

# Population Planning after the One-Child Policy: Shifting Modes of Political Steering in China

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## **Abstract**

Since late 2013, one of China's most controversial policies – the one-child policy – has been gradually phased out, culminating in the reorganization of the National Health and Family Planning Commission in early 2018, which saw it drop the family planning part from its name. Has China forgone population intervention and started to pursue a liberal population policy? This article demonstrates that the Chinese political leadership is still determined to steer the direction of future demographic developments, even though it changed course and has to employ new modes of steering. In fact, it has even elevated political steering of demographic developments to new heights under the rubric of 'top-level design' (*dingceng sheji*). This study takes a comparative look at the two ends of the life course, birth and old age, to reveal the continuity and change in population planning and policy discourses in China.

In late 2013, China's newly installed government under Xi Jinping first decided to relax and then two years later to abolish its decades-old 'one-child policy' (OCP). The news was received with a sense of relief in the Western press. Many reports recounted the numerous problematic aspects of the OCP, such as forced abortions and sterilizations, a skewed sex ratio, the rapid aging of society and shrinking labor supply. The reports also often highlighted that the policy might have been unnecessary in the first place, because the social changes accompanying economic development –urbanization, rising educational standards, more self-determination for women, etc. – would have depressed the birth rate by default without employing the draconian measures associated with the OCP.<sup>1</sup> Now demographers argue that Chinese couples would be reluctant to take up the opportunity to have a

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<sup>1</sup> Martin K. Whyte, Feng Wang and Yong Cai, 'Challenging myths about China's one-child policy', *China Journal* 74 (2015), pp. 144-159; Zhongwei Zhao and Guangyu Zhang, 'Socioeconomic factors have been the major driving force of China's fertility changes since the mid-1990s', *Demography* (2018). DOI: 10.1007/s13524-018-0662-y.

second child, simply because the costs of raising two children seem prohibitive: many families already struggle to invest into their child's education and women may face serious hurdles to rejoin the workforce after repeated childbirth.<sup>2</sup>

While these practical problems are all too real, many reports were decidedly written in 'past tense,' seemingly suggesting that the time of state meddling in the most private affairs of Chinese citizens was a thing of the past. The capstone of policy redirection was the renaming of the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFP) in March 2018 which dropped the family planning part (now: *Guojia weisheng jiankang weiyuanhui*). Domestic as well as foreign observers saw this as "dismantling" of the commission.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to this impression, we argue that the Chinese government has taken a renewed interest in population planning and has even increased its efforts to steer the population in various ways – including a determined attempt to raise the birth rate. Instead of simply dismantling its population planning bureaucracy the Chinese state is, in fact, reorganizing it to make it more effective in tackling the demographic challenge of rapid aging and a declining labor force. And instead of devolving birth control completely to the individual couples, Xi Jinping has declared population policy to fall within the policy fields that need 'top-level design' (*dingceng sheji*) by the central leadership.<sup>4</sup>

An expression of this has been the comprehensive mid-range plan on population development covering the years 2016 through 2030.<sup>5</sup> This document effectively creates a new top layer of state planning and redefines the population policy field: it includes not just birth planning, but also the crucial areas of aging as well as urbanization and migration – to each of which the State Council also devoted a more specific five-year plan (FYP). While the OCP is gone for good, population planning in this broader understanding is alive and well and it will stay here for the foreseeable future. Below we

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<sup>2</sup> Yun Zhou, 'The dual demands: gender equity and fertility intentions after the one-child policy', *Journal of Contemporary China* XX(Y), (2018) DOI: ...

<sup>3</sup> Zhang Hui, 'China to dismantle family planning commission', *Global Times* (13 March 2018), available at: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1093185.shtml> (accessed: 15 April 2018). Liyan Qi and Fanfan Wang, 'China's Notorious Family Planning Agency Fades Into History', *Wall Street Journal* (14 March 2018), available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-signals-shift-away-from-birth-restrictions-as-population-ages-1521027577> (accessed: 15 April 2018).

<sup>4</sup> 'Yingdui laolinghua xuyao dingceng sheji' ['Top-level design required to counter aging'], available at: <http://www.yicai.com/news/4710702.html> (accessed 20 April 2018).

<sup>5</sup> 'Guojia renkou fazhan guihua (2016-2030 nian)' ['National Population Development Plan (2016-2030)]. Issue date: 30/12/2016. A list of all major official documents scrutinized for this analysis appears in the appendix.

will use political steering theory to make sense of population planning in the post-OCP period, with a focus on the two contrasting aspects of the demographic cycle, birth and old age.

Birth and old age related policies are well-suited for comparison because these are intimately connected. Not only is the speed of China's aging a direct consequence of its earlier birth control efforts, but policies ultimately affect family arrangements across three generations: middle-aged couples are now called upon to have a second child. Simultaneously, they may either depend on the older generation for childrearing or face challenges in caring for their elderly parents. In addition, we will highlight how similar conceptions of the two groups – children and elderly – have arisen and seem to have mutually influenced each other.

We employ political steering theory, introduced in more detail below. Political steering is an actors-centric theory that focuses on how steering subjects (usually government actors) intentionally coordinate action of steering objects (e.g. lower levels of government and societal actors).<sup>6</sup> Below we differentiate between four ideal-types of steering modes and show how political steering of population policy shifted from 'hard' or hierarchical steering to indirect or soft forms, for instance, using competition or discourse. Thus, to preview our findings, the Chinese leadership is actively promoting its two-child policy as the new norm through a range of concrete support policies and related propaganda. In the subfield of old-age care the government has redoubled its efforts to create a comprehensive care system by opening up the sector to market and non-profit actors. All of these changes are accompanied by re-conceptualizations of the population (or specific parts thereof) and its relationship to the economy. We pay particular attention to this discursive dimension of policy making because, arguably, the intended changes in both subfields (birth planning and old age) require a novel understanding of these issues to be successful. Therefore, we submit that steering through discourses—in Foucault's understanding—will become even more important than before.

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<sup>6</sup> Renate Mayntz, *Soziale Dynamik und politische Steuerung: Theoretische und methodologische Überlegungen* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1997), pp. 189-193; Bob Jessop, 'Metagovernance', in Mark Bevir, ed., *The SAGE Handbook of Governance* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011), p. 111.

In short, this article presents a timely overview of a highly controversial, yet crucial policy field with important implications for China's economic prospects. Besides secondary literature and some background interviews with population specialists in Beijing the paper draws on a broad array of state plans and other policy documents (see appendix). These are analyzed using the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse which places particular emphasis on the institutional structures producing certain discourse formations.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: the next section presents an outline of our approach based on political steering theory. Next, we present an overview of population planning in contemporary China based on a survey of policy documents and with a focus on the two contrasting aspects of the demographic cycle, birth and old age. Before concluding, we discuss the (new) discourse on population that have come to light.

## Four Modes of Political Steering

Conceptually, this study employs political steering theory as developed by Fritz Scharpf and Renate Mayntz to take into clear focus the modes and instruments of steering.<sup>8</sup> We hold that political steering theory is highly relevant for our understanding of the Chinese case, especially since the re-centralization under Xi Jinping. The reason is that it proceeds from clearly distinguishing between the *subjects and objects of steering* – in contrast to the assumption of a blurring of these boundaries and a horizontal relationship in governance theories.

Political steering theory focuses on the *steering modes* and *instruments* employed in the respective policy field. Modes of steering (understood here as ideal-types) range from hard steering through hierarchy ('command & control') on the one hand to much less hierarchical soft steering through

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<sup>7</sup> Reiner Keller, 'The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD)', *Human Studies* 34(1) (2011), pp. 43-65; Reiner Keller, *Doing Discourse Research: An Introduction to Social Scientists* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Fritz Scharpf, 'Politische Steuerung und Politische Institutionen', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 30(1) (1989): pp. 10-21; Fritz Scharpf, *Interaktionsformen: Akteurszentrierter Institutionalismus in der Politikforschung* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000); Mayntz, *Soziale Dynamik*; Renate Mayntz, *Über Governance: Institutionen und Prozesse politischer Regelung* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2005); Wolfgang Streeck, 'Von der Gesellschaftsteuerung zur sozialen Kontrolle: Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert Soziologie in Theorie und Praxis', *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 1 (2015): pp. 63-80.

discursive practices on the other.<sup>9</sup> In the middle between these two extremes, we identify indirect forms of steering, e.g. using negotiations or (economic or political) competition in the ‘shadow of hierarchy’.

**[Table 1 about here]**

Negotiations or ‘bargaining’ – involving either lower-level state actors or non-state actors – are an important feature not just in democratic settings originally used to develop political steering theory. Lampton, for instance, long ago argued that it constitutes an essential mode of policy making in China’s ‘fragmented authoritarianism’.<sup>10</sup> We see negotiations as a special mode of political steering alongside others and follow Scharpf in highlighting the role of the ‘shadow of hierarchy’:<sup>11</sup> even in situations where local state actors or social forces are participating in the settling of societal problems the central state’s authority is always looming in the background. Thus, if the settlement fails to satisfy state policy makers they could always (and often will) intervene (and other actors take this possibility into account).

