma Kai announced that the 'National Population and Family Planning Commission (*guojia renkou yu jihuashengyu weiyuanhui*)' would be merged with the Ministry of Health to form the 'National Health and Family Planning Commission (*guojia weisheng he jihuashengyu weiyuanhui*)' (Xinhua 2013b). This was not merely a change in title; it was also symbolic, because it essentially returned birth planning back to the original status of a subsection of health governance that it had occupied before the founding of the independent Commission 32 years before (Alcorn 2013). In addition, the institutional

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reshuffling moved the policymaking functions out of the sprawling bureaucracy of the Commission and into the National Development and Reform Commission ('NDRC'), a separate body of the State Council responsible for data analysis and formulation of the various plans (annual, Five Year, etc.) by which China is governed (NDRC 2015). The NDRC was also widely considered to be less in favour of a strict population control (Heilmann & Melton 2013). Joan Kaufman summarized the ramifications of this shift succinctly:

Once the population policy planning function was taken out of the hands of the National Population and Family Planning Commission in 2013 and given to the National Development and Reform Commission, the process of population planning became a much more scientific and evidence-based data decision making process. The institutional bureaucracy of the National Population and Family Planning Commission, which I mentioned earlier, had resisted to some degree believing the clear social, demographic, and economic evidence, because the work of the Commission was premised on population control, and thus they were resistant to relaxing the One-Child Policy. After the population policy planning function moved to the National Development and Reform Commission, it became much more about strategic planning on the basis of that evidence. And the evidence was very compelling about the increasing ageing population, the distorted sex ratio at birth, the decline in new labour force entrants, and the very low fertility levels. So in 2013 when they removed the population planning function from NPFPC and removed their ability to control the evidence that justified continuing the policy, it was really the beginning of the end of the One-Child Policy. (Kaufman Interview 2016).

There is one other detail that emerged from the interviews about this change that precipitated the later events, and that was the apparent surprise at the very highest levels of the NPFPC about this change: 'Two weeks before the announcement was made back in March 2013 that the Family Planning Commission was going to be merged, the Minister then, told staff members that it was not going to happen. So she didn't know' (F. Wang Interview 2016). This Minister, Li Bin, would go on to become the head of the new NHFPC (Xinhua 2013c), but this anecdote, which Wang Feng said he had heard from multiple sources, suggests that the change to the new Ministry came from outside of the family planning establishment, and indeed likely even sparked resistance within it. This suggested that the NDRC and the newly-reconstituted State Council were open to making changes within the

birth planning institutions without the wholehearted support of the bureaucracies themselves, a phenomenon which would present itself again in the coming juncture.

8.2.2 '*Dandu*' Policy, 2013

After the Third Plenum in November of 2013, which was the first major policy event following the institutional reorganization, China's national birth planning policy saw its first loosening. The report from the Plenum buried the announcement as a portion of the 46th of 60 directives resulting from the meeting, but there was still a notation that China would 'start the implementation of a two-child policy for couples in which one member is an only child, and gradually adjust and improve the fertility policy to promote long-term and balanced development of the population' (Xinhua 2013a). Although many couples in which both members were an only child had previously been allowed to receive a permit for a second birth (Gu et al. 2007), the extension to those in which only one member fit the bill (the *dandu* couples, meaning 'one only' pairs) rendered an estimated 15 to 20 million additional couples eligible to have another child (CECC 2013). Of course, there were still many couples who did not meet the requirement. In response to questions about why the policy was not totally loosened, NHFPC Deputy Director Wang Pei'an said, 'if a universal two-child policy were to be implemented, it would cause volatility in short-term births, leading to the accumulation of great pressure on public services' (NHFPC 2013). Yet this increment was still a large step, as Zheng Zhenzhen explained:

I think the first move [to a *dandu* policy] was very important. A lot of people said that the first step was too small, but I think the first move was very important to show that there was nothing to worry about when changing it, and also I think this kind of policy change gets the support from most of the provinces and local officers, so when their attitude is supportive, I think they can do things better. Because they were in the very active and direct role to face the people changing the policy, right? And then when it was approved, I visited several places after the policy change, and I think people were happy about that, and the officials were feeling good about it, so I think they didn't see anything going wrong. I think this gave them confidence that what we said before, that fertility desire is not that strong, was true! (Zheng Interview 2016)

In addition, this shift gave new vigour to the advocacy group, both because it showcased the importance of the research they had done in Jiangsu province on the fertility desire among couples who were themselves only children (Zheng et al. 2009), and because this was in line with the path to policy loosening they had suggested in their 2004 and 2009 proposals. While no one argued that their work contributed to this particular *dandu* shift, interviewees told me that the change gave new urgency to their efforts to bring about a final liberalization of the fertility limits across China.

8.2.3 Lacklustre Increase in Fertility, 2014

Most official estimates and projections had calculated that the shift to a national *dandu* policy would lead to an additional one to two million births per year (about a six to 12 percent increase) (Liu 2013; Bai 2013). In reality, however, the early results were significantly less robust. Although almost all areas across China had fully implemented the *dandu* policy by early summer 2014 (Gu 2014), the crude birth rate for that year only rose from 12.08 per 1,000 people to 12.4, and the total fertility rate (TFR) was calculated to have only increased from 1.55 to 1.56 children per woman (World Bank 2015a). Some reports showed that less than 620,000 new birth approvals had been given out across China in the first nine months of the year (Moore 2014), and in many areas less than ten percent of all eligible couples applied for a second birth permit (Basten & Jiang 2014). In some localities, reports were even more stark: a prefecture in Yunnan Province publicized the fact that only 36 of its 1.25 million citizens had applied for second-child permits by the end of 2014 (Basten & Jiang 2015). Therefore, by the end of the *dandu* policy's first year, it was clear that the mini baby boom that had been assumed to follow it would not materialise. This was compounded somewhat by cultural superstitions concerning the Chinese zodiac: while 2014 was the Year of the Horse, which is considered an auspicious time to have babies, the Year of the Sheep in 2015 is very unlucky for fertility, so most experts foresaw still lower fertility

coming (Goodkind 1992; Grech 2015). This reality of slow growth and foreseen continued sluggishness had two main impacts: first, it assured China's political elite that national policy change would not necessarily unleash a tidal wave of new births, and second, it highlighted the findings of the advocacy group's prior research on generally low fertility ideals across China. Both of these realizations took the situation one step further towards another window in which policy loosening was feasible.

8.3 Shanghai Fudan Conference, December 2014

The time period itself began just before the New Year in 2015. The meeting that would ultimately result in the third and final policy proposal from the advocacy group originally began as a conference entitled, 'Facing the Future of Chinese Population Research' that was funded by the UNFPA and convened at Shanghai Fudan University from December 19th to 20th, 2014 (Fudan University 2014). The event brought together more than 50 demographers from across China and around the world, and some of the most widely-known names in the field presented on the responses to the recent changes, possibilities for future fertility trends, and the necessity of further policy loosening from the central government (Zhang Interview 2016). Once again, former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun played a large role in the conference, even though she was now very elderly and retired from all of her official posts:

She was 85 and she sat in the meeting for two days, asking questions and engaging, and she became very active, more proactive, more vocal publically. So after the meeting, she asked us to have a small group discussion, and she urged us to write another [proposal]. So we thought, "Oh, we don't want to do this again. We've already said everything that we want to say, now things are starting to change." But given the political atmosphere in China, the leaders were very preoccupied with the slowing down economy, anti-corruption, with the power consolidation. The newly-merged Commission, the population people, they were still dragging their feet. A year ago they were talking about, "Oh, we'll complete this transition by the end of the 13th Five-Year Plan", which is 2020, right? So I think Peng Peiyun knew that there was a need to have something to kind of push the leaders from the top, because the leaders in charge of birth control, they were still just not moving fast. (F. Wang Interview 2016).

So, in response to Minister Peng's urging, the advocacy group put together another document and submitted it to the central authorities in January. This final iteration of the

policy proposal, entitled ‘Give the People Free Reign to Have Two Children and Abolish Birth Restrictions (*Quanmian Fangkai Erhai Shengyu Quxiao dui Gongmin de Shengyu Xianzhi*)’ was short, only three pages long, but it had 40 signatories³². It started by arguing that since the response to the *dandu* policy was limited and the problems of ageing and labour force shrinkage worsening, the country should shift immediately to a two-child policy and eliminate the requirement for couples to apply for birth permits prior to having a baby. It described the researchers’ experiences and investigations over the past decades and explained why they were calling for a liberalization. The proposal first pointed to the progression to low fertility in China, and then described how the effects of economic development could be endangered from continuing low fertility. The document pointed to the low fertility rate, and then described how the future of economic development could be endangered by low fertility. It finished by acknowledging that allowing couples to have two children could marginally increase births in the short run, but it would offer benefits to the population structure and Chinese society. The text also included the two prior iterations of the proposal as appendices, both to showcase the long history of advocacy by the group and to further explicate the reasons for which they believed a policy change was necessary (Chen Interview 2016; Gu Interview 2016).

8.4 Proposal Submission and Central Advocacy, Early 2015

The demographers submitted their policy proposal to the National Health and Family Planning Commission in late January of 2015. Yet with former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun’s support, the proposal was not just submitted to through official conduits to the birth planning bureau. Instead, Minister Peng once again served as a ‘channel’ to get the recommendations

³² The full list of signatories is as follows: Gu Baochang, Wang Feng, Peng Xizhe, Ma Xiaohong, Ma Yan, Wang Guangzhou, Wang Tianfu, Wang Jinying, Wang Di, Feng Xiaotian, Zuo Xuejin, Shi Renbing, Qiao Xiaochun, Ren Yuan, Sun Xiaoming, Li Ding, Li Jianxin, Li Shuzhuo, Shen Ke, Shen Jie, Zhang Erli, Zhang Na, Zhang Qiong, Zhang Zhen, Lu Jiehua, Chen Wei, Chen Youhua, Wu Jilei, Mao Zhuoyan, Zhou Changhong, Zheng Zhenzhen, Zhao Zhongwei, Luo Weixiang, Guo Zhigang, Huang Wenzheng, Liang Jianzhang, Zhan Zhongle, Cai Yong, and Tan Kejian.

of the demographic community directly on the desks of China's very highest leaders. Multiple interviewees confirmed that the proposal reached the desk of Xi Jinping and many other powerful actors (Vice Premier Li Keqiang, head of the Development and Reform Commission Zhang Gaoli, and State Councillor Liu Yandong) thanks to former Birth Minister Peng's efforts, although none were willing to be quoted on this fact. When pressed for the details of Xi's comments, interviewees responded that it was too risky to have documented or communicated the specific words of China's highest leader, since doing so would have been in violation of the intense norms of secrecy surrounding China's elite politics. Yet more than one informant gave the same account: that Xi had written extensive comments an entire page long on their proposal, and that he was strongly supportive of the policy change. Specifically, Xi ordered more investigations into the fertility situation and the studies about the projected outcomes of a further loosening of China's birth limits.

Unbeknownst to the external advocates, similar strains of this focused research into the state of China's fertility and the possibility of further loosening the regulations had already begun organically within certain factions of the Commission. He Dan, who was at that time a mid-level official at the NHFPC (and who has since gone on to be the Director of the China Population Development Research Centre, the internal think tank of the Commission), oversaw a research group that in December 2014 had begun to compile a report on the outcomes of the *dandu* policy's implementation (He Interview 2016). This was essentially a new phase in a continuing research project on the feasibility of adjusting the policy that had begun in 2008 (CPDRC 2016). The purpose of the group was to provide recommendations for the 'Population, Development, and Ageing' portion of the Thirteenth Five Year Plan, which was to be adopted at the Fifth Plenum in October. Although Five Year Plans are always important in China due to their bearing on every aspect of policy governance, this particular iteration was of specific consequence, because it would oversee

the second half of the period in which Xi Jinping had promised a doubling of per capita Chinese GDP to reach a level of a ‘moderately prosperous society’ (Hua 2015). This research on the population drivers of these economic shifts was jointly ordered by the NHFPC and the National Development and Reform Commission, which was directly responsible for the formulation of the Five Year Plans and had been given control over the planning function of the population policy in the institutional reshuffling of 2013 (He Interview 2016). It was tasked with analysing the results of past two-child experiments, different policy contexts across China, and the general response to the national *dandu* policy from 2013.

Yet the existence of these analyses concerning the feasibility of further reform was not evident at the beginning of the year, when Minister of the NHFPC Li Bin utilized the old ‘stability’ formulation of birth planning in her New Year’s speech, saying that the Commission’s work in 2014 was a success because, ‘The separate two-child policy was smoothly executed...[and] fertility was kept at a steady low level’ (Li 2015). In addition, Wang Pei’an, who was the Deputy Director of the NHFPC, was quoted in February as saying that the fertility policy adjustment ‘should be completed within the new Five Year Plan’, which pushed out the horizon for possible reform to as late as 2020 (Q. Wang Interview 2016). Yet as early as March, the very first signals of a possible acceleration of forces promoting policy change from within were discernible. Ms. He and her team presented their report to the National People’s Congress on March 8th, which is Women’s Day in China, and their work showed that the implementation of the *dandu* policy indicated that a more lenient policy was feasible and could be implemented without the ‘baby boom’ that many of the elites had feared. When I pressed her on whether the initial investigation had considered the results in the late marriages and late births plus spacing counties, she replied:

We compared this with other designs, for instance when compared with the Yicheng two-child policy, and we found that the *dandu* policy was actually more relaxed. These types of two-child experiments had started fairly early, when the regulations had to be very strict, so that actually the more recent *dandu* two-child regulation was

less strict. Because these experiments had had many requirements. So after the policy changed, and we were considering the two-child policy, it wasn't necessarily that we were looking at these experimental situations. We were more considering the situation of the *dandu* two-child policy (He Interview 2016).

She has said that her research team came to the conclusion that the Chinese total fertility rate was only around 1.5 to 1.6 children per women, and fertility intentions were around 1.9, so the team believed that even with an allowance for a second child, birth rates would stay below replacement with a policy change (He 2016). Therefore, while it was demonstrated that the NHFPC officials were monitoring the results of the experimental counties upon which the advocacy group had based their recommendations, there was also an element of independence to their path to a similar conclusion of very feasible policy loosening.

By the closing of the 12th National People's Congress on March 15th, these first inklings of change began to filter out into the public discourse. In response to a question from reporters at a post-Congress press conference, Premier Li Keqiang said:

For China's population policy – and, as you said, last year we allowed married couples to have two children in some case – we are currently conducting a comprehensive review of how this policy has been implemented. And, we will take the results, while taking China's economic and social development and changes in our demographic structure into account, and will weigh the pros and cons, then improve and adjust our policy in accordance with the law (K. Li 2016).

Some reports of the Congress's discussions surrounding the birth planning policy from the foreign press even suggested that a few policymakers had privately floated the idea of a mandatory two-child policy to increase the birth rates more quickly, although this type of change was rejected (Khan 2015). The major outcome of the meeting was a wider range of projects researching the fertility situation across China and the results of past alternative policies, but a minor result also appeared to be a greater understanding of which officials were open to a policy change and which needed more convincing. Again, the support of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang appeared to have been key in getting these birth planning discussions on the Congressional agenda, and then ensuring that they were followed up with meaningful policy research and evaluations (F. Wang Interview 2016).

8.5 Verification and Reorientation: mid-2015

In practice, it was the portion of the Xinhua News Agency that serves as the CCP's research arm that carried out the most extensive investigations in spring and early summer 2015. Although the reports themselves were classified as *neibu* documents and insufficient time has passed for them to be publicly available, I gathered some information about their characteristics from various interviewees. Gu Baochang was most familiar with the process; he said that after the March Congress, 'Immediately the Xinhua Agency set up more than ten groups to go to various places in the country to look into solutions, what had happened in the past, to interview various people, you know. And they generated more than ten reports, field reports, internal reports, that were submitted in May' (Gu Interview 2016). Wang Feng also said that he had contributed interviews and data to several of the documents and had seen 'some of the other Xinhua news agency reports to the central leadership, and they were uniformly supportive' (Wang Interview 2016). In addition, other informants with strong ties to the Experiment of Eight Million People confirmed that they had been asked to comment about their research or that their contacts at the local levels reported having been contacted by Xinhua representatives (Liang Interview 2016; Chen Interview 2016). From these understandings, then, it appears that while He Dan's internal research group may have been more concerned with the national experience of the *dandu* loosening, the Xinhua reports utilized the experience of the two-child plus spacing counties in their conclusions to a greater degree.

At the same time that these investigations were underway, marks of a discursive change surrounding the birth planning policy began to appear in the Chinese press. The most prophetic piece ran in the central publication for educated Chinese, the *Enlightenment Daily*, on April 29th. Entitled, 'The Evolution of Family Planning Policy in South Korea and Its Application to China (*Hanguo jihua shengyu zhengce yanbian jidui woguo de qishi*)' gave an

in-depth account of South Korea's experience with implementing an antinatalist population policy, and its success in drastically reducing the country's population growth and total fertility rate (TFR) (Guo & Yuan 2015). After describing the period in which Korean fertility was below replacement but there was not a coordinated strategy to affect it further, the piece went a step further and declared that Korea's eventual shift to a pronatalist policy was justified in light of its experience. To bring the point home explicitly, the following quote was included: 'Korea and China have a lot of similarities in their national conditions... but Korea's economic take-off was about 20 years earlier than China's. Therefore, the evolution of the population policy in Korea can be used as a mirror to provide reference for the adjustment of population policy in China'. After musing on this theme a bit further, the piece concluded, 'China should learn from Korea, and according to the level of ultra-low fertility and population age structure of ageing, make a timely adjustment of the population fertility policy'. Such an explicit endorsement of implementing pronatalist policies was surprising in one of China's most strictly-controlled publications, and the fact that the recommendation was made in reference to Korea, which the Chinese often use as a touchstone of successful Asian development, added discursive strength to the argument. As such, hindsight suggests that this was a first instance of floating new arguments for an eventual shift in the policy to the Chinese public.

