

The Arrival of the Three-child Policy: Content Analysis of Chinese and Western Media Attitudes of the Policy's Impact on Chinese women

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Abstract. This study focuses on the media attitudes towards the impact of China's three-child policy on Chinese female group from 2020 to 2022. The author selected 103 news reports about the three-child policy from Chinese and western media. To survey their media attitudes, content analysis was used to examine these news reports. This study also developed a new integrated framework to extract women's rights-related topics and determine the degree of positive or negative media attitude to these topics. It turns out that there is an enormous difference between Chinese media and western media in their attitudes towards the three-child policy. Chinese media showed the most positive attitude towards the topic of "providing government incentives for women", while western media showed the most negative attitude towards the topic of "reducing the cost of childbirth for women". Compared with other aspects, western media hold a relatively more cheerful outlook on "providing government incentives for women". The objective of this paper is to help policy makers better monitor the direction of public opinion and improve this policy by comparing Chinese and western media attitudes on related topics.

Keywords: three-child policy, media attitude, feminism, women's rights and interests, policy making, content analysis, family planning.

1. Introduction

A family picture of two large pigs and three small pigs appears on the "Five Blessings Gathering" stamps issued by China Post on January 5, 2019, in the Year of the Pig. This family formation caused a media storm around the world. Prior to this, the Fifth Plenary session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to fully implement the "one couple can have two children" policy in 2015 (Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Communist Party of China Central Committee Outcome, 2015). Therefore, when the three little pigs appeared together on the stamps, domestic and foreign media speculated that the Chinese government would further encourage the birth of children and open the three-child policy. Facts have proved that on August 20, 2021, China's National People's Congress Standing Committee voted to amend the Population and Family Planning Law to allow a couple to have three-children (Hua, 2021). This decision ushered in a new era of China's three-child policy.

The "three-child policy", part of China's half-century-old family planning policy, marked a major shift in the country's attitude towards fertility. At the very beginning, as a basic state policy of the People's Republic of China, family planning was first confirmed in September 1982 and written into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China in December 1982. Then, the Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China came into effect in 2002, "advocating that each couple have one child. If it meets the requirements prescribed by laws and regulations, it may request to arrange for the birth of a second child "(Feng et al., 2016). The law marks the beginning of an era of family planning in China.

For a long time, China's population growth is tightly controlled by limiting the number of children a couple can have. After family planning was established as one of China's basic national policies, the year-on-year growth rate of China's total population declined every year, dropping to 0.65 in 2002, when the Population and Family Planning Law was enacted (Du, 2016). In 2010, the year before China adopted the "two-child policy", the year-on-year growth rate of the country's total population reached a low of 0.48 (Roser et al., 2019). There is no doubt that the declining birth rate

is posing a serious aging challenge. "Aging is not only the trend of the global population, but also the basic national conditions of China," said a person in charge of China's National Health Commission. (Hua, 2021) Therefore, the main purpose of China's three-child policy is to improve the age structure of the population, reduce the dependency ratio of the elderly population, and cope with the risk of a continuous low fertility level in China.

However, one year later, the three-child policy is not working. Since the introduction of the "three-child policy", the number of newborns in China has fallen rather than risen. By the end of 2021, newborn numbers in China had dropped to 10.63 million (China News, 2022), compared with 17.86 million in 2016 when the two-child policy was firstly introduced (Beijing News, 2017). The reason behind this phenomenon has attracted a lot of media interest. Both Chinese and western media have begun to question the impact of this policy in China.

Combining these contexts, the research in this paper is guided by observation. This study found that the topic of the three-child policy has been widely spread on social media. For example, after The State Council promulgated the three-child policy, the topic "will you have a third child" published by People's Daily has been read 2.65 billion times and discussed 458,000 times. At the same time, this Chinese policy has also aroused heated debate in the international community. Many authoritative western media quickly commented on it. For example, CNN said that "the three-child policy is a measure taken by China to avoid population crisis" (Westcott & Cheung, 2021), while BBC talked about the topic of human rights and said in its report that "China has no right to interfere with how many children people have" (Yip, 2021). To look for possible differences in how these media reported the three-policy, in this study, the comments made by Chinese and western media on the three-child policy were chosen as the research subject to further understand the media attitudes triggered by this topic.