Competition-based steering also has a long pedigree in reform era China with some authors highlighting the role played by fiscal competition in the economic realm,<sup>12</sup> others seeing experimentation and local political competition more broadly as governing methods in China.<sup>13</sup> Again, we submit that steering using either an economic or a political logic of competition is a special mode of steering that has to be seen as one of several in an overall mix of steering modes.

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<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Arndt and Richter, Anna, ‘Steuerung durch diskursive Praktiken’, in Gerhard Göhler, Ulrike Höppner and Sybille De La Rosa (eds.) *Weiche Steuerung. Studien zur Steuerung durch diskursive Praktiken, Argumente und Symbole* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009), pp. 27-73.

<sup>10</sup> David Lampton, ‘A Plum for a Peach: Bargaining, Interest, and Bureaucratic Politics in China’, in Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David Lampton (eds.) *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 34-59.

<sup>11</sup> Scharpf, *Interaktionsformen*, pp. 323-335.

<sup>12</sup> Gabriella Montinola, Yingyi Qian and Barry Weingast, ‘Federalism, Chinese Style: The Political Basis for Economic Success’, *World Politics* 41(1) (1995), pp. 50-81.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Heilmann, ‘Policy Experimentation in China’s Economic Rise’, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43(1) (2008), pp. 1-26; Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (eds.), *Mao’s Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011); Sebastian Heilmann, *Red Swan: How Unorthodox Policy Making Facilitated China’s Rise* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2018).

Employing political steering as analytical lens sheds new light on state power and population politics in China. Building on Foucault's concept of 'neoliberal biopolitics', Greenhalgh and Winckler argued that the Chinese party-state gradually moved to employ this as its preferred strategy.<sup>14</sup> This strategy utilizes discursive power to steer the subjects, recast as 'autonomous individuals', towards politically preferred behaviors (the 'conduct of conduct').<sup>15</sup> However, we argue that this discursive turn happened in the 'shadow of hierarchy', i.e. being directed by the party-state which also sets and enforces the parameters of the discourse. In this sense, it is 'illiberal' rather than 'neoliberal'.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the hard edge of previous direct steering instruments never disappeared completely.

As will be seen, although all four modes continue to exist in the population policy field, there is a shift in the post-OCP period from hard steering based on direct hierarchical control to a combination of other modes of steering, including negotiation, competition and discursive soft steering. However, as top-level design is emphasized the role of the 'shadow of hierarchy' is evident.

## The History of Population Planning in China

The basic idea of population planning arose from Mao Zedong's concerns with the 'chaotic' (unplanned) nature of human reproduction that stood in contrast to the emerging central economic planning in the 1950s.<sup>17</sup> So, there was from the beginning an intimate linkage between demographic and economic concerns and goals.<sup>18</sup> But the way population was discursively constructed as a target of planning has changed over time—at one time describing a large population as a resource beneficial for quick economic development, at another being concerned that fast population growth would undermine any progress in building the economy.

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<sup>14</sup> Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2005); Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality and Critique* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Kipnis, *China and Postsocialist Anthropology: Theorizing Power and Society After Communism* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2008), p. 194.

<sup>17</sup> Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population*.

<sup>18</sup> Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949 – 2005* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Eventually, the latter view dominated the Deng Xiaoping era,<sup>19</sup> i.e. the period that saw the introduction of the radical OCP.<sup>20</sup> The heyday of population planning came in the 1990s, but moving into the 2000s, the idea of ‘giving birth according to plan’ was gradually supplanted by the notion of ‘giving birth according to law’.<sup>21</sup> Population policy now relied on stipulating the legal birth numbers per couple in very detailed provincial legislation,<sup>22</sup> and gradually the policy makers switched to ‘neoliberal biopolitics’ as a preferred implementation strategy.<sup>23</sup> As China entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the transition to a stable low fertility—below replacement level—seemed to be achieved, and a political battle ensued between proponents and opponents of policy change.<sup>24</sup> Even after the end of the OCP, policy pronouncements continue to emphasize the importance of its status as a ‘basic national policy’ (*jiben guoce*).<sup>25</sup> And despite sweeping revisions of the PRC constitution in March 2018, the clause on birth planning remained untouched. So, while the content of birth policies has changed over time, their legal standing has not.

In parallel to the above-described developments, official views on the relationship between population and economy also shifted. At the start of the OCP, population was mostly conceived as mouths to be fed and workers to be provided with employment, hence as a *burden* from the perspective of economic planners. At the same time, not only an excessive quantity, but also a lack of ‘population quality’ (*renkou suzhi/suyang*) was identified as a major problem.<sup>26</sup> Over the 1990s, the emphasis on the quality aspect increased and with it the notion of population as *human resources* that needed to be harnessed for future economic development. In addition, rapid aging of the

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<sup>19</sup> In detail see Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, on how this view prevailed over its alternatives.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Scharping, *Birth Control in China 1949-2000: Population Policy and Demographic Development* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population*.

<sup>22</sup> Scharping, *Birth Control in China*.

<sup>23</sup> Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population*.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Scharping, ‘Abolishing the one-child policy: stages, issues, and the political process’, *Journal of Contemporary China* XX(Y), (2018), DOI: ...

<sup>25</sup> ‘Xi Jinping dui renkou yu jihua shengyu gongzuo zuochu zhongyao zhishi, qiangdiao jihua shengyu jiben guoce bixu changqi jianchi’ [‘Xi Jinping gives out important instructions on birth planning work, emphasizes that birth planning is a fundamental state policy to be upheld for the long term’], *China Youth Daily* (19 May 2016), available online: [http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2016-05/19/nw.D110000zgqnb\\_20160519\\_2-01.htm](http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2016-05/19/nw.D110000zgqnb_20160519_2-01.htm) (accessed: 15 April 2018); National Health and Family Planning Commission, ‘Shisanwu’ quanguo jihua shengyu shiye fazhan guihua [‘13<sup>th</sup> National Five-Year-Plan on Development of the Birth Control Sector’]. Issue date: 25/02/2017.

<sup>26</sup> Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population*.

Chinese society—an inevitable outcome of the demographic transition but hastened by the OCP—started to rise on the political agenda.<sup>27</sup> For better policy coordination the State Council set up a National Work Committee on Aging (NWCA) in 1999 and began to publish plans on aging alongside the regular FYPs on social and economic development.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the history of state planning for old age is much shorter than that of birth planning.

## Birth Planning in the New Era

Birth planning has had far reaching ramifications and is arguably one of the most ambitious attempts at political steering ever undertaken in China. Thus, the significance of the change of direction in birth planning—from restricting population growth to encouraging higher fertility (around the replacement level)—cannot be overstated.<sup>29</sup> This change was eventually initiated when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adopted a policy of ‘one singleton [parent], two children’ (*dandu erhai*) rule (or ‘conditional two-child policy’) at the third plenary session of the 18th Central Committee on November 12, 2013.<sup>30</sup> Two years later, it was replaced by a ‘universal two-child policy’ (*quanmian lianghai zhengce*).<sup>31</sup> With the relaxation of birth control, China’s population policy has finally entered a new era that will redefine the relationships between state, family and individual.

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<sup>27</sup> Central Committee and State Council, ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu jiaqiang laoling gongzuo de jue ding’ [‘Decision on Strengthening the Work Regarding Aging’]. Issue date: 21/8/2000.

<sup>28</sup> The first one was actually a seven-year plan (1994-2000). We draw on all of these plans (covering the years 1994—2020) among other plans and policy documents for the analysis below (see Appendix for a list). One needs to be clear about the nature of these plans in contemporary China, though. Their focus is no longer to set concrete and mandatory numerical targets. At most, they contain ‘binding’ (*yueshuxing*) targets for a limited number of indicators. The majority of numbers included are only ‘prospective targets’ (*yuqi mubiao*) and the policies the plans lay out in order to achieve them are usually described in quite vague language. Nevertheless, these documents, when read together and compared across time and issue area, reveal important insights on how political thinking on population issues is evolving. On the important role of planning in China, see Heilmann, *Red Swan*, chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>29</sup> Stuart Basten and Jiang, Quanbao, ‘China’s Family Planning Policies: Recent Reforms and Future Prospects’, *Studies in Family Planning* 45(4) (2014), pp. 493-509; Zhongwei Zhao, ‘Closing of a Sociodemographic Chapter of Chinese History’, *Population and Development Review* 41(4) (2015), pp. 681-686.

<sup>30</sup> Central Committee, ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu quanmian shenhua gaige ruogan zhongda wenti de jue ding’ [‘Decision on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reforms’]. Issue date: 11/11/2013.

<sup>31</sup> Central Committee and State Council, ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu shishi quanmian lianghai zhengce, gaige wanshan jihua shengyu fuwu guanli de jue ding’ [‘Decision on Implementing the Universal Two-Child Policy, Reforming and Perfecting the Administration of Birth Planning Services’]. Issue date: 31/12/2015; Isabelle Attané, ‘Second child decision in China’, *Population and Development Review* 42(3) (2016), pp. 519-536.