There were no direct accounts of the immediate response to the Xinhua reports in June, but evidence soon suggested that the findings had soothed many of the remaining anxieties about a final shift to a national two-child limit. At the beginning of July, another Deputy Director of the NHFPC, Yang Wenzhuang, was quoted in the *People's Daily* as saying, 'The current main task is to continue to organize the proper implementation of the *dandu* two-child policy, but we are also actively making further adjustments to improve fertility policy research and work on feasibility studies for further reform' (*People's Daily* 2015). Then, at

the end of the month, Xi Jinping led the traditional meeting of policy elites at the cloistered Beidaihe resort to go over the agenda for the Fifth Plenum in October, and birth planning adjustments were discussed there as another facet of the Five Year Plan that could lift consumer markets and contribute to future economic growth (Shi & Zhai 2015). In effect, it seemed that the government was slowly beginning to endorse the arguments that many of the members of the Experiment of Eight Million People had been making in the Chinese press for years:

So from 2015, the young labour force was going to start decreasing. Also, the migrant numbers were starting to drop. Another reason is that the sex ratio at birth is very high, and these types of problems are all mostly due to the One-Child Policy...[it] was leading to an ‘economic new normal’. Why was there this ‘economic new normal’? It was due to the fact that there was a demographic new normal! Due to factors like low fertility, rapid ageing, high sex ratio, they are all signs of a demographic new normal. And this demographic new normal gave rise to an economic new normal. Last year, China’s GDP growth fell below seven percent. This was the lowest in a long time, and many thought too low. With factors like the current population ageing, these are bound to lead to further changes, so the government began to think it was best to change the population policy (Chen Interview 2016).

All of this culminated in the announcement by the National Development and Reform Commission at the end of the month that it intended to change to a general two-child policy, although it also cautioned that ‘before the details of any new policy are officially released, couples who want a second child but are at present forbidden from having it should remain patient’ (Xinhua 2015b). Therefore, the signs of the coming policy shift were multiplying, although it may have required hindsight from after the policy change to put the pieces of the puzzle together in order to highlight the growing momentum.

There were two other warnings in the early fall of the imminent policy change. First, a new birth planning propaganda video was released, which differed from the publicity tropes that had long been the norm. Instead of the traditional video of parents doting on one healthy, happy (often female) child, the new commercial showed an older brother learning to share a toy with his younger sister (Jiang et al. 2015). Because such a sibling configuration would not have been legal for the majority of Chinese couples until the shift towards the *dandu* policy

(and even after it few videos differed from the past norms), this was a shift that caught the interest of some China watchers and was referenced in some coverage of the October shift. And then, in late September, another article in the *Enlightenment Daily* broke the taboo of discussing Malthusian thought in relationship to China's history of birth planning policy. As was described in Chapter 3, Marx's disagreement with the population theory of the prominent English political economist Malthus was a main difficulty for policymakers trying to justify China's birth planning policy in the early decades of the CCP's antinatalist efforts (Greenhalgh 2008). Yet this 2015 article spoke of Malthus's prowess as a political economist and said that while his population theory was flawed, it had been incredibly influential around the world, and had even affected the implementation of the population regime in China (Zhou 2015). It went on to say that China's economy had reached a tipping point, and the acceleration of technology had broken down the conflict between exponential population growth and linear food production increases, so the current most urgent problem was managing the structure of the Chinese population, which it suggested could be done through further loosening. Therefore, the change was foreshadowed in multiple spheres, although few people noticed it at the time.

8.6 Policy Change, Autumn 2015

The fulfilment of these various signs came in the Fifth Plenum of the 18th Central Committee, which took place in Beijing from October 26th to 29th. The Plenary sessions are always shrouded in intense secrecy, so there has been no evidence released or leaked as to what the discussions and the debates were like behind closed doors across the four days. Even the boldest of interviewees balked at relating gossip or hypothesizing independently as to what had gone on in the cloistered rooms. Yet at the end of the meeting, the Thirteenth Five Year plan was officially released, and buried deep within it was the effectual end of China's

long history of promoting one child per couple for the majority of Chinese families. The official release from China's Xinhua News Agency said:

The policy that all couples may have two children will be implemented and the challenge of the ageing population will be addressed in a proactive manner. These major initiatives are taken by the Party Central Committee based on scientific evidence of demographic, economic and social development patterns, and regarded as of strategic importance for promoting a balanced population growth and achieving the long-term development of the Chinese nation (Xinhua 2015a).

When Xi Jinping gave a speech about the new Five Year Plan on November 3rd, birth planning was only the ninth issue he addressed, which mirrored the false nonchalance of the 2013 *dandu* policy announcement. Yet Xi cited two main reasons for changing the policy. On the one hand, the national *dandu* policy made 11 million couples eligible to have a second child, but 'only (*zhiyou*) 1.69 million couples, or 15.4 percent' of them had applied for second births (Xi 2015). The other reason was that 'the ageing trend of China's population is obvious', and therefore the shift was needed to jumpstart economic growth. This conflation of population *decrease* with the endangerment of economic development was revolutionary, since the arguments for antinatalism had long invoked the necessity of slowing population *increase* for economic prosperity. Yet the combination of these two factors suggests that the demographic reality of ageing and a waning labour force had finally become undeniable and was problematized as more likely to harm China's development than any possible baby boom that could result from a policy shift.

The other major change evident from Xi's remarks was a reformulation of the core goal of China's birth planning policy away from 'stabilizing low fertility rates'. Instead, Xi suggested that the new standard should be 'promoting the balanced development of the population' (Xi 2015). This not only justified the shift away from direct antinatalism, but it also opened the door for future reforms that could take China's birth planning policy in a wholly different direction. This was further highlighted by the detailed aspects of the new policy, which shows several major differences from the past regime. After the universal two-

child policy was codified in the ‘Decision on the Implementation of a Comprehensive Two-Child Policy to Improve Management of Family Planning Services (*guanyu shishi quanmian lianghai zhengce gaige wanshan jihua shengyu fuwu guanli de jueding*)’ on December 31, 2015, the 2002 Law on Population and Family Planning was also adjusted. The new law changed a portion that used to read ‘The State maintains its current policy on reproduction, encourages late marriage and childbearing, and advocates one child per couple,’ with ‘The State encourages each couple to have two children’ (National People’s Congress 2015). It also updated the regulations on contraceptives to now say that ‘couples of childbearing age can themselves choose to use contraceptive methods to prevent and reduce unwanted pregnancies’, which in effect ended the more than forty-year history of the state dictating its preferred form of contraception to its female citizens (Attané 2016). Finally, the majority of provincial regulations were changed to stipulate that couples are no longer required to apply for birth permits prior to becoming pregnant, but rather allow them to simply register births after they occur (Gu et al. 2016).

All of these adjustments suggest the degree to which the new policy was well thought-out and drawn from the experiences of many unique local contexts across China. After the change, an interview given by Deputy Director of the NHFPC Wang Pei’an on November 6th shed further light on the extensive research activities that had been carried out within the family planning establishment to smooth the way for the policy change:

At the beginning of this year, the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) and other government departments conducted a joint, special study on the population development strategy in the “13th Five-Year Plan” period and policies to deal with the ageing population. Since March 2015, the NHFPC organized several research groups on feasibility and solutions for the universal two-child policy through multiple scenarios. We’ve held about 100 seminars and listened to advice from experts in population, economics, community development, resources and the environment as well as those from NHFPC chapters at all levels and other agencies. In addition, we’ve conducted in-depth surveys in over 20 provinces. Combined with repeated assessments by the National Development and Reform Commission and other ministries, we have formulated a series of research reports and recommendations for the universal two-child policy, providing support for the decision (P. Wang 2015).

These internal activities were partially described by He Dan and also familiar to the interviewees that took part in some of the meetings in addition to their prior work formulating the advocacy proposal. But they also suggest that the currents of reform existed deeper and wider within the NHFPC than the record currently shows and insinuate that there were many internal dissenters who worked to bring this two-child reform to fruition. When these documents are released in the future, this portion of the research will be revisited to more fully map the internal ‘channels’ that contributed to the eventual nationalization of a two-child policy across China. Whatever future adjustments will show about the process, however, the most important aspect of this period was that it marked a major step towards allowing the majority of Chinese couples to realize their own fertility goals. For now, Table 8.1 gives a summary of the important events in the transition to a national two-child policy.

Table 8.1: Important Events During Possible Critical Juncture 4

Date	Event
December 19, 2014	‘Facing the Future of Chinese Population Research’ Conference in Shanghai
December 2014	NHFPC research group begins making recommendations for 13 th FYP
January 2015	‘Give the People Free Reign to Have Two Children and Abolish Birth Restrictions’ is submitted to the central government
March 8, 2015	NHFPC research group presents recommendations to National People’s Congress
March 15, 2015	Premier Li Keqiang announces possible population adjustment
March and April 2015	Xinhua News Agency conducts extensive investigations on fertility and two-child policy experiment areas
July 2015	Xi Jinping discusses birth planning policy loosening at the Beidaihe conference
July 27, 2015	NDRC announces that there is an intent to change to a two-child policy
October 26, 2015	Fifth Plenum of the 18 th Central Committee occurs in Beijing
November 11, 2015	Xi Jinping officially announces the ‘Universal Two-Child Policy’
December	The Law on Population and Family Planning is officially changed

8.7 Insights from Possible Critical Juncture 4 and Conclusion

Woven throughout this account of the recent policy change are a series of political factors that triggered the eventual shift to a universal two-child policy. The first and perhaps most important aspect is that while the Experiment of Eight Million People advocates were working from outside of the system to bring change to the policy, there were extensive research and advocacy activities internal to the birth planning establishment that arrived at similar conclusions. This seems to have been related to some degree to the entrance of the National Development and Reform Commission to the birth planning policy arena, although further research will be required on the currently-classified *neibu* documents to definitively make this case. The second aspect was the growing awareness of the lack of response to the *dandu* policy loosening in 2013, which served to both strengthen the arguments of the one-child rule's opponents and assuage the concerns of its continued supporters. And finally, the conflation of China's low fertility rates with future economic problems was a powerful change in the discourse that served to both revolutionize the way that the population policy was perceived in the eyes of the highest CCP elites and also quicken the pace of the transition to a universal two-child policy rule. These factors will be re-visited in the next Chapter so that they can be compared with the insights from past Chapters, and the continuities among them highlighted.

This Chapter has provided a detailed account of the existing evidence surrounding the shift to a universal two-child policy (*quanmian lianghai zhengce*) in 2015. It is the most comprehensive English language account of the political factors underpinning the change to date. The Chapter began by highlighting the critical antecedents of the shift (the re-combination of the National Population and Family Planning Commission and the Ministry of Health, the 2013 implementation a national *dandu* policy, and the lack of a corresponding

Chapter 8

baby boom in 2014), and then picked up the detailed description of events with the convocation of a meeting at Shanghai Fudan University in December of 2014. It then traced the drafting and submission of the third and final policy proposal from the Experiment of Eight Million People advocacy group, the evidence surrounding the elite responses to it, and the path by which the efforts of the external advocates and internal forces within the NHFPC resulted in the October 2015 announcement of an imminent shift to a universal two-child policy. The pertinent insights about important political factors in this process – the internal agitation for policy change within the birth planning establishment, the realization of the inefficacy of the *dandu* policy shift, and the problematization of low fertility as a barrier to future economic growth – were then presented. With this coverage of the effectual end of China's long promotion of a general one child per couple rule, the empirical portion of the process is concluded. The remainder of the thesis will return to the various levels of research questions to summarize the results and to consider their implications for the layers of theory that surround the current understanding of China's birth planning policy and the ways that the CCP government utilizes results from policy experiments to change its existing social safety net.

PART FOUR:

Summary, Implications, and the Path Forward

'Full implementation of the two-child policy can further release fertility potential, slow down the pressure of population ageing, increase the labour supply, and promote balanced population development. This stands as a way to promote the long-term development of the Chinese people, and to promote the major initiative of balanced population development.'

- Xi Jinping, October 2015

Chapter 9 Discussion

9.1 Introduction

Now that Part Three has presented the empirical evidence, the remainder of the thesis will discuss the implications of the findings and their bearing on the various levels of research questions. This Chapter will proceed through the answers of the micro-level and meso-level questions, and the Conclusion (Chapter 10) will ruminate on the project's contribution to ultimately answering the macro-level research questions. To start on the most basic plane, then, the first Section of this Chapter will evaluate which of the periods analysed in Part Three constituted critical junctures and provide summaries of the events that occurred during each of these periods. This will complete the answers for the two micro-level questions: *What were the critical junctures in the course of the Experiment of Eight Million People?* and *What happened within each of these junctures?*. The remainder of the Chapter will be concerned with answering the two meso-level research questions. The first, *What were the most important factors that shaped the policy process?* will be the focus of Sections 3, 4, and 5. Section 3 will summarize the insights from each of the juncture Chapters, and distil those that consistently presented themselves into the most important political factors. Then, Section 4 will condense these various insights into a model of the mechanism through which the attempts to change China's birth planning policy were mediated, and Section 5 will consider the theoretical implications of this model. After a comment on the second meso-level research question, *Were the reasons for policy stasis or change similar to the trajectories of population policies in other low-fertility East Asian contexts?* in Section 6, the Chapter will conclude.

9.2 The Four Junctures: What Happened? Were They 'Critical'?

Chapters 5 through 8 described the events that occurred during the four periods that were identified using the observable implications formalized in Chapter 4. Although Chapter 4

introduced these periods as junctures that should be examined more closely to analyse if they were ultimately critical, the discussions of the events in the birth planning realm across the years 1984, 1988, 2004, and 2015 yielded rich evidence that three of the four of them were crucial to the trajectory of the Experiment of Eight Million People. To corroborate this inductively-derived insight, this Section will re-visit the elements of ‘criticalness’ present in the critical junctures theory literature and cross-reference them with summaries of each of the time periods examined to make transparent the reasons that each of these times can be said to have embodied the characteristics of critical junctures. Therefore, this first requires a review of the elements of a ‘critical juncture’ that emerged from the discussion of the methodology in Chapter 4. From the various definitions used for critical junctures, it can be said that they are defined by a combination of :

- ‘structural...influences on political action [that] are significantly relaxed for a relatively short period’ (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007, p.343)
- ‘[the presence of] appealing alternative paths to the future’ (Jo 2012, p.5; Calder & Ye 2004)
- ‘push[ing] a single case onto a new political trajectory that diverges significantly from the old’ (Slater & Simmons 2010, p.888)
- ‘events that set processes of institutional/policy change in motion’ (Donnelly & Hogan 2012)

Unsurprisingly, each of these attributes relates to the dual foundations of context and contingency that were the focus in Chapter 4. For this section, the specific embodiments of structural relaxation, clear alternative paths forward, a political trajectory that diverges from the old, and change in policy or institutions will be tested against summaries of the events in each possible juncture. First, succinct overviews of each of the Chapters are presented.

The first possible juncture examined was the period across 1984 and 1985 in which each of the local-level policy pilots began. Due to the unprecedented access to the granular historical data of Liang Zhongtang, and the status of Yicheng as the only pilot whose beginning preceded the release of Central Document 7’s doctrine of ‘open a small hole to close a large hole’ in birth planning, much of the account focused on Liang and his personal

efforts to start a late marriages and late births plus spacing policy in Shanxi. Beginning at the time of Wang Wei's appointment as the new Minister of the NFPC, Liang lobbied his contacts in the central government to allow him to implement his alternative policy design in an area under his jurisdiction, and thanks to the support of allies like Zhang Xiaotong and Ma Yingtong, his proposal reached China's top leaders, Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang. Zhao Ziyang especially expressed interest in and support for the generation of a pilot to test Liang's proposal. With approval from such high central leaders, Liang could overcome resistance from within the NFPC and gain support of the important birth planning actors in Shanxi, who encouraged him to select Yicheng as the experimental site due to favourable political connections there. In the other three counties, the pilot process did not begin in earnest until after the release of Central Document 7, at which point a variety of local advocates seized upon the central signals to rationalize a policy either through the 'practical difficulties' doctrine or the ethnic minority provisions, depending on their unique local conditions. Despite these somewhat different pathways, by mid-1985, each of the four counties had some form of a two-child plus spacing policy on their books.

The second period that was investigated as a possible critical juncture during the Experiment of Eight Million People covered the time during late 1987 and early 1988 when the expansion of the late marriages and late births plus spacing policy across rural China appeared likely. Beginning with the policy experience conferences in Liaoning and Shanxi provinces in late summer of 1987, it became increasingly clear that the two-child plus spacing design was competing primarily with the one-and-a-half or 'only daughter household' policy, and that the widespread anxieties about the large cohorts of women entering child-bearing ages coloured the analysis of central officials. A series of policy meetings across early 1988 put the new Birth Minister Peng Peiyun at the forefront of these debates. At a pivotal meeting of the highest officials in March of 1988, Minister Peng

presented the results of the design that governed Yicheng, Jiuquan, Chengde, and Enshi, and the State Council had a lively debate as to whether this policy or the ‘only daughters household’ design would be most suitable for expansion. Due to a combination of apprehension about the effects of expanding the right to a second child to all couples during a population peak period, resistance from some of the powerful experts who had originally proposed the one-child rule, and a general conviction that allowing two children would lead to an increase in third- and higher-order births, a decision was made to promote the one-and-a-half child policy as the more gradual option. Once this choice was made, the NFPC set about harmonizing rural regulations across provinces. Thus the number of two-child plus spacing pilots were drastically reduced, and the advocates in the four counties were left to fight for their policy’s continuation.