In the rest of this paper, the author will discuss the attitudes of the western and Chinese media towards China's three-child policy through 103 news comments in the past five years. On the basis, this paper analyzes the media attitude hidden in these news reports from two aspects. On the one hand, the three-child policy has its distinct regional characteristics. China has a large population base, accounting for about 21.5% of the world's total population and has a background of family planning for half a century (Misachi, 2021). Furthermore, China is the only country in the world that has written family planning into its constitution (National legislative bodies, 2001). Therefore, this paper uses the social ecological model to analyze the effect of the national environment on this policy. On the other hand, fertility issues are closely related to women. This policy would have a direct impact on the role that Chinese women play in the society, further shaping their decision to have children. Hence, this paper also uses the feminist role model to explore how the third-child policy affects the changing roles of women in the labor market, family, and other aspects of Chinese society. Finally, this study will conclude the significance of the evaluation of the three-child policy by the news media in Europe, America, and China, and put forward suggestions for the publicity of the family planning policy by the domestic news in the future.

2. Literature Review

According to a relevant study in 2021, after the implementation of the three-child policy, 60% of the Chinese population of childbearing age would like to have a second child, and 13% would like to have a third child (Jing et al., 2022). Among them, men were more willing to have a second or third child than women (Jing et al., 2022). The figures reflected a turning point in the public opinion of Chinese people of childbearing age on the family planning policy: having a second child was favored by more than half of the men and women but having a third one was preferred by only a minority. The reasons behind this were mixed. For example, in the context of the high housing price in China, people in their 20s or 30s are often burdened with the huge pressure of mortgage, and thus do not have enough economic ability to raise more children (Liu & Zhang, 2020). Meanwhile, compared with the older generation, today's Chinese parents pay more attention to the quality of

raising children rather than the quantity (CRI Online, 2018). They prefer to invest their best resources in one or two children to ensure that these kids receive the best education and a higher quality of life. On top of that, young Chinese parents in the 21st century also face the dual pressures of providing for the elderly and raising children. Due to the one-child family planning policy issued by China in the last century, the young generation who become parents today are mostly the only child in their families. This means they have no siblings to help each other with. When their parents are old or suddenly ill, they must bear the double responsibility of supporting their parents (including paying the high medical bills of the sick parents, which are not covered by the medical insurance) and raising their children. This is not only a financial challenge, but also a matter of time, energy, and psychological pressure. For a couple, they have four old people to support. If more children join the family at this time, it will undoubtedly make the young people, who are already burdened with financial and mental pressure, face greater challenges.

In addition to these difficulties, the reproductive intention of the female group was also lower than that of the male group, which indicated that females are possible to bear higher pressure than male in many aspects of reproductive choice. First, physical health is the primary test women must face when giving birth. In terms of female consciousness, previous studies have shown that "Chinese women of childbearing age have insufficient awareness of sexual and reproductive health" (Yan et al., 2021). This means that when Chinese women make decisions about contraception, childbirth, and abortion, they do not have a clear understanding of what will happen to their bodies. Meanwhile, women's mental health is at risk as much as their physical health. For example, according to a previous study from *Sociology of Health and Illness*, researchers claimed that "China's family planning policy stifles the voices of mothers, harms their reproductive health and overall well-being" and "fails to free women from the shackles of traditional social norms" (Zhao & Basnyat, 2021). Similarly, in Shenzhen, China, a controlled experiment in the study also showed that women in the family planning group were more likely to develop postpartum depression than women in the non-family planning group (Sun et al., 2019). These experimental data all showed that the government's fertility policy conflicts with women's mental health. If the Chinese government wants the family planning policy to be successful in the future, it is essential to take women's physical and mental health into account in the policy making process.