Furthermore, the policy field itself has been redefined in the process. The merger of the National Family Planning Commission with the Ministry of Health in early 2013 set the stage for the above-mentioned policy changes and indicated that birth control was to be deemphasized. This has to be seen in light of the fact that aging loomed ever larger on the agenda of population policy, and old age is intimately linked with numerous health-related issues. Thus, the fusion of health and population policies in one administrative body is required for coordinated policy making—clear evidence of the attempt to devise a ‘top-level design’ for political steering of population trends.

The recent redirection of population policy has its roots in the unintended consequences of previous birth restrictions. It is claimed, officially, that 400 million births have been averted because of these birth restrictions.<sup>32</sup> Although the exact impact of these regulations is hard to assess, this claim is certainly an overstatement given that the rapid socioeconomic development during the reform era would have depressed the fertility rate by default.<sup>33</sup> Whatever the weight of the different factors, these policies have hastened the demographic transition to total fertility rates (TFR) below replacement level (i.e. a TFR of 2.1): the national TFR dropped from 5.81 in 1970 to 2.86 (1980), 2.31 (1990), 1.71 (2000), to 1.56 (2012) according to a recent study.<sup>34</sup>

The inevitable corollary of this rapid demographic transition is that China’s population is aging fast. While this has long been anticipated by the Chinese government, the speed of population aging has clearly exceeded earlier expectations. Projections of future population scenarios differ considerably

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<sup>32</sup> Central Committee and State Council, ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu quanmian jiaqiang renkou he jihua shengyu gongzuo tongchou jiejie renkou wenti de jue ding [‘Decision on Comprehensively Strengthening the Coordination of Population and Birth Planning Work to Solve the Population Problem’]. Issue date: 22/1/2007.

<sup>33</sup> Whyte, Wang and Cai, ‘Challenging Myths’; Wang Feng et al., ‘Is demography just a numerical exercise? Numbers, politics, and legacies of China’s one-child policy’, *Demography* (2018). DOI: 10.1007/s13524-018-0658-7.

<sup>34</sup> Yuxia Zhuang, ‘Population and procreation’, in Anqi Xu, John DeFrain and Wenrong Liu (eds.) *The Chinese Family Today* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 75. Due to data problems, these estimates need to be treated with some caution, however, see Thomas Scharping, ‘China’s demographic transition: certainties and uncertainties in current population development’, in Hans Bertram and Nancy Ehlert (eds.) *Family, Ties, and Care: Family Transformation in a Plural Modernity* (Budrich: Ridgebrook, 2012), pp. 411-428.

depending on various assumptions.<sup>35</sup> Still, the share of China's population aged 65 and older will jump to 26.3 percent by mid-century even with a medium pace scenario of aging, thereby surpassing the average equivalent figure for developed countries.<sup>36</sup> Through relaxing previous strictures to a universal two-child policy, the central authorities' goal is to lower the growing share of old-age population by two percentage points by 2050.<sup>37</sup> Although this may seem like a solid target, in fact, there is no way in the future to ascertain whether it has successfully been realized since the authorities failed to provide concrete figures for either projected or targeted percentages. Policy makers now admit that a mere tinkering with the rules is not enough, but that a 'triple transformation' of the whole system is needed. A recent outline issued jointly by the Central Committee and State Council elaborates:

A transformation from taking restricting the population quantity as key, to raising [population] quality and improving its structure [in terms of age and gender]; from taking administration as key, to paying more attention to family services; from primarily relying on government forces, to diversified co-governance (*duoyuan gongzhi*) by government, society and citizens.<sup>38</sup>

Accordingly, central authorities formulate the 'principle of birth planning in the new era': 'to respect the main role of the family in birth planning, while leading the masses to engage in responsible and planned birth giving'.<sup>39</sup> This formulation reveals China's long-standing Foucauldian approach of 'soft steering'.<sup>40</sup> Importantly, it is characteristic of the Chinese approach towards soft steering that it takes

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<sup>35</sup> Tao Liu and Li Sun, 'An apocalyptic vision of ageing in China: old age care for the largest elderly population in the world', *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 48 (2015), pp. 354-364; Baozhen Luo, 'China will get rich before it grows old: Beijing's demographic problems are overrated', *Foreign Affairs* May/June 2015, pp. 19-24.

<sup>36</sup> Yinhua Mai, Xiujuan Peng and Wei Chen, 'How fast is the population ageing in China?' *Asian Population Studies* 9(2) (2013), pp. 216-239.

<sup>37</sup> "Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu shishi quanmian lianghaizhengce, gaige wanshan jihua shengyu fuwu guanli de jue ding" xuexi xuanchuan tigang' ['Outline for Studying and Propagandizing the "Central Committee/State Council Decision on Implementing the Universal Two-Child Policy, Reforming and Perfecting the Administration of Birth Planning Services"']. Issue date: 22/09/2016.

<sup>38</sup> "Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu shishi quanmian lianghaizhengce".

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Arndt and Richter, 'Steuerung', p. 48; Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population*.

place in the 'shadow of hierarchy', i.e. the party-state's authority is looming large in the background and there is always the possibility of its intervention.

Nevertheless, the 'speech space'<sup>41</sup> has been opened up to a greater extent and domestic critics of China's population policy point out that in order to achieve this redefinition, policy makers and administrators themselves need to first free their thinking from 'the shackles [...] of a traditional approach to solving China's population issues through control'.<sup>42</sup> Even then, the odds of success in raising the birth rate significantly remain slim, as seen from the unenthusiastic initial reaction to the relaxation of second births at the national level,<sup>43</sup> as well as earlier local moves in this direction.<sup>44</sup>

The question of policy success or failure is politically charged: responding to critical assessments of the universal two-child policy's effects based on data from the National Statistical Bureau,<sup>45</sup> the NHFPC presented its own data on birth numbers significantly in excess of the former. Thus, instead of the 17.86 million births in 2016 based on a one-percent sample survey NHFPC claimed the number of live childbirths in hospitals to be 18.46 million, or 11.5 percent higher than the previous year, when the conditional two-child policy was still enforced.<sup>46</sup> Embarrassingly, exactly one year later, in early 2018, NHFPC officials had to concede that both sets of figures showed declines in birth numbers in

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<sup>41</sup> Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, p. 51.

<sup>42</sup> Mu Guangzong, Mao Changbao and Zhou Jiantao, 'Quanmian luoshi erhai zhengce. Cujin renkou junheng fazhan' ['Fully implement two-child policy, promote balanced population development'], *Zhongguo Yan'an Ganbu Xueyuan Xuebao* 9(4) (2016), p. 118.

<sup>43</sup> Basten and Jiang, 'China's family planning'; Attané, 'Second child decision'.

<sup>44</sup> Hao Luo and Zhuoyan Mao, 'From fertility intention to fertility behavior: an empirical study in China's Jiangsu province based on the theory of planned behavior', *Asian Population Studies* 10(2) (2014), pp. 195-207; Yan Wei and Li Zhang, 'Re-examination of the Yicheng two-child program', *China Journal* 72 (2014), pp. 98-120; Yingchun Ji et al., 'Do parents matter? Intergenerational ties and fertility preferences in a low-fertility context', *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 1(4) (2015), pp. 485-514.

<sup>45</sup> 'Xin zeng er hai shao yu yuqi: Yang hai gui wu jingli shi zhuyin' ['Additional second births below forecast: high child-rearing expenses and lack of energy main causes]. *Caixin* (26 January 2017), available at: <http://m.china.caixin.com/m/2017-01-26/101049212.html> (accessed: 15 April 2018).

<sup>46</sup> Zhang Ni, 'Quanmian lianghai zhengce shishi yi nian xiaoguo ruhe? Zhe xie shuzi gao ni da'an' ['What are the effects of the universal two-child policy after one year? These figures give you an answer'], *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), January 23, 17.

2017, by 3.5 and 5.7 percentage points respectively (17.23 or 17.58 million in absolute numbers), triggering online debates about an impending ‘avalanche-like’ decrease in China’s total population.<sup>47</sup>

These data attest to the fact that low fertility has, by now, become an established social norm, and Chinese families tend to see additional children primarily as a burden – just as state propaganda told them for decades. In view of this, it is almost certain that it will be an uphill battle to convince families now to have a second child and propaganda alone most likely will not be sufficient for policy success. The new slogan, since 2016, is to encourage couples to ‘give birth according to policy’ (instead of according to law, as previously), referring to the universal two-child policy.<sup>48</sup> This seems to suggest that childbearing is no longer seen as a right that every citizen enjoys (within the limits set by law), which includes the right *not* to have the maximum allowed number of children. Rather, ‘childbearing according to policy’ (*an zhengce shengyu*) would imply that every couple is called upon to have two children under the current policy. And in fact, all the provincial birth-planning regulations that were revised after the introduction of the universal two-child policy include the phrase that the government ‘advocates having two children’ (*tichang yi dui fufu sheng liang ge zinu*) – echoing verbatim the formulation used under the OCP.