After a long delay in which major policy realignments and efforts to expand the two-child plus spacing designs were nearly absent on the national stage, Chapter 7 described the renewed efforts galvanized by the foundation of the policy advocacy group in the early 21st century. Leveraging three years of research on the design of birth planning policies across the country through funding from the Ford Foundation and encouraged by the support of powerful policy patrons with extensive networks (most notably Zhang Erli and former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun), the advocates drafted and submitted a proposal to gradually transition to a national two-child policy in April of 2004. Yet even before their submission, there were signs of internal resistance, with the formation of a Strategic Research Group headed by antinatalist officials Jiang Zhenghua and Song Jian and criticism from Minister Zhang Weiqing himself. Undeterred, however, the advocates and their patrons organized several conferences to bring together officials from the newly-expanded National Population and Family Planning Commission and other experts who shared their conviction about the necessity of policy change: at Baoding in June 2004 and in a two-part meeting split between

Hawaii and Beijing in early 2005. Yet despite ostensibly positive feedback from the bureaucrats who took part in such efforts, the NPFPC officials undermined the reform by discrediting the diagnosis of the fertility situation and insinuating that policy loosening could still lead to unsustainable population growth. As a result, after a disappointing final summit in June of 2005, the advocates realized that their proposal would not bring immediate change, and they shifted their focus to media advocacy.

Finally, the last period under examination was the year 2015, when the forty-year history of state-sponsored birth planning in China finally came to a close. Beginning with a two-pronged process of the Experiment of Eight Million People group's submission of their third policy proposal and the NHFPC advisory committee's report on their evaluation of the *dandu* policy's impact and the best design for the population and birth planning provisions of the Thirteenth Five Year Plan, there were both external and internal efforts to move towards a looser regulation. In order to weigh the options between maintaining the current policy and making a major adjustment, the CCP centre ordered a series of investigations by Xinhua into the outcomes of local pilots and other alternative experimental designs, and by all accounts these returned successful results. Therefore, the transition to a universal two-child policy was posited as a necessity to both counteract the demographic problems introduced by China's low fertility rate and the future obstacles to China's economic development (accelerated ageing, decreased labour force, etc.) that it would introduce. These discussions, which took place throughout the summer and early autumn, all culminated with the Fifth Plenum in October, where the policy was officially changed to allow all couples in the PRC to have a second child. In addition, the standard for population management was shifted from 'stabilizing low fertility' to 'promoting the balanced development of the population', which opened the door for further adjustments to the population policy in the future.

So can it be said that these four periods each embody the aspects of structural relaxation, clear alternatives, and policy or institutional change that the literature ascribes to a true critical juncture? It is the contention of this project that all but one of them do: while 1984, 1988, and 2015 can be classified as critical junctures, 2004 cannot. In 1984, the release of Central Document 7 loosened the strict institutional barriers around birth planning, a spate of viable alternative policies cropped up, and the regulations changed in each of the four pilot counties. In 1988, the discussions of national policy loosening for rural citizens opened up a space for structural realignment, the two-child plus spacing policy was an alternate possibility to the one-and-a-half child policy, and the eventual choice to privilege the only daughters household design led to a change in the enforcement of birth planning around the country. And finally, 2015 was perhaps the strongest candidate for a critical juncture, since it involved the largest policy change since the beginning of the birth planning regime in the 1970s, after a debate surrounding the many possibilities for the future of the population policy. Yet 2004 cannot be considered a true critical juncture, and should rather be seen as a ‘near miss’ in the Experiment of Eight Million People (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007). While there were clear alternatives for the future of China’s birth planning policy present at this time, there was insufficient structural relaxation to allow for a change in the policy or institutions, and therefore the earliest advocacy efforts of the group of demographers failed. As such, three out of the four periods that were investigated can be classified as critical junctures.

9.3 Insights from the Junctures: Political Factors that Shaped the Experiment

Now that it has been shown that three out of the four periods investigated in Part Three constitute critical junctures, and a summary has been given of the events that happened within each period (which are also conveyed in great detail in Chapters 5 through 8), the micro-level research questions have been addressed. As such, this Section will proceed to the meso-level research question surrounding the determinant political factors within each period.

Chapter 9

One section in each of the Chapters highlighted the three most important factors that emerged inductively from the relation of the events. For the account of the various pilots' beginnings in 1984, these factors were:

- The importance of (informal) vertical lines of communication across levels within the CCP
- The significance of identifying opportune moments for policy change
- The use of surveys, censuses, and demographic interpretations as rhetorical devices

In the description of the competition between the late marriages and late births plus spacing policy and the one-and-a-half child policy in 1988, the insights were:

- Widespread anxiety about achieving the target of 1.2 billion people with a population peak
- The importance of vertical factional ties through the Chinese government
- Evidence that the CCP was quashing accounts of debates over the two-child exceptions

In Chapter 7, which described the submission of and response to the first policy proposal from the demographic advocacy group in 2004, the factors that emerged were:

- The centrality of political connections (e.g. Peng Peiyun) to advocacy efforts
- Diverging interpretations of the demographic situation between demographers and the NPFPC
- The need for more data to corroborate alternative policy proposals

And finally, in the previous chapter's coverage of the shift to a universal two-child policy in 2015, the analysis led to the identification of these features:

- Independent research from within the NHFPC that suggested desirability of policy change
- Growing agreement about the lack of response to the *dandu* change and low fertility
- The conflation of current low fertility with future economic slowdown

This Section will discuss these various insights in relation to prior literature on the difficulties of leveraging policy experiments to change the design of China's social policies.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, there are touchpoints in the existing literature that can give insight into these factors to ground them in prior work. The first source for these perspectives are those previous investigations into the difficulties of updating other Chinese social policies using policy pilots. These accounts ultimately fell into three groups of explanations: those that attribute the experiments' difficulties to China's unique institutional structure, its ideational landscape, or various interests within the government. Specifically,

Béland and Yu (2004) and Frazier (2010; 2004) have argued that the plethora of institutions in social welfare have complicated the situation such that even successful social policy experiments cannot become national law, Shi (2006) and Wong (1998) have contended that ideational confusion surrounding the goals and roles of social policy have obstructed change, and Heilmann (2008), Johnston (2002) and Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005) have ascribed difficulties in various policy realms to the resistance of powerful interest groups within the welfare bureaucracy. The other point of reference for these factors lies in the small body of work conducted on the political determinants of a shift away from antinatalism in other East Asian contexts, best represented by (Jones et al. 2009a)'s contention that a delay in policy change across other Asian countries with antinatalist regimes was due to shortcomings in some combination of: understandings about the difference in population growth and population momentum, the willingness of family planning bureaucracies to change, and the descriptive power of the demographic transition theory. Finally, one more recent source for understanding these factors comes in the form of a report penned by members of the policy advocacy group after the policy shift, which attributed its lateness to:

Leaders who have made population control part of their political legitimacy and a bureaucracy that has grown increasingly entrenched in the course of policy enforcement. In addition, the Chinese public has been thoroughly indoctrinated by the Malthusian fear of unchecked population growth and by a social discourse that has erroneously blamed population growth for virtually all of the country's social and economic problems (Gu et al. 2016).

With these reference points in mind, then, it is possible to distil these various case-specific insights into the most important factors that predicated outcomes at key points in the Experiment of Eight Million People. There appear to be three main commonalities across the time periods that were analysed. First, the centrality of informal political connections, or 'channels' to ensuring that proposals reached the highest echelons of Chinese politics was obvious within each of the periods examined. Second, there was a recurring theme relating to the use of demographic data and analysis of the prevailing population situation as a valuable

rhetorical strategy to influence birth planning policy outcomes. Finally, the role of the National Family Planning Commission in its various forms to both problematize the demographic situation and intervene in other ways to obstruct change in the national policy was clear from each of the four periods discussed. As such, it can be said that the general explanation for the pivotal political factors across this history incorporates elements of institutional, ideational, and interest-based elements, but the ways that they presented themselves and interacted with one another are more complex and nuanced than prior analysis has suggested. To advance this exercise one step further, the next section will propose a model of how these factors interacted to determine the outcome of advocacy efforts in each key period. Then, Section 5 will discuss the theoretical implications of these findings and how they relate to previous work.

9.4 A Model of the Path to Adjusting China's Birth Planning Policy

It has been shown that the three most important political factors that emerged from the analysis of the four possible critical junctures were 1) the presence of 'channels' to policy elites, 2) the construction of a general understanding of China's population situation, and 3) the bureaucratic resistance to change from within the NFPC. In order to illustrate the ways in which the factors that were outlined above interacted to determine the policy outcomes at the key points in the Experiment of Eight Million People's history, a model will be proposed. It is represented visually as Figure 9.1:

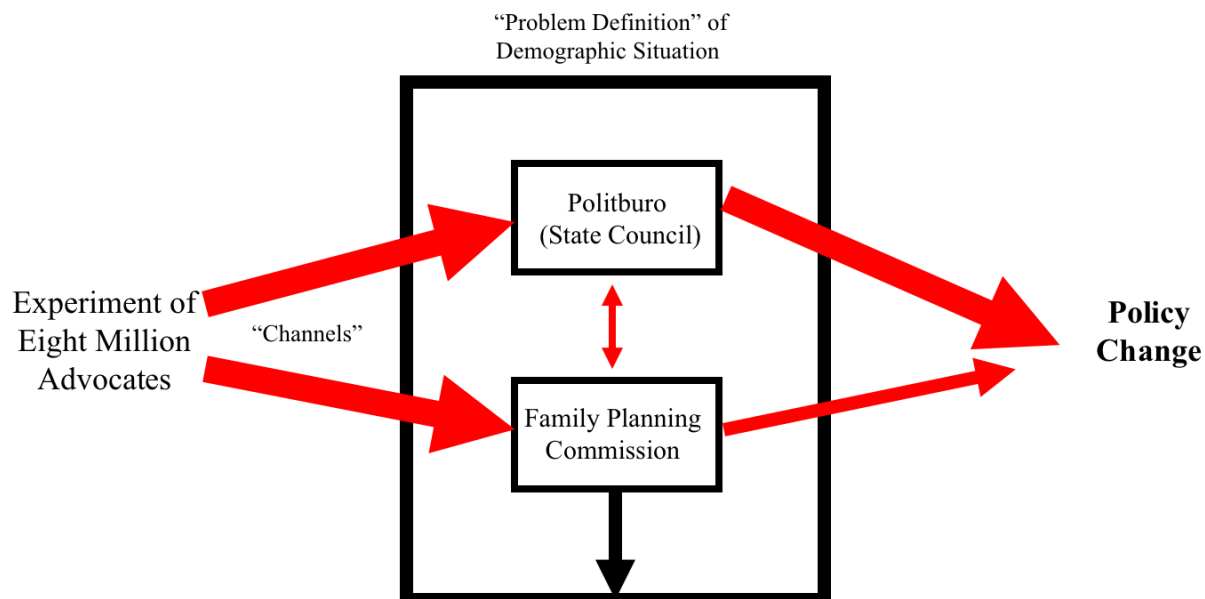


Figure 9.1: Illustration of Key Political Factors’ Interaction during Critical Junctures

This model shows the three stages of a possible change in the Chinese birth planning policy. The left side of the Figure shows the earliest phase of advocacy efforts, whereby the interested parties (whether it was Liang Zhongtang and his supporters in the early stages of the experiments or Gu Baochang, Wang Feng, and their peers after 2001) compile information and suggestions for policy shifts. The two arrows show the formal and informal ‘channels’ by which the proposals/requests/reports are submitted to both the NFPC and directly to as many members of the State Council as possible. In the middle portion of the Figure, the arrow between the two entities of the NFPC and the State Council represents the various communications between those two bodies, which would include comments and instructions of prominent officials, internal reports and analysis concerning reform viability, and follow-up suggestions. Yet all of these communications occur within the context of the contemporaneous understanding of the demographic situation (or the ‘problem definition’), which the model also illustrates is heavily influenced – if not manufactured – by the NFPC itself. This fact, and the reality that these internal communications are largely opaque to advocates who are outside of the establishment, is a major disadvantage of would-be

reformers in the debates. The third stage, to the right side of the diagram, shows the degree to which any policy change is influenced by the central actors: the relative weight of the arrows showcases the fact that the endorsement of the State Council (as the supreme body for social policy governance) is relatively more influential in bringing about shifts. If, theoretically, these stages are passed and the chain is unbroken all the way across the model, an effort at policy advocacy will result in a shift in the design of the birth planning policy.

This model will be further clarified with brief descriptions of how the work of policy advocates proceeded (or was obstructed) through the mechanism at each of the times analysed in Chapter 5 through 8. The events of the first critical juncture, when the pilots within the four localities were started in 1984, is represented by Figure 9.2:

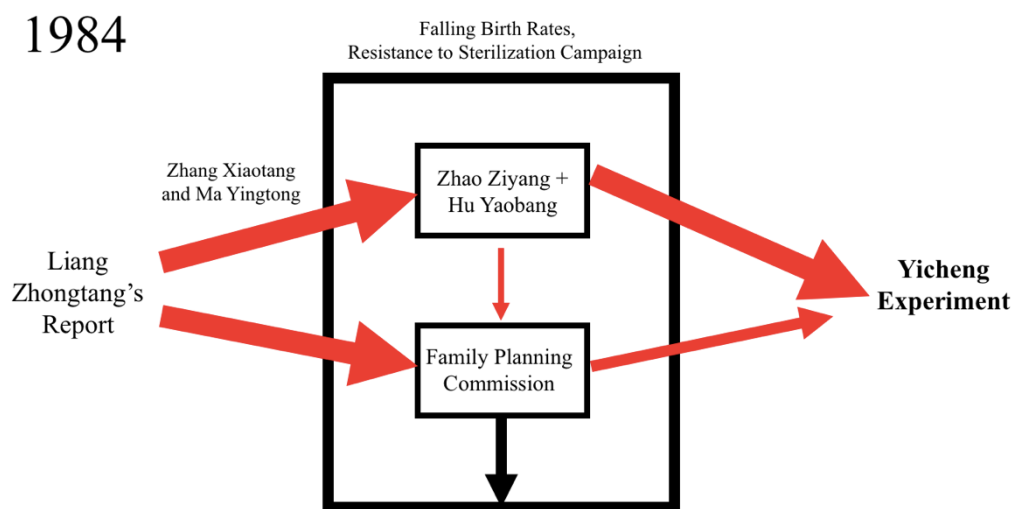


Figure 9.2: An Illustration of the Policy Mechanism in 1984, The Start of the Pilots

As the Figure shows, Liang Zhongtang's report was formally submitted to the Family Planning Commission, but it was also brought to the attention of the two most powerful members of the Politburo by Liang's two internal and informal 'channels', Zhang Xiaotang and Ma Yingtong. The resulting discussions between the Family Planning Commission and

Zhao Ziyang’s reformist clique occurred within the context of the NFPC’s acknowledgement of falling birth rates and the political friction at the grassroots that had occurred because of the unpopular sterilization campaigns. These realities could not be denied by obstructionist forces within the NFPC (although it is useful to recall that there were attempts to filibuster reform with belated responses to directives). Therefore, the top-down fiats to support Liang’s pilot, with begrudging acknowledgement from the family planning establishment, resulted in a sufficiently strong internal mandate to garner support from the provincial and lower levels, and ultimately led to the genesis of the Yicheng ‘late marriages and late births plus spacing’ by mid-1985.

Figure 9.3 illustrates the course of the second critical juncture, when the two-child plus spacing design competed for expansion with and was ultimately defeated by the one-and-a-half child policy across late 1987 and in early 1988:

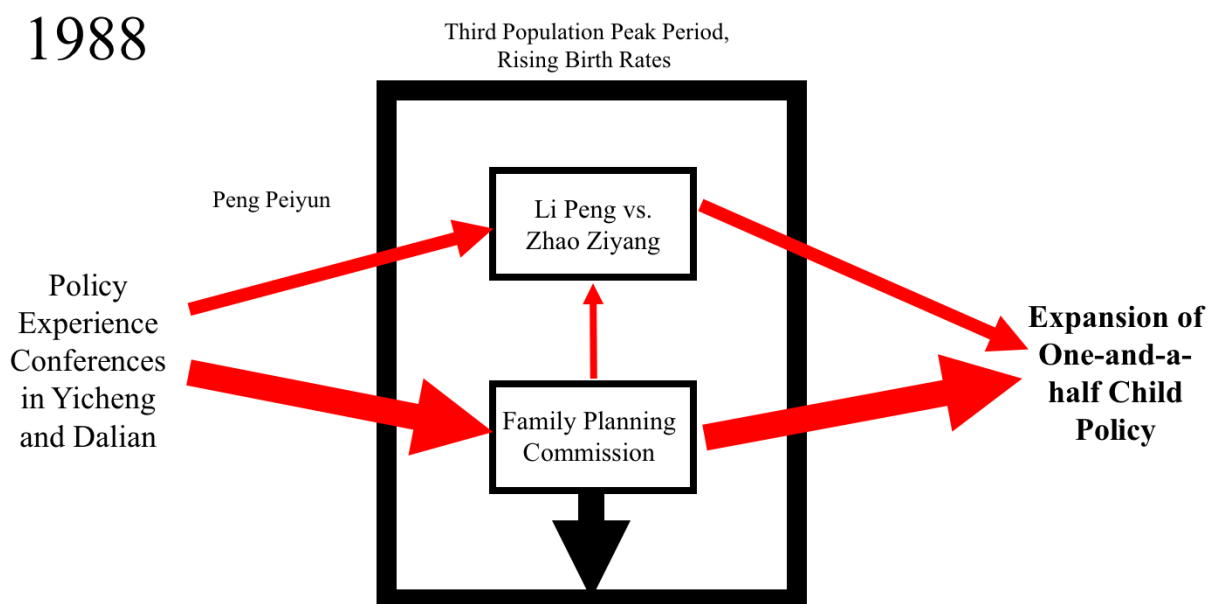


Figure 9.3: An Illustration of the Policy Mechanisms in 1988, Failed Expansion

The differences between this diagram and Figure 9.2 explain the differential outcomes of the two junctures. Here, the left side of the model shows the two inputs that jumpstarted the

competition, in this case the policy experience conferences showcasing each design in the autumn of 1987. The relatively heavier weight of the arrow leading to the Family Planning Commission demonstrates the fact that there were far fewer ‘channels’ to the Politburo during this period than most of the others; in fact, the only evidence available of a direct appeal to the State Council for a decision between the two designs for this period was Birth Minister Peng Peiyun’s account of the meetings in spring 1988. As a result of the weakened channels bypassing the central birth planning institutions, the NFPC was able to exert relatively more control over the internal birth planning policy debates in this period. Particularly important to the eventual outcome was their ability to frame the population situation at the time as incredibly risky, due to the beginning of the so-called ‘population peak period’ and the evidence of a marginal increase in birth rates. Therefore, within this context of a more worrisome population situation and relatively greater insistence from the NFPC to the State Council about its dangers, the decision was made to privilege the only daughters household design, and it can be said to have been a shift which was driven primarily by the NFPC itself.