Other studies have focused on women's reproductive rights. The United Nations in 2022 emphasized that "the principle of reproductive rights should be observed and women's right to reproductive freedom should be protected" (UN Women, 2022). However, on the other hand, the UN has not abandoned the population control agenda (Whittaker, 2017). Therefore, in the context of the growing global population, how to formulate scientific and effective policies to control population reasonably and protect women's reproductive rights at the same time is an issue that every country needs to think carefully. Another study showed that for some special groups of women, such as single mothers or unmarried women, their right to reproductive freedom can hardly be guaranteed under the family planning policy (Graham et al., 2022). When unmarried single women violate the social norms supported by this national policy, their reproductive rights are implicitly limited by their gender identity (China Partnership, 2019).

Based on these literatures, this study thinks that the previous research on the three-child policy mainly focused on the discussion of the reproductive intention of the female population but lacked the exploration of media opinion. In particular, the contrast between Chinese and western media attitudes is missing. Therefore, in this study, fifty media from China, Europe, and the United States were surveyed to explore the public opinion attitudes reflected in 103 news comments on China's three-child policy. Furthermore, to explore the specific impact of this policy on the rights and interests of Chinese women through various media viewpoints.

3. Developing an Integrated Frame

Public opinion is public's feedback on policy. For example, Chen Youhua, a sociology professor at Nanjing University, said, "The new three-child policy meets the need to build a childbearing friendly society. This will help make parents more willing, less worried about having more children, and enable them to raise children well" (2022). Professor Chen's comments showed his public expectation of this policy. News media is a platform for public opinion to get concentrated feedback. Through comments on news websites, the stakeholders of policy making can learn the audience's opinion of the policy in the fastest speed. Therefore, the contribution of this study is to incorporate the social ecological theory dimension and the role practice dimension of women's rights into the public opinion research on the policy. Thus, to judge the attitude of Chinese and western media towards the policy and the actual impact of Chinese women's rights and interests under this policy. The innovation point of this paper is to develop the integrated framework of the two models and explore its new application in the public opinion of the national three-child policy. In the following paragraphs, this study will explain the models employed in each of the two dimensions: the social ecological model and the feminist role model.

3.1 Theoretical Framework Dimension -- Social Ecological Model

This model comes from the ecological theory proposed by American psychologist Bronfenbrenner in 1970 (CDC, 2022). The development of this model can be divided into two stages. The first stage ended with the publication of Bronfenbrenner's work the Ecology of Human Development, which made the social ecological model a formal theoretical model in 1980. The second stage was the author's revision of the model after 1980. In this process, Bronfenbrenner was self-critical for "placing too much emphasis on the context and not enough on the role of the individual in development" (CDC, 2022). Since then, the model has been widely used in other fields, such as enlightenment education, risk communication and political decision-making.

The core of this model is "human beings are social beings" (CDC, 2022). When a hot event occurs, people tend not to be directly affected by the event, but to react under the influence of the surrounding environment. This feature allows ecological theories to be applied to the news media industry. Today, given the growth of online media and the global COVID-19 environment, the Internet is becoming the main stage of the world's news. Therefore, the social ecological model in this paper is based on news reports accessible to the Internet, such as the commentary articles on the news websites of Washington Post, China Daily, BBC, and CNN. Combined with the news reports and the context mentioned above, the purpose of this model is to further analyze what factors in the environment can lead to distinct attitudes of different media towards China's three-child policy.

3.2 Practical Framework Dimension -- Feminist Role Model

The establishment of Feminist Role Model is based on feminism, which studies the role of women in different social environments. From the perspective of feminism, the role model involves the conflict between women's dual roles within and outside the family (Tindall, 2021). For example, "men outside the home, women inside" is a common family pattern in China. The Confucian classic Book of Rites, written by Dai Sheng in Western Han Dynasty, referred to the wife as a male's "nei ren", or "person in the house" (Richey, 2019), which means that women are regarded as the role within the family in a male-dominated family. To some extent, this kind of thinking has influenced people's ideas in modern Chinese society, limiting women's pursuit of gender equality outside the home (such as job opportunities and labor values). If women's role in society is always bound by the family, it is difficult for them to fight for their rights and interests equally.