This propaganda approach to politically influence birth rates is bitterly ridiculed by some Chinese academics. Thus, Mu Guangzong, a veteran demographer and long-standing critic of the OCP, and his co-authors sarcastically propose to establish a ‘national anti-abortion day’ on September 25 (the very date, when back in 1980 the CCP started the OCP with its famous ‘open letter’ to party members) to commemorate the many additional babies that never were born and propagate higher fertility.<sup>49</sup> This piece of ‘policy advice’—certainly not to be taken literally—is an indication of how frustrated Chinese population specialists had become with the futility and high social and psychological costs of the OCP. Framing this bitter criticism of past policy mistakes as innocuous policy advice is also indicative that

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Zhongguo renkou cheng xuebenshi jianshao? Weijiwei zhuanjia: jianzhi shi xiaohua’ [‘Is China facing avalanche-like population decline? NHFPC Expert: Simply a joke’], available at: <http://economy.caijing.com.cn/20180129/4400682.shtml> (accessed: 15 April 2018).

<sup>48</sup> “‘Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu shishi quanmian lianghaizhengce’”.

<sup>49</sup> Mu, Mao and Zhou, ‘Quanmian luoshi erhai zhengce’, p. 118.

even under current circumstances with a widened speech space the ‘shadow of hierarchy’ still looms large and that it remains dangerous to test the limits of the discursive field.

The mid-range population development plan for 2016—2030 seems to admit that two children per couple would be an unrealistic expectation. It envisages the effects of the two-child policy to fully unfold by 2020 and raise the TFR to 1.8 (up from the official figure of 1.5 to 1.6 for 2015). However, no further upward movement is projected for 2030. Even this target will require sustained efforts to incentivize and facilitate second births, especially in the larger cities. Among the family support measures adopted in the population development plans are extended maternity leave, a new system of paternity leave and policies to improve the return of mothers to the workplace after (second) childbirth. Provinces have responded to these calls by, for instance, extending periods for maternity and paternity leaves on top of national requirements. As Figure 1 shows, there is considerable variation between regions in terms of generosity which suggests that there is an emerging political competition for the most suitable policies.<sup>50</sup> So far, large implementation gaps remained with respect to social maternity insurance,<sup>51</sup> but the 2011—2020 development plan for women envisages universal coverage of urban and rural women. It also argues for better support for women returning to work after giving birth.

**[Figure 1 about here]**

A related crucial issue is improved supply of cribs and daycare facilities at the community (*shequ*) level. To this latter end, private investments in this field are encouraged. The public debate on the changes needed to accommodate larger (urban) families has only just begun and it is likely to be just as contentious as in many other societies facing similar issues.<sup>52</sup> So far, Hainan is the only province which stipulates expanded capacity building for childcare in its regulations. Plans dedicated to the

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<sup>50</sup> We collected and compared all available and relevant provincial-level documents for all 31 provinces beginning with the 2014 round of revisions, a total of 101 documents. Only Tibet has not issued an updated version of its regulations at the time of writing.

<sup>51</sup> Tao Liu and Li Sun, ‘Maternity insurance in China: global standards and local responses’, *Asian Women* 31(4) (2015), pp. 23-51.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Guanyu wanshan 0-3 sui ertong zhaoliao tixi, cujin erhai zhengce luoshi de jianyi’ [‘On Improving the System of Daycare for Toddlers between 0 and 3 Years of Age. Suggestions for Promoting the Implementation of the Two-Child Policy’], *Zhongguo Fuyun* 4 (2016), pp. 20-21.

development of women and children have appealed to local communities to increase the supply of creches and kindergartens since the 1990s but apparently with limited effect. Recognizing the need for coordinated development of this sector—and maybe also to keep itself useful on the eve of administrative restructuring—NHFPC officials announced at the March 2018 session of the National People’s Congress that the commission will draft and pass a development plan targeting for toddlers.<sup>53</sup> This is further evidence that the administrative downgrading of family planning does not mean the end of population planning.

To cope with the expected (or at least, hoped for) baby boom local governments and private investors are also called upon to increase the number of beds in birth clinics or stations by 89,000 and the number of midwives by 140,000 until 2020. Likewise, the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP on birth-planning requires localities in which the target group of the two-child policy is especially concentrated to prepare well in terms of medical techniques for higher-order births and late birth-giving.<sup>54</sup> Birth planning authorities are to expand their services to women willing to have another child free of charge, including medical checkups (to assess health and fertility), measures to restore fertility (IUD removal, surgery) and, in case of need, even reproductive treatments.

Especially this latter clause—actively helping couples longing for another child—seems at odds with the predominantly negative image of China’s birth-planning bureaucracy. But it is in line with the idea that Chinese policy makers continue to see population and fertility as something that can be managed top-down by state regulations. Provincial regulations add more specifics: thirteen provinces explicitly offer IUD removal without charge. In addition, fifteen provinces allow surgery to recover reproductive capacity (often to be approved on a case-by-case basis), while seven even offer to financially compensate for it. While these measures intent to ensure higher birth rates, regional governments have not pulled out all stops: twenty-four provincial-level units explicitly stipulate to

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Weijiwei fuzhuren: ling dao san sui yingyou’er fazhan guihua jiang zai niannei chutai’ [‘NHFPC vice-head: Development plan for babies and infants aged zero to three will come out this year’], published 11 March 2018, available at: <https://news.qq.com/a/20180311/018012.htm> (accessed: 15 April 2018).

<sup>54</sup> For instance, medical experts worry about higher rates of postpartum complications due to repeated cesarean sections; Lei Hou et al., ‘Cross Sectional Study of Modes of Delivery and Maternal and Perinatal Outcomes in Mainland China’, *PLOS ONE* (February 2017). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0171779.

collect fines (euphemistically called 'social support payments' or *shehui fuyangfei*) from unwed mothers. So, state actors continue to steer fertility behavior towards its own ideal of 'civilized, harmonious and stable families'.

A second policy goal that is closely related to increasing fertility levels stems from an unintended (and arguably avoidable) consequence of China's strict birth controls, namely the skewed sex ratio.

Although the extent and drivers of this demographic development are still hotly debated,<sup>55</sup> the majority view has been that this disparity is caused by (illegal) sex-selective abortions of female fetuses due to son preference in Chinese society, compounded by excessively high female infant deaths. This has given rise to an increasing mismatch on the marriage market. Commonly cited figures for 'missing girls' in marriageable age are in the range of 20 to 30 million.<sup>56</sup> Li et al. estimate that for every year from 2016 to 2046 more than one million males entering the marriage market will be unable to find a spouse.<sup>57</sup> Beyond the psychological costs and social or even political dangers that this situation will generate, Chinese policy makers now also recognize it as an economic problem: the shrinking number of women in childbearing age will mean even greater challenges for raising the birth rate, and thus increase the pressure on the labor market. This also complicates the anti-aging goals.<sup>58</sup> Thus the mid-range population development plan projects to lower the sex ratio at birth to below 112:100 in 2020 and to 107:100 in 2030 (from the official figure of 113.5 male births to 100 female births in 2015). And the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP proposes a propaganda campaign against sex-specific abortions (which are illegal anyway).

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<sup>55</sup> Isabelle Attané, *The Demographic Masculinization of China. Hoping for A Son* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013); Charis Loh and Elizabeth J. Remick, 'China's skewed sex ratio and the one-child policy', *China Quarterly* 222 (2015), pp. 295-319; Yaojiang Shi and John J. Kennedy, 'Delayed registration and identifying the "missing girls" in China', *China Quarterly* 228 (2016), pp. 1-22.

<sup>56</sup> Loh and Remick, 'China's skewed sex ratio', p. 297.

<sup>57</sup> Shuzhuo Li, Quanbao Jiang and Marcus W. Feldman, 'The male surplus in China's marriage market: review and prospects, in: Isabelle Attané and Baochang Gu (eds.) *Analysing China's Population: Social Change in a New Demographic Era* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014), p. 85.

<sup>58</sup> 'Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu shishi quanmian lianghai zhengce, gaige wanshan jihua shengyu fuwu guanli de jue ding' ['Central Committee/State Council Decision on Implementing the Universal Two-Child Policy, Reforming and Perfecting the Administration of Birth Planning Services'], Issue date: 31/12/2015; Jane Golley and Rod Tyers, 'Gender 'rebalancing' in China', *Asian Population Studies* 10(2) (2014), pp. 125-143.

Meanwhile, the issue of aging has reached the highest echelons of power in China, as policy makers now explicitly emphasize the strengthening of the ‘top-level design’ of the policy.<sup>59</sup> In late May 2016, the CCP Politburo convened a study session on aging at which general secretary Xi Jinping personally delivered the keynote address. His speech was subsequently the focus of policy conferences at which the challenges and opportunities of current population dynamics were discussed among political leaders and academics.<sup>60</sup>

The upshot of these high-level deliberations so far has been a renewed push to address old-age related problems with a fresh sense of urgency, and a comprehensive set of policies directed at the key problem of how to take care of the growing segment of senior citizens in various dimensions. Thus, the relaxation of fertility restrictions is only one measure in this context and not a substitute for finding better solutions to problems relating to old-age care. And the answer provided by the central political authorities is not less population planning, but more of it.

## Plans on Aging

On the face of it, the ideas how to cope with future societal aging have remained remarkably stable over the past two decades. Some key ideas have been consistently included especially since the seminal document on aging issued jointly by the Central Committee and State Council in 2000. The changes can only be detected by closely comparing current with earlier documents employing the techniques of discourse analysis. A clear trend emerged in most recent years: a move from combining population issues *and* health to discursively reconstructing aging *as* a public health concern. Another trend is the commercialization of old-age care.