Although it has already been decided that 2004 did not represent a true critical juncture, but is rather better classified as a ‘near miss’, it is still instructive to consider a Figure that models the course and outcome of the advocacy process in that year using the mechanism presented above. As such, Figure 9.4 shows the specific flow of events during that time:

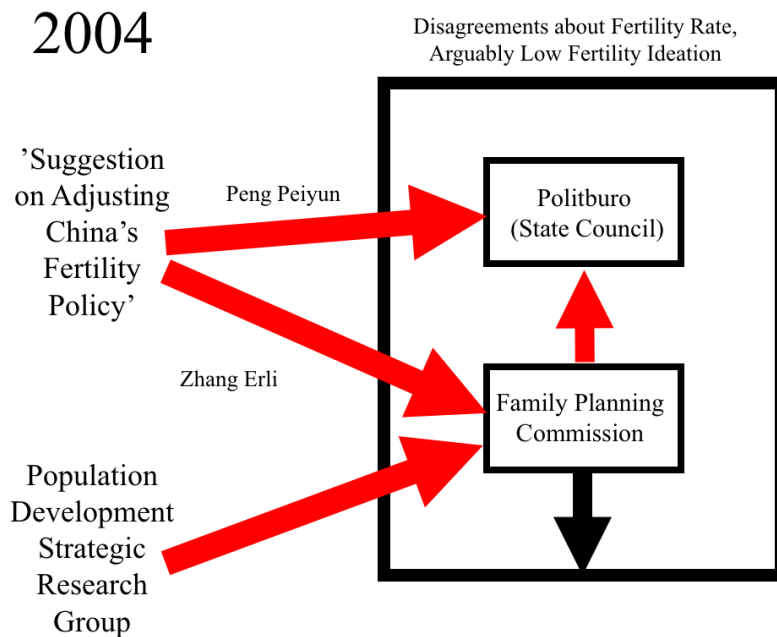


Figure 9.4: An Illustration of the Policy Mechanisms in 2004, A Near Miss

This shows the mechanism whereby the advocacy group's first policy proposal was prevented from leading to a demonstrable shift in the national birth planning design. At the beginning, the group was able to have a far reach with their suggestions, due to a combination of former Birth Minister Peng Peiyun's heft with the State Council due to her position as an elder statesman and Zhang Erli's high standing at the National Population and Family Planning Commission (an esteem he shared with several other signatories, including Gu Baochang). Yet because the feedback from China's highest leaders did not include specific instructions to the Family Planning Commission beyond a mandate for further investigation and analysis, the internal communication surrounding the proposal was a largely one-way street, with the NPFPC shaping much of the dialogue. At the same time, the larger political context was less than optimal, due to both the existence of the Population Development Strategic Research Group as a competing entity feeding analysis into the system and the broad disagreements about the state and dynamics of China's fertility. Because the NPFPC refused to accept outside evidence of very low birth rates (and even lower fertility ideation) across China, they were able to ensure that 2004 was not a critical juncture for the Experiment of Eight Million

this time, and the National Development and Reform Commission was now responsible for a portion of the population policy function. As such, another entity was also able to shape the understanding of China's current demographic conditions, and the NDRC actors appeared to be more relatively amenable to the suggestions of future economic woes due to demographic distortions than the NHFPC had been in the past. As a result, the information that the State Council was receiving from these two entities was more conducive to policy change, and indeed it was the NDRC who first revealed that a shift was in the works, as early as mid-2015. These factors, along with the undeniably low fertility, combined to allow the largest reform to birth planning since its start more than thirty years before.

Therefore, this proposed mechanism illustrates the way that the most important political factors at the various periods tested as possible critical junctures interacted to produce the outcome observed at each point. Specifically, it indicates the ways in which the informal channels to Chinese political elites are needed to circumvent the vested interest of the NFPC in holding onto power, and its consequent ability to shape the State Council's understanding of the population situation to accomplish that aim. The juncture-specific discussions and illustrations of the model showed that it can document the explanatory interactions in different contexts, which suggests that it is worthy of further evaluation and application in the future. Before directions can be laid out for continuation of such additional investigations, however, the bearing that it has on prior theory will be assessed. Then, a portion of the Conclusion will summarize the directions for follow-up investigations that are most likely to be fruitful.

9.5 Theoretical Implications of the Findings

The factors that were found to be explanatory in determining outcomes across key points of the Experiment of Eight Million People and the model that illustrates their interactions have bearing on several of the strains of prior work that were introduced in Chapter 2. In

addition, several of the factors and interactions within the critical junctures relate to earlier theory about the inner workings of the Chinese birth planning establishment and the behaviour of large bureaucracies in general. As such, this Section will relate the individual factors back to the prior work that they corroborate and discuss the implications of the previously hypothesized factors that did not materialize in the Experiment of Eight Million People. These insights will be summarized and leveraged in Chapter 10 to suggest future areas of research that could provide opportunities to expand or nuance the findings of this project. The section will proceed by first addressing the finding about informal networks within the CCP establishment, then moving on to analyse antecedent concepts about the way that the NFPC leveraged their own definition of the population problem and attempted to filibuster reform, and subsequently addressing the other minor insights. Then it will describe the results for the theories that did not find resonance, before ending with a summary of the main contribution of the project to notions of Chinese policy experiments and the welfare state.

The first major finding of this project was the centrality of advocates having access to informal networks (what I have called ‘channels’, following a quote from Wang Feng) to stretch to the top of the CCP hierarchy. Naughton (2008) has argued that vertical factional ties throughout the government have been the most vital organizing force within the Party across the reform period, which forms the strongest foundation for this finding, but it is also related to Shih's (2008) dual typology of ‘generalist factions’ bound by personal relationships from the State Council down through the government, and ‘narrow factions’ centred around agreement on a particular policy issue and resulting coordinative advocacy. The major contribution of this project to this already rich branch of theory (which is perhaps the most widely-theorized aspect of Chinese governance (see for example Nathan 1973; Pye 1981; Kennedy 2005; Steinberg & Shih 2012; Walder 1987)) is the suggestion that consideration of

these factional relationships to actors outside of the formal CCP establishment but still involved in policy and governance is in order. This investigation has suggested that in fact, the strength of these external ties to elite actors has a major bearing on the degree to which advocates are able to bring their concerns to the central agenda, and therefore the likelihood of policy change.

Another chief discernment of the project was that the way in which the birth planning establishment interpreted and presented the demographic situation at any given point had a bearing on the likelihood of policy change. This was related to the ideational theories of Shi (2006) and Wong (1998), both of whom have argued that the way that actors within the Chinese state conceived their welfare duties (on balance with family obligations in Chinese society) and the available solutions for key groups was a major barrier to expanding the social safety net. Beyond these investigations, which are narrowly focused on China's welfare state, this explanation calls to mind Mehta's (2011) conception of the ways that ideas can function as both 'problem definitions' and 'problem solutions'. In Mehta's formation, problem definitions are 'a particular way of understanding a complex reality' that are created by 'a contested process among players with varying levels of power and persuasiveness' (ibid., p. 27, 34). This explanation, then, seems to match closely onto the inductively-derived process by which the National Family Planning Commission in its various forms sought to truncate the field of available action by constructing an understanding of China's population situation that by definition prevented policymakers from considering expansion of less radical policies across wider swaths of China, until they were no longer able to deny the problems these actions caused.

Beyond this tightly-focused typology of ideas as problem definitions and solutions, the work of Shi (2006), Wong (1998), and Mehta (2011) is related to a long tradition of ideational analysis. Perhaps the most influential contribution to this stream was Blyth (2001;

2002), who argued that in times of political uncertainty, ‘ideas are weapons...[to] diagnose “what has gone wrong” and thus “what is to be done”’ (pp. 10 – 30). Blyth’s work on these so-called ‘frames’ (and specifically the feedback and lock-in effects they can initiate) has been applied in the social policy literature to the German welfare state’s retrenchment (Seeleib-Kaiser and Bleses 2004), as well as to the Chinese process of industrial evolution (Eaton 2013). And at its most fundamental level, this whole tradition of ideational scholarship traces back to Kingdon's (1989) conception of the most important phase of the political cycle occurring at the time of ‘agenda setting’, when the objectives are defined and therefore the likelihood of change is narrowed to a specific way of understanding a distinct group of policies. Beyond a few notable exceptions (Zhang 2010; Mok et al. 2010; Choo 2009), this realm of scholarship has not received attention in China studies. Yet the findings of this project suggest that future work should investigate the degree to which similar cycles of agenda setting via problem definition/diagnosis occur in other areas of Chinese welfare. This would present the first expansion of this stream of theory to the welfare state-building experiences of non-democratic states.

The other interest group explanation besides the vertical integration of factions that contributed to understanding the outcomes in the critical junctures of the Experiment of Eight Million People was related to the bureaucratic obstructionism of the central birth planning establishment. This understanding of the ways that Chinese central ministries define and defend their spheres of influence maps closely onto Johnston's (2002) examination of the underpinnings of labour policy in the PRC. He builds on Liberthal et al.'s (1988) observation that personal ties between bureaucrats and policy elites help to define the power of ministries at varying points, and then are used as clout to protect and expand each commission’s sphere of influence. Another similar theory that includes these types of explanations is Tanner's (1995) presentation of the ‘Organizational Political Model’ as it applies to the CCP’s centre.

Therefore, this project is another in a line of investigations that have shown that individual interest groups do not necessarily wield as much power as the self-interested leaders of bureaucratic factions (i.e., the Family Planning Commission for Chinese birth planning) in the Chinese system, and these explanations form another body that deserves further investigation.

A more minor finding of the project was the scattered evidence that the CCP had engineered some of the documentary evidence surrounding the birth planning policy to make it appear that there had been less internal disagreement than there was. This relates to Schmidt's (2000; 2002; 2008; 2010) extensive research on 'discursive institutionalism', a hybrid theory that seeks to unite ideational and institutional analysis by examining 'both the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse in institutional context' (Schmidt 2010, p.1). The ways that the policy debates were glossed over in publicizing the accounts of policy shifts at key points in the birth planning history suggests that the CCP was actively manipulating the 'communicative discourse', or ways that current policies and their justifications can be presented to the public in order to shape public opinion and maintain hegemony (Schmidt 2000). It is unsurprising that these attributes would present themselves in the Chinese context, because she has argued that this type of discourse is particularly important in single-actor systems, where shaping public perceptions is a more vital component of policymaking than in multi-actor polities (Schmidt 2011). To my knowledge, this investigation is the first that has found traction for such discursive institutionalist explanations within the Chinese welfare state context, but given the relative flexibility of Schmidt's theory to non-democratic polities, it is likely to yield more insights upon further study.

Finally, a general discernment from the investigation was the paramount importance at all times of using demographic data and evidence of positive experimental outcomes as

rhetorical devices to influence the outcomes of policy debates. This finding mirrors Greenhalgh's (2003; 2008) explanation of the initial change to implement a general one child per couple rule, which she argued was directly due to a process of 'constituting population as a new, numerically describable, scientifically law-abiding domain of governance; and then using science to define the nature and importance of the population problem and determine the optimal solution to that problem' (Susan Greenhalgh 2003, p.168). In the book-length investigation, Greenhalgh (2008) cites the sophisticated and impressive computer-generated models utilized by Song Jian and his group of natural scientists as a major rhetorical advantage over the crude projections of Liang Zhongtang, which he completed by hand. This project has suggested that this scientization of population knowledge continued across the birth planning period, and it was influential to determining the outcomes of debates about the policy design at key points. Indeed, it even insinuated that the results of policy experiments and pilot localities served many of the same purposes within the birth planning regime, which could suggest another avenue by which this theory about the centrality of scientific and technological knowledge contributes to the shaping of Chinese governance.

As the gaps in these discussions showcase, several prior theories about the difficulties of using policy experiments to bring reform to Chinese social policies did not prove explanatory in the case of the Experiment of Eight Million People. For example, Béland and Yu (2004) and Frazier (2010; 2004) have argued that the central-local divide among Chinese institutions was the primary barrier preventing national policy reform in social policy spheres, but this case showed that policies bring together supporters from across levels of the system and even from outside of it who can agitate directly at the centre. Therefore, even though these types of institutional arguments have significant support within the Chinese politics literature (Lieberthal & Lampton 1992; Fan 2014; Birney 2014; Mei & Pearson 2014; Montinola et al. 1995), this project stands in opposition to federalist explanations. Likewise,

Heilmann's (2008) argument that local-level officials often obstruct the course of social policy experiments out of a belief that supporting such initiatives is not in their own self-interest was not supported, because there was evidence that these actors' diligence and devotion to the continuation of the local pilots was sometimes the only factor that ensured their continuance at certain times. Of course, due to the fact that this project utilized a single case study design, it would be remiss to suggest that the lack of support within it for these explanations dismisses the theories, because they could well find resonance in another policy sphere or particular instance. However, it is worth mentioning that this study has suggested that they were relatively less powerful in predicting the outcomes of the various moments where the two-child plus spacing design reached the national stage.

In summary, the findings of this project and the way that they were hypothesized to interact in the model showcased in Figure 9.1 had significant implications for disparate strains of literature surrounding China's social policies. They advanced certain theories a step further by demonstrating their importance within the birth planning policy subsector: these included Naughton's (2008) observations that vertical factions are invaluable to bringing issues to the forefront of elite politics, Shi's (2006), Mehta's (2011), and Blyth's (2002) shared discernments concerning the vitality of ideationally defining or framing policy issues to get them on the agenda, and Johnston's (2002) theories about the ways that central Chinese bureaucracies serve as platforms for powerful vested interests. In addition, more minor findings found resonance within the literature; the evidence surrounding the CCP's management of the discourse about policy change to give the impression of unity was related to Schmidt's (2000; 2008; 2010) 'discursive institutionalist' conception of politics, and the centrality of utilizing population information and data to shape elite debates was related to Greenhalgh's (2003; 2008) past work on the scientization of population policy since Deng's accession to supreme leader.

9.6 A Note on Birth Planning in ‘Developmentalist’ East Asian Welfare States

With regard to the meso-level research question *Were the reasons for policy stasis or change similar to the trajectories of population policies in other low-fertility East Asian contexts?* a comment is necessary here. As was covered in Chapter 2, there is very little literature surrounding the mechanisms that underpinned the delay in many East Asian countries between fertility falling below the replacement rate and a shift to pronatalist policies. Indeed, the only discussion of multiple factors that interplayed across cases was in Jones et al. (2009b), who identified misunderstandings of population momentum, inertia of family planning bureaucracies, and demographic transition theory’s lack of predictive power when fertility falls below replacement. As such, this project has advanced this small literature drawing together the history of East Asian antinatalism and the politics of social policy by corroborating two out of three of Jones et al.’s factors (misplaced concerns about demographic factors and the inertia of formal family planning institutions) and advancing them a step with the case-specific model laid out above. In the future, investigations of the role of family planning bureaucracies in not only resisting policy change but also problematizing the demographic situation in such a way to avoid being shaken out of their path dependent trajectories is necessary to determine whether this more sophisticated explanation stretches beyond the PRC.

Beyond this basic level of pushing the research on the politics of the general transition from antinatalism to pronatalism across East Asia a step forward lies another, deeper question relating to the characteristics of so-called ‘developmentalist’ or ‘productivist’ welfare states. These terms, although somewhat fluid, are often used to characterise the social policies of South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and other states in the region (Aspalter 2006; Holliday 2000; Gough 2004). It is generally agreed that these states are united by a type of system in which ‘social policy is either developed or underdeveloped for promoting

economic growth' (Tang 2000, p.278), or in other words, there exists 'subordination of all aspects of state policy, including social policy, to economic/industrial objectives' (Holliday 2005, p.709). Yet while this idea is often referenced with regard to more traditional social policies like pensions, there does not yet appear to have been anyone drawing the link between this noted streak of developmentalism and the propensity of East Asian welfare states to implement family planning policies that shorten the time of their transition and maximize their demographic dividend. To put it succinctly: in many ways, couldn't the implementation of strict family planning policies across East Asia be seen as the ultimate productivist welfare policy?

All of the states of East Asia were faced with the daunting task of trying to develop economically with large populations of agrarian and uneducated citizens, and each of them (with the exception of Japan, where fertility decline occurred early and organically (Ogawa 2007)) implemented policies that sought to rectify these conditions with state-sponsored antinatalist policies. Of course, the design and implementation of these policies differed across the region (c.f. Robinson & Ross 2007; Lee 2009; Straughan et al. 2009), but the underlying drivers and even rhetoric were the same: to lower birth rates, release women to the workforce, raise the quality of the population, and aid in economic development, antinatalism was necessary. None of these regimes were as direct and stringent as China's birth planning policy, but the results were the same: rapid drops in fertility, plummeting dependency, and rising per capita incomes (Jones 2009; Westley et al. 2010; Feeney 1994). As such, it seems that these various countries were successful in simultaneously engineering their population's numerator with their other welfare policies that sought to increase income and productivity, as well as their denominator with the policies to markedly decrease the sheer number of citizens across which these benefits would be shared. Of course, it is now obvious that these experiences of 'compressed modernity' (Kyung-Sup 1999) came at the cost of rapid ageing

across society, which is the most pressing welfare issue across East Asia today (Martin 1991; Lloyd-Sherlock 2002; Hu & Yang 2012). Despite the fact that some of these regimes may indeed be ‘growing old before growing rich’ (Cai & Wang 2007), they got there by subsuming the very makeup of their population to development objectives. In this way, then, the experiences of productivist welfare state building in concert with antinatalist population policies (and then a gradual transition to defraying the costs of their results) should be re-examined as an important factor uniting the social policy regimes of East Asia.

9.7 Conclusion

This Chapter has discussed the bearing that the empirical results from Part Three had on the micro-level and meso-level research questions. It began by providing cogent summaries of each of the four periods investigated as possible critical junctures in the Experiment of Eight Million People, and assessing these times in light of the elements of ‘criticalness’ that define such junctures. In doing so, it determined that three out of the four periods examined (1984, 1988, and 2015) could be considered critical junctures, while 2004 did not reflect sufficient change and should therefore be classified as a ‘near miss’ in its history. It then moved on to collate the insights from each of the periods examined to distil three main political factors that were most determinant in shaping outcomes of the experiment: the strength of informal ‘channels’ to political elites, the problematization and understanding of the demographic situation at the points, and the propensity of the NFPC to serve as a bureaucratic obstruction to meaningful change. Other minor findings were summarized as 1) the importance of analysing and using demographic data and experimental analysis as effective rhetorical devices, and 2) the CCP’s apparent *post hoc* engineering of the (communicative) policy discourse to create a false appearance of consensus. The interactions among these factors were illustrated as a case-specific model of the underlying mechanism in the policy process, and this model was then customized to show its descriptive power across

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each of the periods analysed. The theoretical implications of these findings were then considered, and a note made to clarify the fact that theories of developmentalist and productivist welfare policy in East Asian states should consider the presence of antinatalist population policies as a fundamental aspect of these welfare states' development. Now that each of these implications has been elucidated, Chapter 10 will conclude the project by providing a high-level summary and then re-considering the macro-level research questions of the investigation.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This Chapter will complete the project by summarizing its design, findings, and most valuable contributions, considering the high-level implications of these conclusions by returning to the macro-level research questions, and charting a path forward to expanding upon the main findings. Section 2 will provide a high-level summary of the project's design, empirical insights, theoretical contribution, and bearing on prior theories of Chinese social policy and experimentation. Section 3 will widen the scope of the discussion to consider the implications of the project at the highest plane of abstraction by revisiting the two macro-level research questions introduced in Chapter 2 to advance them one more step towards an eventual answer. The two questions that will be addressed are broadly: the relationship between population policy and social policy, and the drivers behind China's implementation and maintenance of an antinatalist regime. In Section 4, broad predictions about the outlook for China's population policy, including the already-discernible beginnings of a shift towards the future promotion of pronatalist policies, will be put forward. Section 5 will provide suggestions on several avenues for further research projects that could expand upon or nuance the most important findings of this thesis, and Section 6 will provide the final closing for the project as a whole.

10.2 Summary of Project, Findings, and Implications

This project has provided the first English-language account of a group of Chinese policy experiments that has become collectively known as the Experiment of Eight Million People. Beginning in the mid-1980s, this array of similarly designed 'late marriages and late births plus spacing' initiatives have existed in contrast to the national focus on the promotion of one child per couple, and later as an exception to the promotion of the one-and-a-half child policy across rural China. The project first laid out a broad and granular history of the history

of China's birth planning policy, beginning with the CCP's focus on pronatalism in its early days and continuing through the cyclical policy adjustments of the Maoist period, each of which had effects on the structure and dynamics of China's population that would echo to present day. Then it described the shift towards organized antinatalism in the 1970s, covering first the implementation of the 'later, longer, fewer' policy and its dramatic reduction of the fertility rate across a single decade, and moving on to describe the underlying reasons for the further tightening that culminated in the national promotion of 'one child per couple' in 1980. After recounting the upheaval of the initial implementation of this stringent fertility limit, the chronology split in 1984 to describe the dual trajectories of the national birth planning policy and the Experiment of Eight Million People's place within it. By tracing the courses of these two policy designs through their adjustment in the late 1980s, stasis through the 1990s and early 2000s, and then gradual loosening across the past five years, this overview was able to pinpoint and give a nascent description of the moments in which these two histories overlapped.

This process of narrowing and explication was taken a step further with the application of critical junctures theory, and specifically Hogan and Doyle's (2007) method of formalizing *a priori* 'observable implications' that would be expected to characterize a critical juncture and then using a counting mechanism to adjudicate between likely candidates. This procedure resulted in the selection of four periods – 1984, 1988, 2004, and 2015 – as the times in the Experiment of Eight Million People that would be most likely to constitute critical junctures in its course. Each of these four times was investigated more closely, and a combination of Chinese newspapers, internally classified '*neibu*' documents, and elite interviews was used to reconstruct the events of each time. It was found that the beginning of the pilot in Yicheng diverged from the experiences of the other three counties, because Yicheng's implementation was precipitated by Liang Zhongtang's internal advocacy prior to

the circulation of Central Document 7, while the experiments in Jiuquan, Enshi, and Chengde were started in response to that central directive. Yet each of their experiences were marshalled as evidence in the competition for rural expansion between the ‘late marriage and late births plus spacing’ and the ‘one-and-a-half child’ policies in 1988, which was ultimately swayed in favour of the one-and-a-half child policy by deeply held anxieties about the effects of expanding exceptions too widely during a time of large cohorts of women entering childbearing ages. After a long bout without significant change, another window for reform opened in 2004 with the advocacy group’s submission of their first policy proposal to the National Population and Family Planning Commission, but resistance to relinquishing control over the sphere and a lack of sufficient data to problematize the low fertility situation prevented meaningful change. Finally, 2015 saw the confluence of both another external policy proposal and internal NHFPC reports that both suggested the feasibility of future policy loosening, and the combination of these factors with the entrance of the National Development and Reform Commission into the birth planning sphere allowed for a final movement to a universal two-child policy.

Ultimately, these accounts of occurrences during each of these moments were summarized and compared with the most important elements of critical junctures – heightened contingency, institutional loosening, the presence of multiple paths forward, and change in policies or institutions – to determine that 1984, 1988, and 2015 constituted true critical junctures, while 2004 did not. Then the insights into the various political factors that had characterized the course and outcomes within each of the junctures were summarized, and they were found to be primarily threefold: the centrality of informal political channels to powerful CCP elites, the ability of the NFPC to analyse and problematize the demographic situation at any given point, and the resistance from within the birth planning establishment to reform the policy and thereby weaken their institutional authority. The way that these

individual factors interacted to determine the outcomes at each of the three points was hypothesized in the form of a mechanistic model, which showed the way that a policy proposal would flow through the system and possibly result in policy change.

After this model was further explicated with a demonstration of its explanatory power within each of the four moments that were described in the birth planning experiment, its implications for prior theory were introduced. In general, it was decided that the model corroborated preceding theories concerning the impact of vertical factions throughout the CCP structure (Naughton 2008), the influence of problem definitions limiting the range of policy options available (Shi 2006; Mehta 2011), and the forces of bureaucratic obstructionism within the central Chinese government (Johnston 2002). In addition to these major findings, there was also some evidence that the CCP was managing its ‘communicative discourse’ to create the impression of consensus among elites concerning the birth planning policy (Schmidt 2000; 2010), and that there was continuing importance of leveraging data as a rhetorical strategy to influence the outcomes of policy debates (Greenhalgh 2008). Therefore, it insinuated that there are several avenues for further research, which will be discussed later in this Chapter.

10.3 Macro-Level Research Questions

Chapter 2 introduced the existing work surrounding the macro-level research questions, which were the two inquiries that were intended to situate the project in relationship to some of the largest and most interdisciplinary issues outstanding in the literature. There were two primary questions, each of which stretches across fields and is related to a host of other issues still under debate. The first question was *What welfare function do population policies serve?* This is perhaps the more difficult issue to solve, given that it is highly interdisciplinary and also speaks to a prominent lacuna in both the literatures of the welfare state and of state-sponsored population management. Second, the thesis was

situated in relation to the large issue of, *Why did China implement and maintain a strict antinatalist policy?* in the Introduction (Chapter 1). Although there were some implicit advances towards clarifying these two issues made throughout the course of the investigation, it is useful to re-visit the questions here and make the contributions of this project explicit. As such, the next two portions will address each of the two macro-level research questions in turn.

10.3.1 Population Policy and Social Policy

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the definition of population policy has been explicated (Demeny 2010), but few of the underlying issues or relations to other themes of the social policy discipline have been illuminated. The United Nations World Population Plan, which was ratified in 1974 and has served as a guidepost for many population policies around the world, included the following passages:

Individual reproductive behaviour and the needs and aspirations of society should be reconciled. In many developing countries, and particularly in the large countries of Asia, the desire of couples to achieve large families is believed to result in excessive national population growth rates and Governments are explicitly attempting to reduce those rates by implementing specific policy measures. On the other hand, some countries are attempting to increase desired family size, if only slightly. The formulation and implementation of population policies is the sovereign right of each nation...

Population policies are constituent elements of socio-economic development policies, never substitutes for them: while serving socio-economic objectives, they should be consistent with internationally and nationally recognized human rights of individual freedom, justice and the survival of national, regional and minority groups. Independent of the realization of economic and social objectives, respect for human life is basic to all human societies. All couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so; the responsibility of couples and individuals in the exercise of this right takes into account the needs of living and future children, and their responsibilities towards the community (United Nations 1974).

These quotes illustrate the tenets of population policy as it was originally conceived: a sovereign plan that seeks to aid in realizing both individual aspirations and collective development goals, while taking into account human rights and freedom of choice. It is obvious that a comparison between these goals and the Chinese experience of birth planning

reveals some significant shortcomings, not least of them the failure of the CCP to guarantee the 'basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of children'. Yet the breach of this precept can be traced directly back to the willingness of the Chinese state to privilege the 'needs and aspirations of society' over the individual, which was construed as a social welfare benefit that necessitated the cumulative individual costs. This was very much in line with the interpretation of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism at the beginning of the birth planning period.

Granted, this international plan was ratified in the context of the population alarmism of the 1970s, when there were legitimate concerns that the world's population would reach as many as 16 billion people, so the argument for reducing fertility rates was a simple one to construe as a net gain for the welfare of all of humanity (McDonald 2008). Across the 1980s, Chinese leaders believed that 'population remained a race with grain, the outcome of which would affect the survival of the Chinese race' (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p. 126); as such, they were willing to leverage their extensive bureaucracy and unlimited power to implement such a stringent population program. But over time, the population policy evolved into an extreme form of social control, as the Chinese populace began to internalize decades of propaganda and 'regulate itself' (Janowitz 1975, p.82) by having fewer and fewer children. In combination with the naturally fertility depressing effects of economic development, China's birth rates have now reached levels close to those classified as 'lowest-low' (Jasilioniene 2009) or 'ultra-low' (Jones et al. 2009a). As such, it seems that China is now in the same category of many Western European and other East Asian countries, in that they are faced with the looming prospect of needing to raise their fertility rate to fend off rapid population ageing and eventual population decline (the empirical likelihood of such a shift will be discussed further below).

But can state-sponsored policies to increase fertility be considered to have the same effects on welfare as antinatalist ones? Although China's methods were heavy-handed, the aim of their birth planning policy was ultimately to decrease fertility to more sustainable levels, and the profits of such an aim are clear at both the individual and welfare state level. Lowering birth rates generates what has been called the 'demographic dividend', or a period in which decreased dependency allows for greater economic gains (Bloom et al. 2003), which in turn can provide a broader base for the formation of a traditionally redistributive welfare state. On an individual level, decreasing fertility rates (or at the least giving women the contraceptive methods to control the number and timing of their children) frees women to take part in the labour force, alleviates a portion of the dependency burden on poor families, and often improves maternal and child health and mortality outcomes (Jaffe 1974b). In fact, many have argued that one of the reasons that the implementation of family planning policies around the world usually leads to such drastic reductions in birth rates is that such policies align with the desires of women to dramatically decrease their number of children from the preindustrial levels of five to six babies (McDonald 2008).

Yet an explanation that has been floated for the failure of many pronatalist policies to increase fertility is that, in fact, these policies run counter to the desires of the women that they target. Especially in rapidly changing or developing contexts, many societies lack the infrastructure to help parents (but especially mothers) rectify their career goals with their family duties, and many women choose to defy tradition by 'retreating' from motherhood (Jones 2009). Another wrinkle specific to the Asian context is the so-called 'retreat from marriage', which demographers have argued is due to the fact that marriage itself is seen as so intertwined with these traditional norms of motherhood and homemaking that are distasteful to many of the newly-educated women across the region (Jiang et al. 2014; Feeney 1991; Yi 2007). Furthermore, the arguments as to why population decline is negative on a

national scale are often related to the economics of welfare state retrenchment: rapid ageing is used as an excuse for the state to retreat from pensions, for example, and decreasing labour force sizes thought to endanger projections of economic growth and therefore the pools of money available for other programs. But although these are real policy problems that will require creative responses in the future, it is unclear whether these costs justify the subjugation of individual fertility desires to some fuzzily conceived idea of the value of a strong demographic future.

The various issues that were highlighted in Chapter 2 as subsections of theory on the nexus of social policy and population policy were identified as: the appropriate scope of government intervention in the 'private' sphere of family, the relationship of social control and population policy, and the very efficacy of population policies. The preceding discussion has shown that, like the realms of social policy and population policy in general, these subjects are 'inextricably confounded' (Demeny 1986, p.349). Yet considering their applications to the Chinese case has suggested that further analyses of the relationship between individual fertility ideation and the efficacy of pronatalist policies in low fertility countries could be insightful. It has also shown that explications of the effects that antinatalist propaganda has had on the 'social control' of antinatalist policies could elucidate some of these issues. And more than anything, it has suggested that the correct governance of a country's population is a matter of balance: between the individual and the collective, between the enabling and the coercive, and between unsustainably high fertility and lowest-low or ultra-low figures. As McDonald (2007) put it, 'while it may seem to be inordinately prescriptive, the target range for fertility in all countries should be from 1.6 to 2.1 births per woman' (p. 5). But, as this investigation has shown, the path that is taken to achieve those goals is also of paramount importance. A discussion of why this happened in China particularly will form the body of the next portion.

10.3.2 Understanding China's History of Antinatalism

While it is generally understood that the PRC has had the most extreme and longest-lived antinatalist population policy of any country around the world, very little research has investigated the reasons why China formulated and then maintained a birth planning policy. The description in Chapter 3 illustrated the demographic situation of China at the key points during the trajectory of its birth planning history, and over time, a relationship between the two became clear. The question of why an antinatalist policy was implemented in the first place has received relatively more attention, and a combination of the insights from several book-length investigations yields a composite explanation (Greenhalgh 2008; Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005; White 2006; Scharping 2003). In general, it can be agreed that China's highest officials truly believed that the nation's population growth was a matter of existential importance, and that the widespread poverty and food shortages that would result from continued increase beyond the carrying capacity. Into this ideational environment, an array of different actors peddling their own favoured solution entered, and through a complex interaction of personal connections, elite constellations, and the scientization of their findings and proposals, a drastic measure to limit Chinese families to one child per couple was considered the only option that promised sufficient slowdown to help the nation achieve its rigidly defined targets for economic growth, per capita income, and gross numbers of people. Therefore, the Open Letter of 1980 set in motion the history of general promotion of a one-child fertility limit, with shifting exceptions over time and space.

The contribution of this thesis fits into the second part of that question, namely *why did China maintain an anti-natalist policy for so long?* Once again, it must be reiterated that a lag between fertility rates dipping below replacement rate and the end of antinatalist policies across Asia is not wholly unusual, but China's more than 25 year gap is above the average (Jones et al. 2009a). The findings of this investigation suggest that the NFPCs desire

to keep a tight hold on its institutional authority, in combination with its ability to control the data reaching the State Council and problematize the demographic situation to suit its desired policy outcome, was a major factor that shaped the inertia surrounding the policy. In addition, the risk aversion of many officials from the grassroots all the way to the commanding heights of Chinese politics was detrimental to the process, as these actors were more likely to maintain the status quo than break the path dependency of the birth planning policy. In effect, it required a tipping point in both the demographic situation and the bureaucratic configuration buttressing the policy sphere to shake the stasis of the population policy. Both factors converged in recent years, with the entrance of the National Development and Reform Commission into the policy arena and the growing acceptance of low (almost lowest-low in many cases) fertility across China, which had led to undeniable projections of future rising dependency and decreasing economic growth. Therefore, the 2015 shift was enabled through an overlap of external advocacy with internal acceptance of the demographic problems created by the maintenance of an increasingly out-of-date regulation. This is therefore the beginning of the end of this macro-level question's applicability to the PRC. But it begs another query: what will change in years to come?

10.4 Where Will China's Population Policy Go in the Future?

Now that China has officially moved away from the national promotion of a general 'one child per couple' rule, the time is ripe to consider where its population policy regime will go in the future. It is worth noting that the formulation of the October 2015 shift followed the 'classic formula – affirming A but adding B – by which PRC leaders announce a switch in emphasis from A to B' (Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005, p.169). Formally speaking, birth planning is still a 'basic national policy' of China, which puts it in a protected category where it cannot be criticized as a fundamentally inappropriate sphere of state influence, no matter the implications of government management of individual fertility goals (Greenhalgh

2008, p.4). As such, it is highly unlikely that the CCP government will wholly liberalize its policies on childbearing in the near future, and even less probable that there will soon be an acknowledgment that birth planning directly led to many distortions into the Chinese population – rapid ageing, a high sex ratio at birth, etc. – that will complicate development for years to come. Yet several of the changes that have been implemented after the Thirteenth Five Year Plan was released suggest that Xi Jinping’s new formulation of ‘promoting the balanced development of the population’ (Xi 2015) may allow sufficient breadth for a significant realignment of the policy in the near future.