**Family Care.** From the very first plan on aging issued in 1994 the goal has been to build up a three-level care system with families as the basic providers, community (*shequ*) services as support, and

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<sup>59</sup> ‘Xi Jinping: Tuidong laoling shiye quanmian xietiao kechixu fazhan’ [‘Xi Jinping: push forward the project of aging to comprehensively coordinate sustainable development’], Issue date: 29/05/2016, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/28/c\\_1118948763.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/28/c_1118948763.htm) (accessed: 15 April 2018).

<sup>60</sup> ‘Xuexi guanche Xi Jinping zongshuji guanyu jiaqiang laoling gongzuo zhongyao jianghua jingsheng gaoceng luntan zai Beijing juxing’ [‘High-level Conference on Studying General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Important Speech on Strengthening Aging Related Work Convened in Beijing’], Issue date: 04/11/2016, available at: <http://www.cncaprc.gov.cn/contents/2/177437.html> (accessed: 15 April 2018).

social (institutional) care services as the supplement. The emphasis on the family as the main provider is understandable in face of the still severe undersupply of care facilities. This means that (mostly female) family members will continue to shoulder the bulk of care work. This form of caregiving is associated with the traditional value of 'filial piety' (*xiao*) that is firmly rooted in Confucian ethics, but also propagated by the party-state.<sup>61</sup> Although it is somewhat ironic that the Communist party-state falls back on the traditional exhortation of Confucian values, the demand to enhance this value of respect for the elderly has been included in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> FYPs on aging. The 2012 revision of the PRC Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly added a clause to require family members, living apart from their elderly relatives to 'regularly visit or extend greetings' to them. The documents usually remained a bit more circumspect and avoided the Confucian term *xiao(qin)* in favor of calling 'respect for the elderly' (*jinglao*) a 'beautiful virtue of traditional China.' But more recently, Xi Jinping personally called for the incorporation of filial piety into the exclusive list of 'socialist core values' to be propagated vigorously.<sup>62</sup> Thus, political steering in this case primarily relies on exhortations but backs this up with legal requirements, i.e. discursive steering in the 'shadow of hierarchy.'

The reason for the stepped-up propaganda is, of course, that this normative value can no longer be taken for granted. On the one hand, some scholars of Chinese society and family increasingly see this value and the general respect for the elderly undermined by processes of modernization.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, several scholars argue that the norm itself is largely intact, while only the form in which filial piety is being expressed is subject to change and reinterpretation.<sup>64</sup> For instance, they find that

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<sup>61</sup> Rita Jing-Ann Chou, 'Filial piety by contract? The emergence, implementation, and implications of the "family support agreement" in China', *Gerontologist* 51(1) (2010), pp. 3-16.

<sup>62</sup> 'Xi Jinping: Tuidong laoling shiye'. Xi also used the term twice in his policy address to the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress in October 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Chau-Kiu Cheung and Alex Yui-Huen Kwan, 'The erosion of filial piety by modernisation in Chinese cities', *Aging & Society* 29 (2009), pp. 179-198; Nelson Chow and Xue Bai, 'Modernization and its impact on Chinese older people's perception of their own image and status', *International Social Work* 54(6) (2011), pp. 800-815; Xue Bai, 'Alignment or struggle? Exploring socio-demographic correlates of individual modernity in Chinese older people', *Ageing & Society* 36(2016), pp. 133-159; Xue Bai, Daniel W.L. Lai and Aimei Guo, 'Ageism and depression: perceptions of older people as a burden in China', *Journal of Social Issues* 72(1) (2016), pp. 26-46.

<sup>64</sup> Heying Zhan, Xiaotian Feng and Baozhen Luo, 'Placing elderly in institutions in urban China: a reinterpretation of filial piety', *Research on Aging* 30(5) (2008), pp. 543-571; Baozhen Luo and Heying Zhan,

delegating elderly care itself to professional service providers will not be seen as a violation of this norm as long as emotional support is provided by younger relatives. But even those scholars of the latter opinion concede that this transformation of filial piety involves a greater reliance on care arrangements outside the family.

**Community Care.** This brings us to the second level of community services, which are still in very short supply. Here, we find the government employing a hierarchical mode of steering. While the very first plan on aging in the 1990s did not contain any specific goals, beginning with the 10<sup>th</sup> FYP on aging we find a set of concrete numerical targets (alongside a multitude of softer policy goals) that demonstrate that hard steering through hierarchical control is the predominant mode. Table 2 lists some highlights and shows the escalating top-down pressure on local state actors. These top-down pressures also induced horizontal learning and diffusion among localities following the logic of political competition.<sup>65</sup>

To supplement these state efforts, fitter elderly should be exploited as a resource by making them contribute voluntary labor to care for those in need. In this vein, Jiangsu province experiments with ‘senior citizen support banks’ which register voluntary work hours that can be drawn on, once the volunteers themselves need support.<sup>66</sup> Thus, elderly people are, at least in some part, expected to take care of themselves. This idea is also expressed with respect to social organizations the elderlies are encouraged to establish to ‘manage themselves, educate themselves and service themselves’. As a discursive strategy, these provisions play on the internationally recognized concept of ‘active aging’

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‘Filial piety and functional support: understanding intergenerational solidarity among families with migrated children in rural China’, *Ageing International* 37(1) (2011), pp. 69-92; Lin Chen and Minzhi Ye, ‘The role of children’s support in elders’ decision to live in a yanglaoyuan (residential long-term care)’, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 28 (2013), pp. 75- 87; Jun Zhang, ‘(Extended) family car, filial consumer-citizens: becoming properly middle class in post-socialist South China’, *Modern China* 43(1) (2017), pp. 36-65; Stevi Jackson and Jieyu Liu, ‘The social context of aging and intergenerational relationships in Chinese families’, *Journal of Chinese Sociology* 4(2) (2017), pp. 1-5.

<sup>65</sup> Jessica C. Teets, ‘Policy diffusion in China: contracting out elder care’, *China: An International Journal* 14(3) (2016), pp. 88-106.

<sup>66</sup> Wang Xin and Cang Wei, ‘Volunteers pilot ‘bank’ for the elderly’, *China Daily* (Online Edition) (27 October 2015), available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-08/04/content\\_21493773.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-08/04/content_21493773.htm) (accessed: 15 April 2018).

without using this exact phrase.<sup>67</sup> As such, this discursive strategy is quite ambivalent. On the one hand, it can be seen as a benign attempt on the part of the government to steer the aging population towards activities that mutually benefit the elderly and others in society. On the other hand, the concept has a paternalistic bend, for instance, when its proponents argue for combining rights and obligations for the elderly.<sup>68</sup> In an authoritarian political system such as China's it is easy to envision how this might lead to an overbearing attitude on the part of local administrations and even the exclusion of those who fail to become active.

[Table 2 about here]

**Institutional Care.** The third level of care-giving consists of specialized institutions. The local state is still the main provider of this institutional elderly care, even though since at least 2000 the government has tried to encourage increasing investments by 'social forces' (*shehui lilian*) in this sector, i.e. primarily private investors. The 10th and 11th FYPs on aging (but curiously, not the 12th) explicitly mention individual, private and even foreign investments in this 'elderly industry' (*laonian/laoling chanye*). Significantly, the political center is trying to turn the provision of elderly care into an industry (*chanyehua*)—which is a concept strikingly different from *shiye*, since the latter term implies the public goods character of the undertaking. The former term also implies that competition is employed as a mode of steering. While this trend was only hinted at in the early 21st century, it has recently become much more explicit. For instance, the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP but also an earlier document issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs propagate to build up elderly care service firms (*yanglao fuwu qiye*), to use franchising business models and brand-building strategies in order to develop conglomerates or 'dragon-head' enterprises (*longtou qiye*) that are discursively linked with an orderly market structure, higher quality and more standardized products.<sup>69</sup> All of this will be

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<sup>67</sup> Vivian W.Q. Lou, 'Active ageing in mainland China', in Alan Walker and Christoph Aspalter, eds., *Active Ageing in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 126.

<sup>68</sup> Alan Walker, 'The concept of active aging', in Alan Walker and Christoph Aspalter, eds., *Active Ageing in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> 'Minzhengbu guanyu guli he yindao minjian ziben jinru yanglao fuwu lingyu de shishi yijian' ['Ministry of Civil Affairs: Opinions on carrying out the encouragement and guidance of civic capital to enter the field of old-age care services'], Issue date: 24/07/2012.

familiar to students of China's political economy, because it represents the mainstream thinking on the goals and methods of industrial policy in China, more or less irrespective of the sector in question.<sup>70</sup>

What is more, the provision of care facilities by local state actors—though still the primary providers—has been reevaluated over the past two decades. Prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP efforts to increase the supply of care facilities primarily operated with numerical targets that exemplify 'hard steering'. This can be effective but may create problems of its own, such as lack of coordination between different bureaucracies, short-term orientation of local state actors, as well as an imbalanced development of different forms of care provision. Most importantly, political efforts so far are considered far from sufficient in terms of both quantity and quality of care services.<sup>71</sup> In particular, the fixation on plan indicators such as care beds-per-elderlies has led to serious imbalances. Thus, an industry report argues that the vacancy rate of senior care beds stood at 48 percent at the end of 2015, demonstrating that the need is not for more beds per se, but for more professional service providers.<sup>72</sup> In other words, political steering efforts need to be intensified, but by using new modes and instruments.