Since the October announcement, there have been several national and local adjustments to existing rules that are harbingers of future changes to come. As stated previously, the requirement for couples to register and receive permission to have a baby prior to a pregnancy was outlawed, and it is now only necessary to register the birth after it occurs (Gu et al. 2016). The longstanding admonitions that Chinese couples should practice ‘late marriages and late births (*wanhun wanyu*)’ have been lifted, which means that people can now marry and begin childbearing at an age of their choice, rather than ages set by law (usually over 20 for women and 22 for men at the earliest) (Zeng & Hesketh 2016). In addition, the legally mandated maternity leave for mothers has been extended by 30 days so that all women are guaranteed a 128 day ‘basic leave (*jiben chanjia*)’, and paternity leave was tripled from the original five days to a full 15 (Attané 2016). As the state now allows people to have two children each, the previous emphasis on ‘glorious one-child certificates’ has been withdrawn; this means that parents of only children are no longer entitled to bonuses, special pension plans, and other favourable treatments (although couples with prior certificates are grandfathered into the programs) (Gong et al. 2016). A quote from a mid-level official at the National Health and Family Planning Commission, on this topic is particularly revealing:

I know the current policy. It’s that the original people will continue to receive these sorts of things [like the one-child certificate benefits]. And new people, the nation

wants them to have two children, they should still have two. But if they only want to have one, we can't promise them the same past things.

Now, the policy towards mothers is that it's best to have two children, and the policy wants you to have two, so we can't continue to support you in only having one. In the past, you were supported if you only had one. Now, they can't still be supported in having one. You should have two; it's this way. If they still don't want to have any, what are we to do? In the future, the policy might change step-by-step.

These details suggest that China is in the process of rolling back many of the elements of the birth planning system that have been the most directly anti-natalist, and is even taking the first small steps toward a pronatalist policy (increased maternity leave, for example). In addition, the quote above explicitly opens the door to further 'step-by-step' adjustments to the policy that would make it more directly pronatalist. Given the conflation of future economic growth and raising fertility rates, as was mentioned in Chapter 8, along with the lacklustre policy response to the implementation of the national *dandu* policy in 2013 and the currently very low fertility rates in many areas of China, it seems likely that some type of pronatalist policies will be implemented in the coming years. Depending on the fertility statistics for 2016, which is the zodiac calendar's Year of the Monkey and traditionally considered a very auspicious time to have babies (Grech 2015), this day of pronatalism could come sooner rather than later. East Asian countries around China are rife with examples of policies that could be imitated: 'baby bonuses' like in Singapore (Straughan et al. 2009), government-sponsored and subsidized childcare centres as seen in Korea (S. Lee 2009), and even more generous parental leave allotments and protections, similar to Japan (Ogawa 2007).

But the fact remains the fertility ideation is still very low in China, and these pronatalist measures that could serve as touchstones have not been successful in significantly raising fertility across Asia. This has been ascribed to a multitude of causes: the continuation of traditional gender norms surrounding marriage and childbearing that relegate women to shoulder the 'dual burden' of both work and homemaking (Lee 2006), the high cost of living and especially of housing in Asian cities (National Population and Talent Division 2013), the

traditions of corporate work that demand long hours from all employees regardless of gender (Jones 2007), and the internalization of decades of antinatalist propaganda (Basten & Jiang 2015), among others. And as mentioned previously, any projections about the policy effects of a Chinese birth planning loosening require a caveat, because the expected gains in births from the national *dandu* policy never materialized (Attané 2016). So while it is the contention of this project that the Chinese population policy will transform into one of pronatalist intent sooner rather than later, the question remains, ‘is it too little, too late, and is China going to be able to rebound at all demographically?’ (Hardee 2016). This answer will hold the key to China’s future economic growth and the development of its people.

10.5 Directions for Future Research

Although the bearing of the findings on the relevant prior literature were considered in Chapter 9, it is useful here to re-state the primary implications of this investigation. The major findings that were presented in the model illustrating the mechanism that determined the outcome of policy debates at key points in the Experiment of Eight Million People were threefold. First, this investigation illustrated the importance of the (usually informal) vertical connections among actors within the CCP, which was related to past work on integrated factionalism within the Chinese government. There was also an ideational element, because the evidence showed that the birth planning institutions succeeded at defining the population problem in such a way to shape the sphere of available policy responses in their favour. Finally, the accounts of the critical junctures showed that elite actors within the National Family Planning Commission worked strategically to maintain their bureaucratic and pragmatic power through maintaining a strict birth planning policy. There were also two minor findings: the policy debates often relied on the ‘scientization’ of population data and experimental outcomes for rhetorical heft, and the CCP acted to retroactively smooth over some of the most bitter policy debates at its highest levels. Each of these represents a

theoretical contribution of the project, but it can also serve as a platform to advance another step in the future.

There are three most fruitful areas for further expansion or nuance of this project's discernments. The first frontier involves the applicability of the general factors gleaned inductively from the empirical work and the specific model to other areas of China's welfare state building project. As was discussed in Chapter 2, most work about China's social policies centres on the empirical elements of histories of policy development and evaluations of program effectiveness. But this investigation took the explication a step further to consider the political factors that motivated and shaped the policy decisions, and in doing so it illustrated the applicability of many theories usually utilized in the Western social policy context to the Chinese experience. Because so little is known about the impetus for and design of new elements of the social safety net in the PRC, further research could attempt to test the general findings of this project in other social policy spheres like pensions, unemployment insurance, and poverty relief. This would test whether the insights from this project are fundamental attributes of Chinese social policymaking, or whether they were instead unique to the field of birth planning and less determinant than other elements of the different social policy realms.

The second space into which this thesis could develop is the understanding of the mechanisms underpinning transitions from antinatalism to pronatalism across East Asia. Much like the literature on Chinese social policy, far too much of this field is devoted to documenting shifts and their empirical importance without attempting to understand the drivers behind the changes themselves. Yet because most of these East Asian welfare states had a long gap between their fertility rates falling below replacement and their shift to pronatalist policies, which have had major implications for their population structure and economic future, understanding the substructure of that reluctance and eventual shift is vital.

While this narrower conception of the field of possibilities only includes East Asian contexts because they form the most similar cases for Chinese comparison, a more general understanding of the politics of population policy across the globe would also be a valuable exercise in each context, because this realm of governance is undertheorized and often misunderstood. But since it appears that more and more countries around the world are conceptualizing the best demographic path to their preferred future and instituting policies to try to align individual incentives to achieve that goal, the motivations for and implications of these types of interventions are vital.

This work also problematizes the dominant narrative surrounding the use of policy experimentation in China, and it merits further investigation into this body of research. It is generally assumed that the unique process of ‘crossing the river by feeling for stones’, or incremental policy changes motivated by the results of localized policy experiments, is efficiency seeking and largely responsible for China’s successful record of development. But this project has illustrated that the application of policy experimentation to the social policy realm can be very complex, and it is convoluted by many factors beyond simply analysing which initiative is most successful and expanding those successful pilots. As such, there should be more work done (following past investigations such as Mei & Liu (2014); Schoon (2014); Tsai & Dean (2014); Zeng (2014)) that questions these conceptualizations of Chinese experimental policymaking. It should be determined to what degree these policymaking norms are truly efficiency-seeking, and in what contexts their expansion should be advocated. More generally, the underspecified and sycophantic ‘China Model’ and ‘Beijing Consensus’ ideas, which have received more publicity than investigation, should be questioned further.

It should also be noted that the way in which this project conceptualized and operationalized critical junctures provides a path for future investigations to have a transparent and defensible way of identifying and explicating important times in a policy

process. Critical junctures theory is still relatively new in qualitative political science research, and there are several avenues that have been explored as ways of identifying critical junctures for investigation. This project expanded on the work of Hogan (2006) and Hogan and Doyle (2007) to follow in their steps of formalizing *a priori* observable implications that would be assumed to accompany a juncture and then testing a series of candidates. But rather than definitively stating that a period was a critical juncture directly after the conclusion of this exercise, this project chose to rather incorporate an inductive element by moving on to investigate the events during each likely juncture and only *post hoc* labelling some as true critical junctures and one as a ‘near miss’ of history. By doing so, this project incorporated both inductive and deductive elements of critical juncture identification and explication, and moved a step forward towards presenting a method of identifying junctures that is both transparent and able to counteract accusations of confirmation bias. As such, this particular application of the methodology could be replicated in future projects to render the usage of critical junctures theory more justifiable and defensible in cases beyond the Experiment of Eight Million People.

10.6 Reflection on the Project

Throughout this document, I have made significant efforts to be transparent about the process I followed in gathering the data, analysing it, and communicating the findings. To complete this work, openness will be extended to clarity about the project’s foundations and my place in it as a researcher. First, although each of the decisions made about the framing and operationalization of the research questions has been justified, I also acknowledge their insufficiencies. Conducting a single case study immediately narrows the field of extrapolation for my findings, because the empirical uniqueness renders it impossible to claim that what happened in the Experiment of Eight Million People was replicated anywhere else. And though critical junctures theory was particularly apt for the cyclical nature of the

Experiment's overlap with the national policy discourse, selecting periods that the data suggested were relatively more important than others opens the project to criticism that these were improperly chosen. While I drew my conclusions from deep familiarity with the data, clearly communicated the metrics that were used, and also checked my interpretations with main actors involved, I acknowledge that I cannot wholly reject alternative constructions of critical junctures in this case. And finally, though the data sources were triangulated wherever possible, the inherent biases of the viewpoints of the elites involved and the intentionality of the documents drawn upon undoubtedly shaped my interpretation to a degree, especially given the time and space that separated me from the events themselves.

Furthermore, as a piece of qualitative research, this project brings me as the researcher to the forefront, because my work was inescapably shaped by my unique positionality. I acknowledge that as a Westerner studying the Chinese welfare state, my outsider status is pertinent. This was particularly relevant in the elite interviews, so I worked to continuously polish my Mandarin, thought critically about how I approached and presented myself to my interviewees, and checked as many central interpretations as possible with the Chinese actors directly involved in the events described here. Yet each of these decisions presumably altered the ways in which my informants interacted with me, and even though I checked my high-level findings with the Chinese, it is still possible that my Western eye affected my understanding of context or led me to ascribe order and structure that did not exist to those directly involved in the Experiment of Eight Million People. In the same way, my Mandarin will never have the same nuance as a native speaker, so some allusions or connotations in the analysed texts were liable to be overlooked, thereby sacrificing a degree of native language richness in the documentary analysis. Even the fact of attempting to find Chinese resonance with theories that arose from analysis of Western contexts is a decision that reflects my inescapable identity.

These types of trade-offs must be made in any research project, as there is no perfect method. Qualitative research especially requires intentionality about the position of the researcher inside the project, and I concede the elements of my identity that fundamentally shape the way I view the world and the manner in which I approached this project. Yet in making these allegiances manifest and explicitly describing the ways in which I attempted to overcome my perspective, I have left it to the reader to meditate on its effects. This satisfies at least to some degree the scientific standard of transparency (and, to a lesser one, replicability) in research, and in my opinion nuances the project. As such, I believe that the trade-offs that have been made in this thesis are justifiable, and still allows the end product – although necessarily imperfect – to stand as a meaningful contribution to the social policy canon.

10.7 Conclusion

This investigation has provided a deep theoretical grounding for investigating China's birth planning policy, and it has expanded upon prior work by providing a comprehensive history of the institutions, actors, and drivers that shaped the so-called One-Child Policy across its course. It then identified a series of potentially crucial periods in that history and drew together a wide swath of data sources to build granular accounts of what happened to determine the outcomes at those key points. Yet at its most basic level, the project divulged a story that has gone untold for far too long. The tale of the Experiment of Eight Million People is one that problematizes many common misunderstandings about China. It flies in the face of the overused narrative of the One-Child Policy by showing that there were many alternative regulations operating at the margins of the national birth planning system. It complicates the simplified understanding of China's unique form of policy experimentation, by suggesting that the system is not wholly efficiency seeking and can be complicated by vested interests, ideational fixedness, and the context of Chinese governance at a given time.

Chapter 10

And more than anything, it problematizes the general understanding of the government of the PRC as a monolithic bloc that rules by consensus. This account has shown that, like any other system, much of the change and continuity in the CCP establishment can be explained by the actions of individuals at key moments. And therefore, it is in fact a human story: of actors who dissented with the policy of ‘one childization’ in its early days, of grassroots officials who worked to implement a more welcome version of an unpopular policy, and of scholars and experts who dedicated their careers to raising awareness of demographic dangers facing China in the future. The recent policy changes were triggered by these groups of people, and in the future, the population policy of the PRC will continue to be shaped on this human level. It can only be hoped that these actors will work with the best interests of the Chinese people in mind.

Appendix: Detailed Methodology

A.1 Introduction

Because Chapter 4 is a complex portion of the document that addresses case selection, approach, and research method, lengthening it further with the granular information about the sampling and analysis of the three main data sources was deemed unwieldy. Yet transparency in these matters is valuable to both confirm the validity of this project and enhance its replicability, so this Appendix will describe the analysis of the Chinese newspapers, “*neibu*” documents, and interview accounts in depth. Before these data sources are addressed in turn, however, a note on the project’s methodological development is in order. When it was initially conceived, this illumination of the Experiment of Eight Million People was cast as a hypothesis testing, process tracing case study. As such, when the data was first analysed, it was in a more deductive, theory-driven manner than the inductive and historical critical junctures approach that has been presented here. Therefore, the coding guides that were relied upon in the initial analysis below are more tightly focused around the strands of ideational, institutional, and interest-based theoretical explanations than their presentation in the empirical chapters of the final thesis would suggest. Indeed, as the following sections will show, all three sources were examined anew with a more historical approach to their stature as primary source materials when the methodological foundation shifted across the project. Yet because these early efforts informed and nuanced my understanding of the context and course of the Experiment of Eight Million People, I have included accounts of both rounds analysis in the methods of addressing the Chinese newspapers, *neibu* documents, and interview data.

A.2 Newspaper analysis

For this project, the newspaper sources contributed to the final project in two main ways: first, they provided a valuable level of granularity for the historical aspect of the

project, and they gave insight into the discursive environment of the central CCP. As such, this discussion will clarify the sampling mechanisms used to derive a database of thousands of newspaper articles that discussed the birth planning policy in China. Then, it will proceed to give a high-level overview of the ways that this database of specialized articles was leveraged to inform the creation of a nuanced timeline of events, as well as to add colour to the periods that were discussed as possible critical junctures in the course of the Experiment of Eight Million People. The discussion will then proceed to give a more in-depth account of the second level of sampling that yielded a body of articles specifically discussing two children under the national one-child regime, and the qualitative coding that was completed on this smaller sample in order to yield insights into the discourse surrounding the second child. Although some of these insights were not included in the final thesis due to the methodological shift from theory-testing process tracing to a critical junctures approach, the analysis informed the author's understanding of the political and historical context, and therefore merits discussion here.

The national newspapers that were chosen for analysis were the *People's Daily* [*Renmin Ribao*] and the *Enlightenment Daily* [*Guangming Ribao*]. These selections were simple, because these two sources – and especially the *People's Daily* - are the two publications that are known to be closest to the CCP's political centre (Lee 2000; Zhang 2011). The *People's Daily* has at many points in CCP history been directly utilized by various factions within the upper echelons of the Party to communicate policy preferences and justifications, and it was the site of many of Mao's most famous editorials (Qian 1987). The front page of each day's paper bears calligraphy written in the Chairman's own hand (Howkins 1982). Although the *Enlightenment Daily* is situated slightly differently, as the

voice of the Party to educated elites³³, it is also closely aligned with the centre, and along with the *People's Daily* (plus the *Economic Daily [Jingji Ribao]* and *Seeking Truth [Qiushi]*), was one of only four papers that were kept under direct Party ownership during press liberalization in the early 1990s (Zhang 2011, p.39). In order to generate a representative sample of all articles about the birth planning policy across the reform period, ten search terms commonly associated with birth planning were applied to the online newspaper archives that the University of Oxford subscribes to through Green Apple. These terms were derived from recurring phrases and slogans in secondary English literature on the history of the birth planning period (e.g. Scharping 2003; White 2006; Greenhalgh & Winckler 2005). The terms and their English translations are:

Table A.1: Search Terms Used for Newspaper Sampling

<i>Pinyin</i>	English Translation
<i>dusheng ziniu</i>	Only Child (also used for “One Child Policy”)
<i>jihua shengyu</i>	Birth Planning
<i>biyun yongpin</i>	Contraceptives
<i>jihuawai shengyu</i>	Out-of-Plan Birth
<i>jueyu</i>	Birth Control ³⁴
<i>yitai hua</i>	One Childization
<i>shaosheng kuai fu</i>	“Fewer Children Means Faster Prosperity”
<i>duozi duochou</i>	“More Children Mean More Troubles”
<i>wanhu wanyu shaosheng yousheng</i>	“Late marriage, late births, few births, quality births”
<i>kongzhi renkou</i>	Control the Population ³⁵

³³ The Enlightenment Daily has a mixed history in China. It was started in 1949 as the newspaper of the eight minority political parties in China, and was the location of many criticisms against the CCP in the “Hundred Flowers Movement” of 1957 (Latham 2010). The paper was subsequently brought under Party control, and has since been the primary mode of communication to intellectuals in China; it is estimated that its circulation is more than 99 percent composed of teachers, scientists, government officials, and students (Publicitas 2014).

³⁴ Although “*biyun yongpin*” and “*jueyu*” both translate as “contraceptive” or “birth control”, *biyun yongpin* usually refers to user-controlled methods like oral contraceptives or condoms, whereas *jueyu* is almost always used for more permanent methods of contraception like intrauterine devices (IUDs) and sterilizations. Given the history of resistance to sterilization and other *jueyu* methods (Bernman 1999), this was an important distinction to capture.

³⁵ This phrase was a truncated version of “*kongzhi renkou zengjia*” or “control the growth of the population”, but it was searched in its shortened form because it was often abbreviated.

Applying these ten search terms to the *People's Daily* yielded 1,198 total articles ranging across the years 1956 to 2012. For the *Enlightenment Daily*, there were 794 total articles to 2013.

To add an element of local context to the national analysis, the two provinces (Hebei and Gansu) whose experiments had been mentioned in the national newspapers were selected for further research. Experts on Chinese media have mixed opinions about the autonomy of provincial and lower level newspapers from the central CCP (Lee 1994; Lynch 1999; Chang et al. 1993; Svensson 2012). Although each newspaper is directly controlled by the Party and is subject to oversight by the Central Propaganda Department, there has been evidence that local Party elites publicize various policy programs in the newspapers, both to their local constituents and central officials (Hood 1994). Provincial newspapers are not available in complete online databases³⁶, but the Chinese University of Hong Kong has very good³⁷ physical archives of each provincial newspaper across the reform period. For the provincial newspapers, the time frame analysed was narrowed to the decade from 1984 to 1995, which encompasses the beginning of the policy pilots that came to be included in the Experiment of Eight Million People, their continuation through the general tightening of the birth planning policy that occurred in the early 1990s, and the period when the first meaningful results of the policy pilot were compiled and circulated. The same search terms listed in Table A.1 above were applied to the *Gansu Daily* and the *Hebei Daily*, which yielded a sample of 339 articles from Gansu and 324 articles from Hebei. These were fewer than the number of articles in the

³⁶ There are some partial databases available, but they are incomplete for the provinces examined here. For example, *Hebei Daily* has some selections that are available online at the CNKI's Core Newspaper Database, but only after the year 2000. For each year before 2000, there are 350 to 400 total articles available on all topics, or about one article per day. Given that each of these newspapers is at least four pages long every day, this was deemed insufficiently representative.

³⁷ There were a few gaps in the newspaper record; for example, each newspaper in the collection was missing the months of April to June 1989. In general, however, the archives were complete.

People's Daily over that same time period (588 articles from 1984 to 1995), but represented a *People's Daily* (282 articles).

With these sampling procedures, a database of more than 2,600 newspaper articles on the birth planning policy across the history of the CCP was established. When it was initially compiled, each of these articles was read chronologically, and those that discussed specific events – policy conferences, announcements, Central document publications, etc. – were marked on a timeline of the policy history. When the periods that were likely to be critical junctures were later identified, the database was again referred to as primary documents to give context and dimension to the events of the period. Where possible, the discussions in Chapters 5 through 8 referred to the newspaper articles to establish chronologies and share direct quotations from primary sources of the original events. The earlier conception of this project as a process tracing design involved a hypothesis about the discussions of the second child in the discourse under a one-child regime, so a second round of qualitative content analysis was conducted on a sample of articles that discussed two children. While the results of this analysis were not formally included in the investigation, the coding exercise was incredibly valuable to the understanding of the ideational environment across the two-child history, and the insights informed the discussion at several points.

The articles before 1979 were excluded in the second round of sampling for two-child discussions, as they occurred before China had officially moved to promoting a “one child per couple” policy with targeted exceptions. To separate out the articles that specifically dealt with the second child, two terms were used: “*liangge haizi*” or “two children”, and “*di'erge haizi*” or “the second child”³⁸. In addition, the sample was searched for articles that mentioned any of the four areas in which the *Experiment of Eight Million People* took place;

³⁸ Another possible search term, “*er tai*”, which is an informal translation of “second child”, was excluded because it was present in almost half of the total articles, and because a random sample of the articles in which it occurred revealed that it was mentioned in passing or was unrelated to the main focus of the article.

that is, Jiuquan , Yicheng, Enshi, and Chengde. The *People’s Daily* had two articles mentioning Chengde and one mentioning Jiuquan, and *Enlightenment Daily* had one article mentioning Chengde. This second round of sampling generated 54 articles for the *People’s Daily* from 1979 to 2007, or five percent of the total articles over that period. The *Enlightenment Daily* had 35 articles from 1979 to 2008, which also represented five percent of the 715 total articles over that period. For the local-level newspapers, the *Hebei Daily* and *Gansu Daily*, a search of this initial sample for the two-child terms “*liangge haizi*” and “*di’erge haizi*” yielded too few results for the coding to be a useful comparison to the work done on the national newspapers (though it was similar to the five percent of total articles in the national newspapers), so the decision was made to include articles with the term “*er tai*”, which is a more informal translation of “second child”. This expanded search yielded a total of 67 articles from the *Gansu Daily* and 54 articles from the *Hebei Daily*. These figures represented 19 percent and 17 percent of the total samples, respectively, but this oversampling was considered justified because these sources had not been previously analysed.

Table A.2: Sampling of the Four Chinese Newspapers

Newspaper	Initial Sample	Two-Child Sample	% of Initial Sample
<i>People’s Daily</i>	1,198	54	5
<i>Enlightenment Daily</i>	794	35	5
<i>Gansu Daily</i>	339	67	19
<i>Hebei Daily</i>	324	54	17

These 89 total articles from the *People’s Daily* and the *Enlightenment Daily* formed the body of articles qualitatively coded for the national newspapers, and the 121 total articles from the *Gansu Daily* and the *Hebei Daily* were the provincial sample. The articles were coded according to a qualitative guide designed to track the themes relevant to understanding the ways that the second child was discussed: type of article (e.g., opinion, interview), time (when two children were discussed), and tone (how the second child was discussed). They

were read and coded in Mandarin, so that nuances were not altered through translation, for example through connotative differences between Mandarin and English words. In order to address each of these metrics in a simple format, the following coding document was developed and filled out for each article:

Figure A.1: Coding Frame for Qualitative Content Analysis

TITLE:				
PUBLICATION:				
YEAR:				
MONTH:				
DAY:				
BYLINE (IF ANY):				
THREE-DIGIT CODE:				
Length				
Search Term(s)				
Type of Article				
Overall Tone				
ZC Mention(s)				
Mention(s) Tone				
Counties				
Brief Summary				

The first seven rows of the coding sheet are primarily for identification and analysis of the timing of articles; the “Byline” category was added to check whether any particular authors recurred or wrote discernibly unique opinions. The “Length” was used as a proxy for the amount of space that was devoted to each article discussing the second child, since utilizing online databases rendered analysis of the size and positioning of articles impossible (Granner et al. 2010). The “Search Term” from the original list of ten was noted in order to see if they changed over time; for example, this metric lead to the discovery that “Fewer Children Means Faster Prosperity” only occurred in articles during the late 1990s and early 2000s, reflecting the continuation of a “campaign style” (White 2006) of enforcement into the

21st century. The “Type of Article” row referred to which of the following categories each article fit:

Table A.3: Categories of Article Types for Qualitative Coding

Number	Type of Article
1	Reprinting of Policy Document or Policy Meeting Proceedings
2	Summary of Policy Document or Policy Meeting Proceedings
3	Reprinting of Politician’s Speech or Interview
4	Summary of Politician’s Speech or Interview
5	Report from Lower Level Area
6	General Statement on Birth Planning Policy
7	Opinion Piece against Two Children
8	Opinion Piece Supporting Two Children
9	Summary of a Statistical Communique
10	Article on Birth Planning in Another Country/Internationally

These categories grouped similar articles together in order to determine differences in timing and tone of each particular type of publication. Tone is recognized as an important measure in analysis of Chinese media (Liang & Lu 2013; Sullivan & Seiler-Helmer 2012; Tang 2012; Gao et al. 2013), and it is vital to addressing the process tracing tests listed above. The overall tone of each article and the tone of each mention of two children was coded on a five-point scale. The measures of tone were derived from the context of the policy environment gleaned from the secondary literature about China’s birth planning policy: for example, it quickly became obvious during background research that any mention of the likelihood of a large and fast population increase in China was negative in the context of its population policy (Greenhalgh 2003). Table A.4 and Table A.5 below show each category of tone, along with a real example from a coded *People’s Daily* article or a 2-child mention in order to illustrate the differences:

Table A.4: Examples of Coding for Overall Article tone

Overall Article Coding for Tone		
Number	Tone	Example – Article Titles
1	Very Negative	“The Situation of China's Population Growth is Grim; In April of This Year it Will Surpass 1.1 Billion”

2	Somewhat Negative	“Increase and Strengthen the Feelings of Urgency for the Cadres and Masses toward Population Control”
3	Neutral/Mixed	“A Topic of Conversation for a Generation of People: Chen Danyan's "Manifesto of an Only Child"”
4	Somewhat Positive	“Zhejiang Resolutely Keeps Accounting of Birth Work at Each Level”
5	Very Positive	“Singapore’s Control of Population Growth Achieves Astounding Results”

Table A.5: Examples of Coding for Tone of the Two-Child Mention

Two-Child Mention Coding		
Number	Tone	Example – Quotes from Articles
1	Very Negative	“If every couple has two children, there will be 480 million excess people by 2000!”
2	Somewhat Negative	“There is a risk that allowing every couple to have two children would lead to a fertility rebound”
3	Neutral/Mixed	“In some places, if both parents are only children, they are allowed to have two”
4	Somewhat Positive	“In Singapore, families that only have two children are rewarded with free entrance to the best schools”
5	Very Positive	“In only six months, Urumqi’s government has persuaded more than 5,000 minority couples to pledge to only have two children!”

One of the other measures coded on the sheet were the degree to which the second child/two children was mentioned in the article, coded as: 1 - Mentioned once in passing, 2 - Focus of a sentence, 3 - Focus of a paragraph, 4 - Main focus of the article. Finally, the last section was marked for whether the article mentioned any of the counties in the experiment by name. The summary section was useful to pull quotes from the analysis, to highlight different justifications of the policy or exceptions, and to check the tones. The coding guide was refined through a process of coding five randomly selected articles from the national newspapers (Macnamara 2006). The following adjustments were made to the first iteration in order to yield the final version described here: 1) a more detailed breakdown of article length (in 500-word increments instead of 1,000) to reflect more differences, 2) addition of the category 10 “Birth Planning in Another Country/Internationally”, 3) addition of the word

“Interview” to the categories 3 and 4, and 4) a change of category 5 from “Report from Experimental Area” to “Report from Lower-level Area”. Once these adjustments had been made and two weeks passed, these same articles were coded again to ensure consistency. There was over 95 percent consistency for the five documents³⁹, so the coding guide was deemed valid (Schreier 2012). The analysis of the coding for temporal distribution, overall tone, discernible patterns in types of articles, etc., was accomplished using Microsoft Excel, which was appropriate for the volume of articles analysed and the types of analysis (trends, averages, patterns) that the process tracing tests require than STATA or another statistical analysis software.

A.3 Neibu documents

In addition to the publicly-available newspaper articles, the historical and political context of the project was enriched by analysis of previously-classified internal Chinese government documents, which are often referred to in short hand as “*neibu*” documents. While the *neibu* sources are a fairly new resource for the study of Chinese politics and policy, their status as policy documents makes it possible to draw from the long history of political content analysis in order to analyse them. This section will give an overview of how these sources were accessed, sampled, and analysed, with a focus on tying the methodology to best practices in the qualitative methods literature. The majority of the focus will be on the qualitative content analysis (QCA) conducted on all of the documents. This is due to the fact that the majority of the findings that stretch beyond basic historical value (primary accounts of meetings, contributions to timelines of key events, etc.) were derived from this analysis.

The *neibu* documents were gathered in two research trips. These were undertaken because the *neibu* documents have only recently been declassified, so there are only two sizeable archives outside of mainland China available to foreign scholars. The first is at the

³⁹ The difference in the coding of the five documents was that the second round coded one of the articles about birth planning in another country as an overall tone of “5 – Very Positive” instead of “4 – Somewhat Positive”.

H.C. Fung Library within the Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies at Harvard University, where I travelled in February of 2015 to collect sources from the *neibu* journals *Internal Reference on Reform (Gaige Neican)*, *Dynamic Theory (Lilun Dongtai)*, and *Internal Reference Materials on Economic Reform (Jingji Tizhi Gaige Neibu Cankao)*. It was in the Fung archives that I also discovered a *neibu* book published in 1989 entitled *A Compilation of Important Essays on Birth Planning (Jihua shengyu zhongyao wenjian xuanbian)*, which included reference materials and many excerpts from speeches by Politburo officials across the early decades of the population policy. I also travelled to the China Studies Centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in November of 2015 to supplement the Harvard sample with CUHK's extensive holdings of *Internal Reference on Reform (Gaige Neican)*, as well as additional years of *Internal Reference (Neibu Cankao)*.

The search criteria for the articles sampled was less specific for the *neibu* documents than for the newspapers, because fewer articles were searched and there was the advantage of physical examination for identifying articles whose titles were phrased slightly differently but still discussed birth planning. For example, an article entitled "The Population Problem: The Crisis Inherent in Society and Humanity (*renkou wenti: renlei shehui neisheng weiji*)" would not have been highlighted by the ten search terms used for the much larger databases of newspaper articles, but in the context of the *neibu* documents, it was possible to identify and analyse. The plan for this portion of the analysis had been to code each of the *neibu* documents twice: once with the qualitative coding guide generated in the last section for newspaper analysis to specifically identify the prevalence of discussions of the second child and the tone with which they were addressed, and once with a formalized qualitative content analysis (QCA) guide to analyse justifications for the birth planning policy. Once the documents were compiled, however, it was discovered that this two-step process would be useful only for the elite speeches. The other *neibu* documents were longer and more complex

than had been anticipated, so focusing specifically on the QCA to fully specify and analyse the themes of the birth planning discussions, rather than losing the richness by over-specifying the two-child focus, was a better path forward for the reference documents and journal articles. See the section on newspapers above for a detailed discussion of the coding guide that applied to the Politburo speeches, as well as its foundations in media content

The remaining discussion of this section will centre on the qualitative content analysis conducted on all the *neibu* documents. Qualitative content analysis, or “QCA” can be defined as ‘a method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way’ (Schreier 2012, p.1), but can be divided into distinct categories: conventional, directed, or summative QCA (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). The sub-type of QCA that was used in this analysis was “directed” QCA, which has also been called “deductive category application” (Mayring 2000) or simply “analytical coding” (Savin-Baden & Major 2013, p.422). Directed QCA is a structured approach whereby existing work on a particular area is leveraged to create the key variables for a coding guide (Potter & Levin-Donnerstein 1999). By coding the texts under investigation with these inherently theoretical parameters, a directed approach avoids the trap of overly inductive schemes generating a large number of case-specific findings that fail to advance existing theory (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). It has been argued that this approach is particularly relevant to integrating content analysis into analysis of case study data (Kohlbacher 2006).

QCA is a three-step process, which requires preparation of the materials, organization of the outputs, and reporting of the analysis process and results (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). Preparation of materials can be seen as two-fold in directed QCA, because it requires not only the arrangement of the documents, but also the derivation of the “*a priori* codes” from the existing literature on a given subject (Savin-Baden & Major 2013, p.422). For my analysis, I

returned to the literature on the history and effects of China’s promotion of “one child per couple”, and grouped similar arguments that the CCP had used over time to build a three-level coding guide that aggregated rationalizations to the first “dimensions”, or main categories (Schreier 2012, p.59), of political, economic, social, and demographic justifications for the birth planning policy. The next sub-level disaggregated each dimension by its main themes; for example, the “political” dimension was divided into Marxist, authoritarian, and target achievement justifications. This was due to the fact that prior work on the birth planning policy in China argued that while central leaders tended to stress the importance of Marxist doctrines like the “dual forms of production” (White 2006, pp.5–6) in formulating the population policy, the strongest drive for the policy’s implementation came from the perceived need to keep China’s population numbers below certain thresholds to reach the ambitious development goals that had been set or to show Party strength (Greenhalgh 2008, p.118; Scharping 2003, p.65). The coding guide as originally conceived is included below as Figure 7.1:

Figure 7.1: Directed QCA Coding Frame Prior to Analysis

- 1. POLITICAL**
 - 1.1. Marxist**
 - 1.1.1. China is at a developmental stage of socialism
 - 1.1.2. Socialism has a control objective, which includes controlling the population
 - 1.1.3. Dual forms of production: fertility should be regulated like material production
 - 1.2. Authoritarian**
 - 1.2.1. It is a duty of all cadres to support birth planning
 - 1.2.2. Birth planning is a “basic national policy”
 - 1.3. Target Achievement**
 - 1.3.1. Population control is necessary to achieve the Four Modernizations
 - 1.3.2. Control of population growth is necessary to achieve a *xiaokang* society
 - 1.3.3. Birth planning is necessary to achieve 1.2 billion people by the end of the century
- 2. ECONOMIC**
 - 2.1. Pre-Existing Conditions**
 - 2.1.1. China has little arable land
 - 2.1.2. China’s per capita income is low, and it is backwards
 - 2.1.3. China still has a very large rural population that needs to be developed
 - 2.2. Future Trajectory**
 - 2.2.1. Development is very closely related to population growth
 - 2.2.2. Children are a burden on society for years before they become producers
 - 2.2.3. Parents can invest more in an only child
- 3. SOCIAL**
 - 3.1. Women**
 - 3.1.1. Traditional beliefs about large families or many sons are widespread

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3.1.2. Birth planning will help raise women's positions in society

3.1.3. Focus on maternal and child health helps women

3.2. *Welfare*

3.2.1. Birth planning is necessary to alleviate poverty

3.2.2. Proper birth planning fosters a good relationship between cadres and the masses

3.2.3. Rapid population growth would have negative effects on improving education, health, culture, or other policy areas

3.3. *Macro-issues*

3.3.1. Controlling population is important to protecting the environment

3.3.2. The entire world is struggling with population growth, and China is a part of that

4. **DEMOGRAPHIC**

4.1. *China's Population Structure*

4.1.1. China has a very large (the world's largest) population

4.1.2. China has a peaked population structure

4.1.3. China has a high birth rate

4.2. *Demographic Transition*

4.2.1. China must develop its population in line with economic development

th standards have improved, so people will live longer

rolling population growth lets China benefit from a demographic dividend

demographic problems brought about by one Childization are easily solvable

4.3.2. Loosening birth limits would lead to a fertility rebound

5. **Other**

This coding guide, which can be categorized as one of “high complexity”, because it has ‘several dimensions, of which at least one reaches down more than one level’ (Schreier 2012, p.71), was ready for coding, but it was first necessary to define a unit of analysis in order to determine how to break the documents into coding units. Determining the size of each unit of analysis depends on the type of data being coded, because it must strike a balance between representativeness (a too-small unit is difficult to contextualize) and coherence (a unit that is too large would contain multiple or overlapping justifications) (Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Duncan 1989). After an examination of the three different types of *neibu* sources, it was decided that the Politburo speeches would be coded sentence-by-sentence, but the *neibu* reference materials and journals would be coded as paragraphs. This choice was made for two reasons: first, several of the speeches were very short and therefore would only have one necessarily incomplete code. Second, while the *neibu* reference documents and journal articles were generally written using highly formalized Mandarin, with each paragraph composed of a topic sentence and supporting evidence, the speeches were less structured, and included multiple justifications in subsequent sentences.