This explains why the most recent 13<sup>th</sup> FYP changes tack and wants to push old-age care even further in the direction of marketization—employing competition in the 'shadow of hierarchy' as a steering mode. This new push is evident in the exhortation to 'corporatize' public care institutions (*gongban yanglao jigou zhuan wei qiye*) or to set up public-private partnerships (PPP) (*gong-jian min-ying*).

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<sup>70</sup> Margaret M. Pearson, 'The business of governing business in China: institutions and norms of the emerging regulatory state', *World Politics* 57(2) (2005), pp. 296-322.

<sup>71</sup> Wenyi Lin, 'Challenges of long-term care provisions for the elderly in urban China', *China: An International Journal* 12(2) (2014), pp. 144-160; Chang Liu, Zhanlian Feng and Vincent Mor, 'Case-mix and quality indicators in Chinese elder care homes: are there differences between government-owned and private-sector facilities?' *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 62(2) (2014), pp. 371-377; Jun-E Liu et al., 'Living experiences and care needs of Chinese empty-nested elderly people in urban communities in Beijing, China: a qualitative study', *International Journal of Nursing Sciences* 2 (2015), pp. 15-22; Rong Peng and Bei Wu, 'Changes of health status and institutionalization among older adults in China', *Journal of Aging and Health* 27(7) (2015), pp. 1223-1246; Junshan Zhou and Alan Walker, 'The need for community care among older people in China', *Ageing and Society* 36 (2015), pp. 1312-1332; Haiyan Zhu, 'Unmet needs in long-term care and their associated factors among the oldest old in China', *MBC Geriatrics* 15(46) (2015), pp. 1-11.

<sup>72</sup> DBS Asian Insights, 'Eldercare in China: a sunrise industry', *Sector Briefing* 33 (2016) (Asian Insights Office, DBS Group Research), pp. 14-15.

Typically for the Chinese policy process, it was preceded by experiments authorized by the State Council in 2013. Now to increase the efficiency of care institutions private investments are encouraged in any form, be it as separate entities or in cooperation with public providers, as joint ventures, stockholders, partners or by leasing public institutions and running them privately. In line with this commercialization of eldercare, the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Elderly was revised again in 2015 to place for-profit care providers under the purview of the industrial and commercial administration bureaus instead of the civil affairs bureaus (now only responsible for non-profits). In a word, the former are being treated like any regular business. This push for privatization comes at a risk, though: the profit-motive may outweigh the concerns for quality of care and the needs of the elderly. The 13<sup>th</sup> FYP on aging also states that the admission to care facilities should prioritize the neediest cases and that quality standards should be raised. Yet, the market for old-age care services is to be completely opened up and local governments are called upon to assist new private establishments.

On top of these for-profit market actors the political center also envisions a greater role for non-profit organizations (NPOs) or social organizations (*shehui zuzhi*). This is also in accordance with proposals by Chinese academics working on aging.<sup>73</sup> According to official documents, NPOs running care facilities are supposed to receive even more policy support than commercial ones, including direct subsidies from the local and central governments. With respect to local funds the Ministry of Civil Affairs stipulated in 2012 that on each administrative level at least 50 percent of lottery revenues (a large income category for this arm of the Chinese state) have to be devoted to old-age care. In return for the support the NPOs receive, their prices are to be set by the government (*zhengfu zhidaojia*), while for-profit institutions can charge according to their quality. A year later, the State Council followed up with even more detailed regulations on how to help newly established and already operating old-age care facilities through taxation, subsidies, access to construction land etc. These

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<sup>73</sup> Lu Jiehua and Wu Haicheng, 'Jiating, shimin shehui yu guojia de liangxing hudong shejiao xia shidu jiating fuzhu de chonggou' ['Reconstruct the assistance system for families who lost their single child under the perspective of positive interactions between family, civil society and state'], *Dongyue Luntan* 37(8) (2016), pp. 10-16.

regulations explicitly create two levels of support: most assistance is awarded to NPOs and public institutions, slightly less to private domestic or foreign-invested care facilities. These regulations make it clear that the sector is not to develop independently from the government, but rather under its close management and guidance. Thus, the Ministry also calls for establishing various standards and industry associations to better manage the development of this sector. In other words, commercialization is not to be confused with a retreat of the state, instead we see competition in the 'shadow of hierarchy' at work. Whether this will turn out to be successful, is as of now an open question that has to be answered empirically. Industry insiders seem to be skeptical due to the nature and level of subsidies as well as the fact that business actors entering the industry primarily are developers with very limited experience in operational management of eldercare.<sup>74</sup>

To summarize, the plans and policy documents analyzed here set out a multi-pronged strategy that has lately received increasing emphasis to build up a three-level care system with a diversified set of providers. The ultimate goal of this diversification is to reach the high targets for beds in old-age care facilities, but to ensure at the same time that the government-run institutions account for less than 50 percent thereof.<sup>75</sup>

***Pension and Long-term Care Insurance.*** Besides these aspects relating to old-age care, the plans also mention a host of other policies concerning the elderly. Of highest practical relevance is probably the financial side including the massive expansion of old-age insurance. According to the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP on aging the number of people included in the old-age insurance for urban employees has been increased to 354 million by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP in 2016 (falling only slightly short of the plan target of 357 million). On the other hand, the number of insured persons in the urban and rural basic old-age insurance was increased to 505 million, substantially exceeding the plan target of 450 million by 12 percent. This basic insurance since 2014 combined precursors that were set up separately for urban and rural China. Of course, the pay-out of this 'basic' insurance is just that: very basic. But

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<sup>74</sup> DBS Asian Insights, 'Eldercare in China', pp. 17-21.

<sup>75</sup> 'Shisanwu' guojia laoling shiye fazhan'.

China's leaders have demonstrated that they are willing to raise the amount of money distributed to elderly citizens, and this may in the future also happen for this form of insurance.

In addition, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security started local experiments with long-term care insurance in fourteen provinces.<sup>76</sup> Chinese academics involved in evaluating these pilots are not convinced that the right kind of model has already been found.<sup>77</sup> But the center is clearly following its tried and tested mode of policy making through political competition, using local experiments to test differing schemes before coming up with a model approved by the center.<sup>78</sup>

## Discussion: Discourses on Population

We have seen throughout the previous sections how the state adjusts its mix of steering modes, while continuing to rely on discursive steering—even more so than previously. But how have the contents of these population discourses changed? We argue that to achieve its demographic goals the party-state has deemphasized the burden perspective and re-defined discursively both children and elderly as human resource to be harnessed. Of course, the goal of raising 'population quality' to increase productivity and achieve modernity<sup>79</sup> was a centerpiece of the OCP from the start. But it was balanced with the concern that only having fewer children would allow China to achieve these goals. More recently, children are no longer presented as an obstacle to progress. To the contrary, the development plan for children (2011-2020) calls for building China into a 'human resource great power'. Measures stipulated in current plans do not differ much from earlier documents. While serving human development goals, they also follow an economic calculus, namely that health interventions will save public money in the long run and better education from pre-school to high school will improve the productivity of the labor force.

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<sup>76</sup> Wei Yang et al., 'Financing institutional long-term care for the elderly in China: a policy evaluation of new models', *Health Policy and Planning* 31(19) (2016), pp. 1391-1401.

<sup>77</sup> Interviews with Beijing-based academics, October-November 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Heilmann, *Red Swan*.

<sup>79</sup> Susan Greenhalgh, 'Planned births, unplanned persons: "population" in the making of Chinese modernity', *American Ethnologist* 30(2), pp. 196-215.

What is more surprising is that this human resource perspective is now also extended to the elderly population. The State Council passed a plan on elderly education in October 2016, a very comprehensive and ambitious program that sets the target of seniors participating in any form of education at 20 percent by 2020 (it was only 3.5 percent in 2015). The goal is to completely renew the system to realize the goal of a 'learning society' (*xuexixing shehui*). Especially in comparison to earlier documents which primarily focused on the elderly as a burden on society, here they are called a 'precious treasure' (*baogui caifu*) of the nation and society. Although the plan is not exclusively concerned with creating a more productive elderly population for the sake of the whole society, this is, nevertheless, the main thrust. Seniors are to be kept active in the labor market for longer (extending the official retirement age is on the agenda) and learn new skills so that the expected labor shortage can be somewhat mitigated.

This is a marked change from earlier phases of population planning. In the 1990s, only rural elderly who were fit enough physically were encouraged to continue to work and even to study in order to increase their productivity. Given the lack of social support systems in rural China at the time,<sup>80</sup> the logical choice was to have the elderly provide for themselves as long as possible. But the (rural) elderly here were only encouraged not to be a greater burden than necessary, they were not yet seen as a factor to positively influence overall economic development.

Moreover, thinking on the relationship between old aged population and the economy has received another twist. The seniors are not only seen as a potential productive asset but also as a potent consumer force. While in official documents until the middle of the last decade this was combined with the caveat that the state should 'correctly guide' the consumption of the elderly, this provision has now been dropped. Instead the most recent FYP calls on investors of all kinds to develop diverse and innovative products and services for the elderly in health, food, medicine, information, e-commerce, tourism etc. Given that China is in the process of redefining its growth model with a

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<sup>80</sup> Lutz Leisering, Gong Sen and Athar Hussain, *People's Republic of China. Old-age Pensions for the Rural Areas: from Land Reform to Globalization* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2002).

stronger emphasis on domestic consumption, the role of seniors is seen in a more optimistic light than previously when the emphasis was primarily on the burden of old-age care.

The previously mentioned reconfiguration of the policy field to combine old age and health issues ties directly into this ambivalent conceptualization of children and the elderly. Development plans for children have long highlighted physical health as a precondition of turning them into successful contributors to China's modernization. Older people are, naturally, more afflicted with health problems than the general population. Therefore, the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP on aging sets out to integrate the health and eldercare sectors in practical ways on the level of service delivery (*yiyang jiehe*). Overall, the plan aims at better prevention and early detection by promoting the concept of 'healthy aging' (*jiangkang laolinghua*). On the one hand, this would decrease the burden the elderly place on the Chinese state and the social insurance system. On the other hand, it would also increase and prolong the productivity of the elderly and, hence, make them more of an asset for economic development. This perspective —viewing population through the lens of health—has seen its culmination in the recent State Council reforms: not only was the 'birth planning' part dropped from the NHFPC's name, but the newly created National Health Commission was charged with old-age related policies previously under the Ministry of Civil Affairs, incorporating its NWCA.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, we may expect that population discourses will further move into this direction in the future.

## Conclusion

China's population planning has entered a new era after the end of the one-child policy. It has not diminished in importance, but rather been elevated to a new high with the recent emphasis on 'top-level design' to politically steer population development in a more comprehensive way. This includes eliminating previous administrative boundaries between vertically organized bureaucracies, placing

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<sup>81</sup> Wang Yong, 'Guanyu guowuyuan jigou gaige fang'an de shuoming' ['Explanation of the State Council structure reform proposal'], Xinhua (13 March 2018), available at: [http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2018-03/14/content\\_5273856.htm](http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2018-03/14/content_5273856.htm) (accessed 17 March 2018).

population 'health' instead of 'birth planning' in the focus. This paper takes stock of what has changed and what has not in this crucially important policy field. First, the OCP has been replaced by a universal two-child policy that the state wants to propagate and realize with a large array of measures. As 'birth-giving according to policy' has become the new catchphrase, fertility is still the target of government policy and state intervention. Birth-giving is no longer referred to as a legal right (within state-set limits), but rather couples are called upon to fulfill the two-children per couple policy. The specific ways in which this goal is to be achieved differ from the enforcement of the OCP—coercive measures are deemphasized and replaced with the instruments of indirect steering and soft steering in the 'shadow of hierarchy'. Dropping 'family planning' from the name of the new National Health Commission, while retaining an office for 'birth control' within it, can be seen as a double move: on the discursive level, it signals a new approach to population questions, while in terms of practical policy it re-tasks the existing bureaucracy with a new purpose, namely to increase the birth rate in the face of societal aging instead of restricting it.

Meanwhile, the central government has taken other steps to address the consequences of aging. The immediate worry is, of course, how to tackle the looming crisis in old-age care. The relevant plans not only envision a massive improvement of both quantity and quality of care institutions and their staff. They, moreover, also call for a fundamental rearrangement of ownership structures of the sector, lowering the government's share to less than half of all beds, because the previous hierarchical steering produced unintended side-effects. The development of the new care industry presents another major challenge for political steering in the population policy field, but also an opportunity to employ the market mechanism—under government guidance—to steer development in population policy. Beyond these practical issues, questions relating to the understanding of aging and proper (family) care will emerge, calling forth even more state efforts to 'correctly guide' the thinking of its citizens. In other words, the steering instruments employed are evolving to include 'competition in the shadow of hierarchy' alongside 'soft steering in the shadow of hierarchy.'

This brings us, finally, to the way how population and its various sub-groups are being discursively conceptualized as resources rather than burdens in the recent political documents analyzed above. The official documents are nowadays cautious not to state how burdensome childcare can be—lest they further discourage potential second-time parents—but argue that families need state support to strengthen their ‘development capacity’ and take on the additional task of raising a second child. The elderly of today are called upon to work longer, learn new skills, participate more actively in social and cultural activities and volunteer for public causes, and they are also conceptualized as a potent force to increase consumption and thereby support economic development. Of course, similar policy initiatives are to be found in aging societies around the world and have been discussed under various labels from ‘successful’ to ‘productive’ to ‘active aging’.<sup>82</sup> But they have an ambivalent character because they invariably trigger the question what happens with those who, for health or other reasons, cannot live up to these ideals: are they to be considered ‘unproductive’, ‘unsuccessful’ or ‘inactive’?<sup>83</sup> The consequences of these ‘political narratives of aging’<sup>84</sup> in the Chinese context await further investigation.

Overall, we see that White’s argument that the planning of the economy and population in China go hand in hand still seems to fit—however, with important permutations.<sup>85</sup> Of course, neither the economy nor population can be successfully steered using only a ‘command & control’ approach in today’s much more complex Chinese society. Instead, other, more indirect ways of political steering need to be applied. And even then, plans are one thing, real political and economic outcomes are another. So, the crucial next step is to investigate empirically, how these attempts to politically steer population development are put into practice, what challenges arise in the process and what outcomes are produced. For this important endeavor, political steering theory provides an apt analytical lens.

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<sup>82</sup> Walker, ‘The concept of active aging’.

<sup>83</sup> Jiayin Liang and Baozhen Luo, ‘Toward a discourse shift in social gerontology: from successful aging to harmonious aging’, *Journal of Aging Studies* 26 (2012), pp. 327-334.

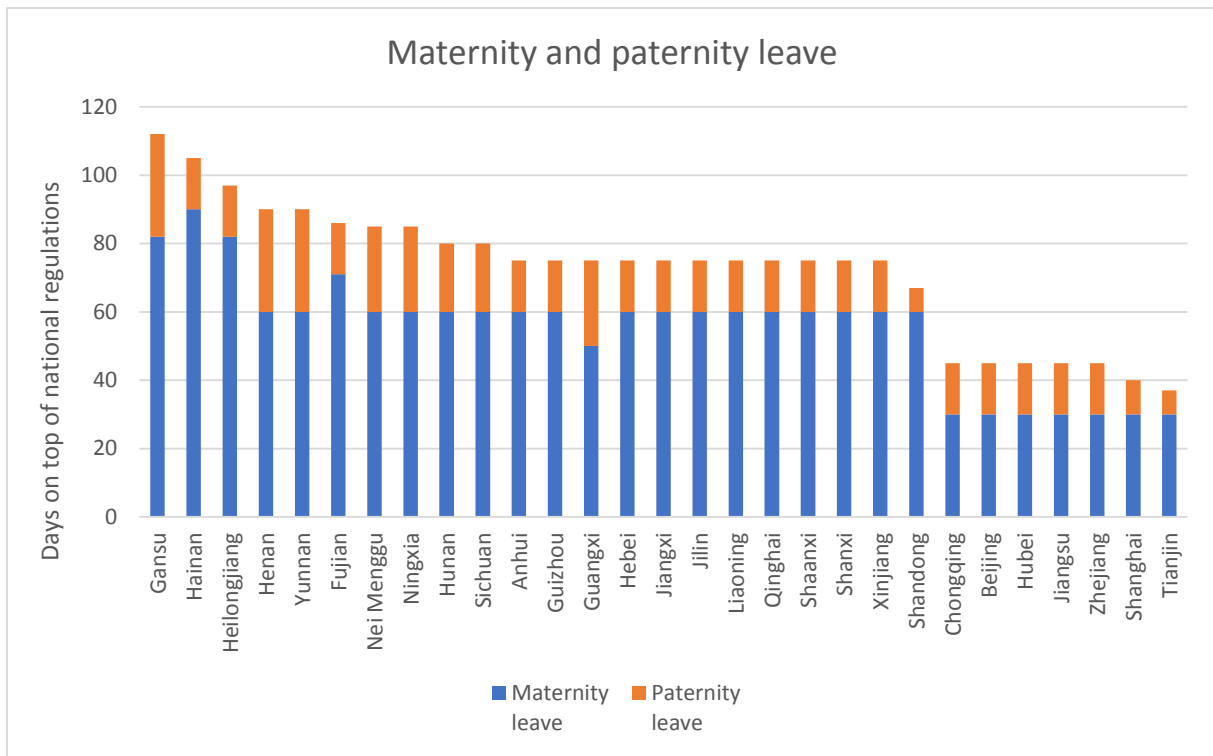
<sup>84</sup> Ian Cook and Jason L. Powell, ‘China and political narratives of aging’, *Asian Journal of Social Policy* 1(1) (2005), pp. 1-8.

<sup>85</sup> White, *China’s Longest Campaign*.