Once this decision had been made, I moved on to the coding and organization phase. During the coding, it was discovered that there were recurring themes and arguments for the birth planning policy present in the documents that had not been captured by the literature survey. In order to introduce the greatest possible transparency into the oscillation between deductive and inductive coding that capturing this nuance entailed (Schreier 2012, pp.60–61), I have included the coding guide as it stood after the coding, with the categories that were added marked in bold. The only place where the inductive addition did not create a wholly new category was in the addition of “strategic policy” to “basic national policy” in category 1.2.2. This was because several of the documents before the time when birth planning was made a constitutional duty in 1982 (Scharping 2003, p.56) used the phrase “strategic policy (*zhanluexing de zhengce*)” in the same manner that “basic national policy” was later utilized. The updated coding guide below also excludes the four categories (2.2.3, 3.1.2, 4.2.2, and 4.2.3) that did not return any results after the full sample of documents had been coded, because categories that have no relationship with the documents should be struck from the coding frame (Mayring 2014). As such, the final coding guide is included below as Figure 7.2:

Figure 7.2: Directed QCA Coding Frame After Analysis

1. **POLITICAL**
 - 1.1. *Marxist*
 - 1.1.1. China is at a developmental stage of socialism
 - 1.1.2. Socialism has a control objective, which includes controlling the population
 - 1.1.3. Dual forms of production: fertility should be regulated like material production
 - 1.1.4. The achievement of a spiritual civilization requires birth planning**
 - 1.2. *Authoritarian*
 - 1.2.1. It is a duty of all cadres to support birth planning
 - 1.2.2. Birth planning is a “basic national policy” or “**strategic policy**”
 - 1.3. *Target Achievement*
 - 1.3.1. Population control is necessary to achieve the Four Modernizations
 - 1.3.2. Control of population growth is necessary to achieve a *xiaokang* society
 - 1.3.3. Birth planning is necessary to achieve 1.2 billion people by the end of the century
 - 1.3.4. If every couple has two or more children, China’s population will be too big very quickly
2. **ECONOMIC**
 - 2.1. *Pre-Existing Conditions*
 - 2.1.1. China has little arable land
 - 2.1.2. China’s per capita income is low, and it is backwards
 - 2.1.3. China still has a very large rural population that needs to be developed
 - 2.1.4. China cannot produce enough to feed its growing population without birth planning**
 - 2.2. *Future Trajectory*
 - 2.2.1. Development is very closely related to population growth

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2.2.2. Children are a burden on society for years before they become producers

3. SOCIAL

3.1. Women

3.1.1. Traditional beliefs about large families or many sons are widespread

3.1.3 Focus on maternal and child health helps women

3.2. Welfare

3.2.1. Birth planning is necessary to alleviate poverty

3.2.2. Proper birth planning fosters a good relationship between cadres and the masses

3.2.3. Rapid population growth would have negative effects on improving education, health, culture, or other policy areas

3.2.4. The quality of the population must be raised

3.3. Macro-issues

3.3.1. Controlling population is important to protecting the environment

3.3.2. The entire world is struggling with population growth, and China is a part of that

3.3.3. Foreigners resist China's population policy because they want to keep it in its current state

3.3.4. Population issues are closely related to national/international security

4. DEMOGRAPHIC

4.1. China's Population Structure

4.1.1. China has a very large (the world's largest) population

China has a peaked population structure

China has a high birth rate

China is in a population peak period, with many women in reproductive ages

Demographic Transition

4.2.1. China must develop its population in line with economic development

4.3. Trends

4.3.1. Any demographic problems brought about by one Childization are easily solvable

4.3.2. Loosening birth limits would/has lead/led to a fertility rebound

5. OTHER

Although each of these categories were grounded in the literature or the data, the most important categories were 1.21 and 1.22 (“It is a duty of all cadres to support birth planning” and “birth planning is a “basic national policy” or “strategic policy””), 1.3.4 (“If every couple has two or more children, China’s population will be too big very quickly”) and 3.1.1 (“Traditional beliefs about large families or many sons are widespread”). The raw results from the QCA were entered into Microsoft Excel, and the analysis of different justifications’ frequencies and trends across time, speaker, and type of document were analysed using that software. Like the newspaper content analysis from the previous chapter, the total number of justifications was considered too low to justify tests of statistical significance that would have necessitated the use of STATA or R. As mentioned in the Introduction to this Appendix, the *neibu* documents that are cited in this thesis were treated as valuable historical documents, but also as insights into the nature of elite discussions at key points across its history. As such,

this discussion of the way the *neibu* documents were accessed, sampled, and coded is valuable to ground the insights into the CCP discourse.

v Data Analysis

Although the documentary evidence for the national discussions of the population policy and the accounts of the Experiment of Eight Million People was richer than had been expected, the account it yielded of the policy trajectory was lacking a certain human element. For instance, although documents proved the occurrence of a conference on low fertility in Asia at the East-West Center in 2005, the tenor of the discussion and reaction of National Population and Family Planning Commission officials was absent. As such, I decided to seek out the small group of academics and officials who had been directly involved with the advocacy for the Experiment of Eight Million People across its course, in order to triangulate some initial findings and add greater dimension to the discussions of the possible critical junctures. As such, it is important to give a thorough account of the way that the interview data was conceptualized, gathered, and analysed in order to establish its validity and increase the replicability of this study. There are three main points of emphasis for this discussion: the process of sampling and selecting interviewees, the considerations inherent to elite interviewing in a cross-cultural setting, and the process of compiling and analysing the data using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. This section will discuss each of these aspects in turn.

For this investigation, eleven elite informants were interviewed about their involvement in the Experiment of Eight Million People. Because the group of people directly involved in implementing, researching, and promoting the Experiment was quite limited, it was determined that purposive sampling was more appropriate than attempting to randomly select individuals from the Chinese population establishment (Mikecz 2012; Silverman 2013). The search for informants began with the literature surrounding the experimental counties,

and Professor Gietel-Basten's contacts in the Chinese demographic community were instrumental in procuring a first round of informants. In the process of contacting interviewees and gauging their interest in participating in the study, I also asked for references of other people whose insights they felt would be beneficial; as such, several additional interviewees were procured through this "snowballing" exercise (Davies & Hughes 2014; Goldstein 2002; Roberts 2012; Selwyn 2012). The key interviewees whom I contacted who were unresponsive or were uninterested in taking part in the study were Zhang Erli (a former birth planning official who is in bad health), Dr. Yong Cai (a University of North
grapher involved who did not feel he had pertinent information to contribute),
zhuo (a professor from Xi'an Jiaotong who could not find time to speak).

The eleven interviewees were composed of three subgroups: Chinese demographers, Chinese policymakers, and knowledgeable Westerners. A brief overview is useful to establish each informant's expertise and position within the Chinese population establishment. Five of the informants were Chinese demographers:

- *Gu Baochang* is currently a Professor of Demography at Renmin University, but he previously served in the China Family Planning Association, the Population Council, and the China Population Information and Research Centre. He co-edited the *Experiment of Eight Million People* book.
- *Wang Feng* is a Professor of Sociology and University of California, Irvine, and has previously held posts at Brookings, Tsinghua University, and the East-West Centre, among others. He co-edited the *Experiment of Eight Million People*.
- *Chen Wei* is a Professor of Demography at Renmin University, where he has taught since receiving his PhD from Australian National University in 2004. He wrote the chapter on Guangdong Province in the *Experiment of Eight Million People* book, and co-authored one of the policy proposals.
- *Zhang Li* is a Professor of Demography at Fudan University; he recently extensively researched and wrote an article on the history and outcome of the Experiment in Yicheng.
- *Zheng Zhenzhen* works at the Institute of Population and Labour Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing. Her work is primarily in statistical investigations, but she also spearheaded the low fertility ideation study in Jiangsu province and signed all three policy proposals.

Three of the interviewees were Chinese government officials at various levels:

- *He Dan* is the director of the China Population Development Research Centre, and has been a longtime official at the National Family Planning Commission in its various forms. She oversaw the initiative to research the Population portions of the Five Year Plan in 2015, and her findings on the effects of the *dandu* policy were valuable corroboration of the advocacy group's external efforts.
- *Liang Zhongtang* is the most famous internal objector to the CCP's focus on one child per couple. In 1980, he was the head of the Shanxi Party School, and argued against "one Childization". He received permission directly from Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang to begin the two-child experiment in Yicheng County, and held a position at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences before retiring.
- *Wang Qian* is a Deputy Director at the National Health and Family Planning Commission. A large part of his current portfolio deals with migration, but he has also worked extensively in birth planning.

Finally, three Americans who were involved with the Experiment of Eight Million People or related to it on its course were interviewed:

- *Karen Hardee* is a Senior Associate at the Population Council, and conducted extensive fieldwork on the birth planning policy in the 1980s, including directly accessing primary sources of relevant speeches and policy documents. Her insights were valuable to round out the discussion of the competition between the 1.5-child policy and the Experiment in the late 1980s.
- *Joan Kaufman* is the Director of the Columbia Global Centres for East Asia. She has previously worked at the Ford Foundation and the United Nations Population Fund, where she funded the initial meetings of the Experiment's advocacy group.
- *Daniel Goodkind* is a demographer at the United States Census Bureau, but he also works and writes as an Independent Researcher⁴⁰. He has spoken publicly on several occasions against the results from the Experiment of Eight Million People.

As this brief introduction suggests, the group of interviewees, while necessarily small due to the tight-knit community with direct knowledge of the Experiment, had wide-ranging and diverse knowledge that contributed to a deeper understanding of its complex history.

Elite interviews, or interviews with 'persons who are leaders or experts in a community, [and] who are usually in powerful positions' (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p.147), arose for studies of politics and policy-making, and are valuable to glean 'behind the scenes' information of the policy process (Darbi & Hall 2014, pp.832–834). Due to the complex power dynamics of interviewing people who are in privileged positions, as well as (in this

⁴⁰ Due to legal considerations, Dr. Goodkind stressed that the insights and opinions he shared with me were solely in his capacity as an Independent Researcher, and did not in any way draw from his work at the US Census Bureau, or reflect the opinions of that body.

case) working across cultural contexts, there are questions to be considered and steps that must be taken in order to ensure that the interview data is valid. Access to elite interviewees can be difficult to procure (Goldstein 2002), the interviewer needs work hard to establish credibility (Hochschild 2009), positionality must be thoroughly considered (Herod 1999), questions of language and communication contemplated (Mikecz 2012), and attention given to the ways in which cultural differences can be navigated without causing confusion or misunderstandings (Gins 1999).

Each of these unique facets of interviewing elites was considered in designing this portion of the project, and steps were taken to mitigate the risks of such a research design. With regard to interviewee access, I first leveraged the extensive formal and informal contacts of my supervisor to establish contact with a core group of interviewees (Gu Baochang, Wang Feng, etc.) (Darbi & Hall 2014, p.838), and then asked these interviewees to suggest other informants or connect me with them directly, which added to my sample through “snowballing” (Goodman 1961; Goldstein 2002). It is true that snowball sampling has been criticized for introducing sample bias into some investigations (Browne 2005; Noy 2008; Waters 2014), but given the small number of actors with extensive knowledge of the Experiment of Eight Million People, as well as my efforts to reach out to prominent critics (especially Zhang Li and Daniel Goodkind), I believe that the interviews offered sufficiently diverse testimonies. In addition, I took pre-emptive action to establish my credibility and clarify my positionality with the interviewees by sending them written interview requests in English and Mandarin that laid out the goals of my research project and why I wanted to interview them, along with an interview outline of what questions I’d ask (Lilleker 2003). Once they agreed to be interviewed, I also ensured that they received a full consent form, complete with the information surrounding my Oxford CUREC ethics application.

With regard to conducting the interviews, I allowed the interviewees to select the location and language in which they would feel most comfortable speaking to me (Lilleker 2003). While the two Western informants were interviewed via Skype, I met the Chinese interviewees in person over a three-week period in Beijing and Shanghai⁴¹. Wang Qian, Liang Zhongtang, and Chen Wei were the only interviewees who preferred to speak Mandarin; all others chose English for the discussion. At the beginning of each interview, I presented the interviewee with a hard copy of the consent form and informed them that they could provide written or verbal consent to be interviewed and/or have their data recorded; all interviewees provided verbal consent, and each discussion was recorded in its entirety using an Olympus DM-650 Digital Voice Recorder. I dressed in business attire, greeted each interviewee with their proper deferential title, accepted their business card in the correct manner, and presented them with a small gift – an engraved University of Oxford pen – to demonstrate that I understood the ways that respect is communicated in Chinese culture. I also opened each interview with a brief summary of my understanding of the importance of the Experiment of Eight Million People⁴² and my perception of their place in it, as an attempt to further establish my positionality as an “informed outsider”: someone who is a ‘neutral outsider with an inside view’ (Mikecz 2012, p.482; Welch et al. 2002; Mullings 1999; Herod 1999). I was complimented by several interviewees on my understanding of Chinese language and culture, and I did not sense that any elite was offended at any time during the interviews, so these efforts helped garner rich data.

Upon completion of the interviews, the recordings were transferred from the Olympus Digital Voice Recorder to my laptop, assigned a unique number, and uploaded to a password-

⁴¹ Wang Feng was interviewed in Oxford, where he was attending a conference. Zhang Li and Liang Zhongtang were interviewed in Shanghai, while all remaining Chinese interviews occurred in Beijing.

⁴² I did not present interviewees with any of the theoretical determinants or importance of my interest in the Experiment. This was omitted intentionally in order to ensure that any reference or commentary to these theories given by the interviewees arose organically.

protected online drive. Over the course of the next month, I used these recordings to generate written transcripts of each interview. The English interviews were transcribed verbatim, so that the written record was a ‘word-for-word reproduction of verbal data’ (Halcomb & Davidson 2006, p.38), even though this included repetitions and incomplete sentences normal in human speech but awkward in writing. For the three interviews that were conducted in Mandarin, the English transcript was compiled directly from the recording of the spoken Mandarin, and then a separate Chinese transcript was compiled to cross-reference the translation, and to verify quotes with the speakers in both English and Mandarin (Halai 2007). Because these were primarily factual interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009) and weren’t subject to discourse analysis, the transcripts were organized like the script in a play, and the attributes of the conversation flow itself – pauses, sighs, etc. – were not marked (Wodak & Meyer 2001). Any direct quotes that are included in the text of the thesis have been approved by the interviewees, who were allowed to edit their responses slightly if they wished, as promised on the consent form.

When transcription was finished, the compiled English documents were loaded into the NVivo 2010 software – procured through the University of Oxford’s subscription – for analysis. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) has been used since the mid-1980s, but there have been a series of debates over its usefulness and the researcher’s burden in relying on it (Richards 2002). However, it is generally agreed that (when used properly) NVivo allows for the efficient management of ideas, reliable data querying, effective visualization of data, and streamlined data reporting tools (Bazeley 2010). In considering whether to use it or not, I balanced the training time, number and length of documents, coding structure, and software cost (Auld et al. 2007), and determined that the greater efficiency and simplicity of cross-referencing and compiling documents around a theme was worth using NVivo. In addition, the ability to create a node tree with my pre-

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existing coding frame and then inductively add nodes to it when additional themes arose (Crowley et al. 2002) struck me as particularly appropriate. Yet at every point, I kept in mind that ‘the main function of CAQDAS is not to analyse data but rather to aid the analysis process’ (Zamawe 2015), so the following paragraphs detail the manner in which NVivo was utilized. Providing granular information about the ways NVivo was leveraged increases the reliability of my study (Welsh 2002).

As with every portion of this project, the coding was intended to draw a clear line between what findings related to *a priori* or deductive frames of analysis, and which arose inductively from the data. As such, the nodes, or ‘what the researcher uses to group meaning’ (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2011, p.74) created prior to the beginning of coding were designed to relate closely to the original hypotheses. They were organized by groups of hypotheses, and each could be matched with one of the tests presented in the Theory section. The nodes were as follows:

- Ideas
 - Fertility Rebound
 - Optics of Policy Change
 - Authority Continuity
 - Traditional Ideas
- Institutions
 - Central Local Info Divide
- Interests or Actors
 - Elite Factions

Over the course of coding, several additional recurring themes were discovered that were compiled into new nodes under the existing three thematic parent nodes. They were as follows:

- Ideas
 - Low fertility ideation
- Interests or Actors
 - Bureaucratic Resistance
 - Local Interests
 - Peng Peiyun

Beyond the historical validity that was added to the project by triangulating the findings of the documentary analysis with the personal accounts of elite actors directly involved with the

Experiment of Eight Million People, this thematic coding allowed for clarity in distilling the theoretical factors that predicated the outcomes of the policy history (Chapter 9). Therefore, the interview data was able to add another valuable aspect to this account of the population policy in China.

ion

This Appendix has described in depth the approach to identifying, sampling, and analysing the three types of data sources that were leveraged for this project: Chinese newspaper articles, *neibu* documents, and elite interview accounts. In the interests of full transparency, it described the initial approach to deductively investigating hypotheses around the ideational, institutional, and interest-based mechanisms underpinning the course of the Experiment of Eight Million People. Then, it also elucidated the ways in which each of the data sources was re-considered inductively, as both a primary source document and an insight into the periods that were being investigated as possible critical junctures. In doing so, it has completed the project's methodological aim, by providing a final way in which the thesis was completed in a transparent, justifiable, and replicable manner.

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