**Table 1: Ideal-types of steering modes**

	<b>Hard Steering</b>	<b>Indirect Steering</b>		<b>Soft Steering</b>
<b>Steering Modes</b>	<b>Hierarchy</b>	<b>Negotiation</b>	<b>Competition</b>	<b>Discourse</b>
Authority relations	hierarchical (vertical domination)	non-hierarchical (mutual influence)	non-hierarchical (mutual adjustment)	semi-hierarchical (vertical influence)
Decision-making	authoritative	mutual agreement	market-based	discursive
Implementation	command & control	consensual	self-enforcing	self-enforcing
Interaction	limited consultation under hierarchy	extensive negotiations in the 'shadow of hierarchy'	political or economic competition in the 'shadow of hierarchy'	conduct of conduct in the 'shadow of hierarchy'

Source: Authors' compilation; inspired by Tanja A. Börzel, 'The European Union – a unique governance mix?', in David Levi-Faur, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 616.



**Figure 1:** Maximum maternity and paternity leave periods in addition to national standards (in days).

**Source:** Authors' compilation of relevant provincial-level documents.

Note: The national standard is 98 days maternity leave, of which up to 15 days may be taken pre-partum.

Where provincial regulations stipulated leave periods in months, these were converted to days (at 30 days a month).

**Table 2:** Major targets of various national plans on aging

	<b>Community level</b>	<b>Institutional care</b>
10 <sup>th</sup> FYP	90% of villages and townships should establish old people's homes ( <i>yanglaoyuan</i> ) 60% to 80% of community care workers should be trained	Achieve supply of 10 beds per 1,000 urban elderlies in social care institutions
11 <sup>th</sup> FYP	Setting up of community service centers for elderly encouraged, target 75% of villages and townships	Set up 2.2 million additional beds in care homes for rural <i>wubao</i> cases, and 80,000 additional beds for urban elderly living alone
12 <sup>th</sup> FYP	80% of township-level units and 50% of community-level units should establish integrated community service centers (including eldercare) Integrate at least 80% of elderly in social management Register at least 10% of elderly as volunteers	Create 3.42 million additional beds in various care facilities Achieve supply of 30 beds per 1,000 elderlies in social care institutions
2011 plan for building a social old-age care system	Create 3.4 million daycare places by 2016	Achieve supply of 35 to 40 beds per 1,000 elderlies in social care institutions
13 <sup>th</sup> FYP	Improve quality and availability of various facilities for elderly Register at least 12% of elderly as volunteers 90% of urban and rural community-level units should establish elderlies associations	Reduce share of state-run beds in eldercare facilities below 50% Medical care integrated for at least 30% of eldercare beds

## Appendix: Major documents used in the analysis

Issuing unit	Date (year/month)	Title
Central Committee	1980/9	<i>Zhongguo zhongyang guanyu kongzhi woguo renkou zengzhang wenti zhi quanti gongchandangyuan gongqingtuanyuan de gongkaixin</i> Open Letter of the Central Committee to all Party and Youth League Members Regarding Controlling the Growth of China's Population
Central Committee/ State Council	1991/5	<i>Guanyu jiaqiang jihua shengyu yange kongzhi renkou zengzhang de jue ding</i> Decision on Strengthening Birth Planning Work to Strictly Control the Growth of the Population
Central Committee/ State Council	1991/8	<i>Guanyu jiaqiang jihua shengyu gongzuo yange kongzhi renkou zengzhang de jue ding</i> Decision on Strengthening Birth Planning Work to Strictly Control Population Growth
Central Committee/ State Council	2000/3	<i>Guanyu jiaqiang jihua shengyu gongzuo wending di shengyu shuiping de jue ding</i> Decision on Strengthening Population and Birth Planning Work to Stabilize a Low Fertility Level
Central Committee/ State Council	2000/8	<i>Guanyu jiaqiang laoling gongzuo de jue ding</i> Decision on Strengthening the Work Regarding Aging
Central Committee/ State Council	2000/8	<i>Guanyu jiaqiang renkou yu jihua shengyu gongzuo wending dishengyu shuiping de jue ding</i> Decision on Strengthening the Work on Population and Birth Planning to Stabilize the Low Fertility Level
Central Committee/ State Council	2007/1	<i>Guanyu quanmian jiaqiang renkou he jihua shengyu gongzuo tongchou jie jue renkou wenti de jue ding</i> Decision on Comprehensively Strengthening the Coordination of Population and Birth Planning Work to Solve the Population Problem
Central Committee/ State Council	2015/12	<i>Guanyu shishi quanmian lianghai zhengce, gaige wanshan jihua shengyu fuwu guanli de jue ding</i> Decision on Implementing the Universal Two-Child Policy, Reforming and Perfecting the Administration of Birth Planning Services
Central Committee/ State Council	2016/9	<i>Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu shishi quanmian lianghai zhengce, gaige wanshan jihua shengyu fuwu guanli de jue ding' xuexi xuanchuan tigang</i> Outline for Studying and Propagandizing the 'Central Committee/State Council Decision on Implementing the Universal Two-Child Policy, Reforming and Perfecting the Administration of Birth Planning Services'
Ministry of Civil Affairs	2012/7	<i>Guanyu guli he yindao minjian ziben jinru yanglao fuwu lingyu de shishi yijian</i> Opinions on Carrying out the Encouragement and Guidance of Civic Capital to Enter the Field of Old-Age Care Services
Ministry of Human Resources and Social	2016/6	<i>Guanyu kaizhan changqi huli baoxian zhidu shidian de zhidao yijian</i> Guiding Opinions Regarding the Establishment of Experimental Sites for Long-term Care Insurance

Security		
National Health and Family Planning Commission	2017/1	<i>'Shisanwu' quanguo jihua shengyu shiye fazhan guihua</i> 13 <sup>th</sup> National Five-Year-Plan on Development of the Birth Control Sector
National People's Congress	1996/10	<i>Zhonghua renmin gongheguo laonianren quanyi baozhang fa</i> Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Elderly
National People's Congress	2012/12	<i>Zhonghua renmin gongheguo laonianren quanyi baozhang fa (2012 nian xiuzheng)</i> Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Elderly (revised in 2012)
National People's Congress	2015/4	<i>Zhonghua renmin gongheguo laonianren quanyi baozhang fa (2015 nian xiuzheng)</i> Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Elderly (revised in 2015)
National Work Committee on Aging	2006/8	<i>Zhongguo laoling shiye fazhan 'shiyiwu' guihua</i> China's 11 <sup>th</sup> Five-Year-Plan on the Development of the Old-Age Sector
NHFPC	2016/11	<i>Quanguo huli shiye fazhan guihua (2016—2020 nian)</i> National Development Plan for the Nursing Sector (2016—2020)
State Council	1992/3	<i>Jiushi niandai Zhongguo ertong fazhan gangyao</i> China Children Development Plan for the 1990s
State Council	1995/8	<i>Zhongguo funü fazhan gangyao (1995-2000)</i> China Women Development Plan (1995-2000)
State Council	2001/5	<i>Zhongguo ertong fazhan gangyao (2011-2020)</i> China Children Development Plan (2011-2020)
State Council	2001/5	<i>Zhongguo funü fazhan gangyao (2001-2010)</i> China Women Development Plan (2001-2010)
State Council	2001/8	<i>Zhongguo laoling shiye fazhan 'shiwu' jihua gangyao (2001-2005)</i> Outline for Development of China's Old-Age Sector during the 10 <sup>th</sup> Five-Year-Plan (2001-2005)
State Council	2011/7	<i>Zhongguo funü fazhan gangyao (2011-2020)</i> China Women Development Plan (2011-2020)
State Council	2011/7	<i>Zhongguo ertong fazhan gangyao (2011-2020)</i> China Children Development Plan (2011-2020)
State Council	2011/9	<i>Zhongguo laoling shiye fazhan 'shierwu' guihua</i> China's 12 <sup>th</sup> Five-Year-Plan on the Development of the Old-Age Sector
State Council	2013/9	<i>Guowuyuan guanyu jiaqiang yanglao fuwuye de ruogan yijian</i> State Council: Several Opinions on Speeding Up Development of the Old-Age Service Sector

State Council	2013/9	<i>Guanyu cujin jiankang fuwuyue fazhan ruogan yijian</i> Some Opinions on Developing the Health Service Sector
State Council	2016/12	<i>Guojia renkou fazhan guihua (2016-2030 nian)</i> National Population Development Plan (2016-2030)
State Council	2017/3	<i>'Shisanwu' guojia laoling shiye fazhan he yanglao tixi jianshe guihua</i> 13 <sup>th</sup> National Five-Year-Plan on Development of the Old-Age Sector and Building the Old- Age Care System
State Council Office	2011/12	<i>Shehui yanglao fuwu tixi jianshe guihua (2011 – 2015 nian)</i> Plan on Constructing a Social Eldercare Service System (2011 – 2015)
State Council Office	2016/10	<i>Laonian jiaoyu fazhan guihua (2016-2020)</i> Old-Age Education Development Plan (2016-2020)
State Planning Commission	1994/12	<i>Zhongguo laoling gongzuo qi nian fazhan gangyao (1994-2000)</i> Seven-Year Outline for the Development of China's Work on Aging (1994-2000)

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