Based on the Feminism Role Model, whether the European, American, and Chinese media believe that China's three-child policy will intensify the family relationship of "men outside the home, women inside" is one of the important challenges faced by this policy. Some argue that this kind of family relationship is not conducive for women to balance the role conflict between home

and work. If this relationship continues to be rooted in Chinese society, it will mean that women need to submit to their family roles at the expense of their social roles, resulting in fewer job opportunities and a lower value of labor for women. Furthermore, the arrival of the three-child policy will only worsen this trend. More children need more family input to take care of them. At a time when domestic roles are a priority for women, the increase in the number of children will function as a disincentive for females to pursue their roles outside the home.

Meanwhile, under this model, there are also opponents who believe that the arrival of China's three-child policy is accompanied by the increase of social welfare for women, including maternity allowances and house purchase subsidies. Compared with the absence of these benefits, these kinds of national welfare brought by the policy could relieve the family burden of women, which is more conducive for them to get out of the family, enter work, have more contact with society, and enhance their social value. Therefore, based on this contradiction, this paper takes the role of women under feminism as the second dimension of the study, from two aspects of women's "roles within the family" and "roles outside the family", to analyze the attitudes of western and Chinese media about the influence of China's three-child policy on women's roles.

4. Coding Scheme

Although previous studies have proved that the social ecological dimension and the feminist role dimension are closely related to women's rights and interests, it is still unclear whether these two dimensions can reflect the difference between Chinese and western media's attitudes towards the three-child policy. Therefore, the first research question in this paper is derived from the differences in media attitudes:

4.1 RQ1: How do Chinese and European media show their attitudes from the dimensions of social ecology and the role of women?

To answer this question, this paper analyzed 103 news reports by extracting key words. These keywords are selected based on the integration framework, respectively the theoretical dimension and the practical dimension.

As mentioned above, the theoretical dimension starts from the social ecological model and focuses on China's reproductive environment. This dimension hopes to study the impact of various levels of environment on Chinese women after the promulgation of the three-child policy. In existing research, the most frequently discussed topics related to China's reproductive environment are patriarchy, childbearing costs, and government incentives. First, the existence of patriarchy in Chinese society, especially in rural areas, still affects women's desire to have children. Patriarchy not only means that men have higher social status and more family discourse power than women, but also causes women to face childbearing pressure from all aspects of the external environment. For example, a mother giving birth to a boy would be considered the greatest honor for the family but giving birth to a girl would be persuaded or forced to have a second or third child (Wang & Cheng, 2021). Meanwhile, in the context of patriarchy, women's social value is related to whether they give birth or not. Some women even choose to give birth in their 60s or 70s only to fulfill their mission of having children. There is no doubt that such a social background is not conducive to the formation of a child-friendly society. On the contrary, for the young generation of Chinese women, patriarchal values run counter to their pursuit of gender equality and female independence, resulting in lower fertility intention. Therefore, whether the three-child policy can change China's traditional gender concept represented by patriarchy will affect the media's attitude towards the policy.

Secondly, the cost of women's childbearing is also a big challenge for China to improve the reproductive environment. As Chinese couples pay more attention to the quality of childbirth rather than the quantity, the corresponding birth cost will also increase (Wang et al., 2022). However, this cost is not only reflected in the explicit expenditure of a family to raise children, but also causes more invisible losses to women. For example, when women in China spend time on pregnancy and

childcare, they have to accept the invisible rule that the social environment assumes women will devote more energy to their children and family. It leads to women's reduced wages, lower labor value, and even dismissal (Xian et al., 2022). Without doubt, these invisible losses from the social environment can cause negative effects on women's willingness to have children. Therefore, whether the three-child policy can reduce women's childbearing costs is also a crucial factor determining the media's attitude.

In addition, previous studies have suggested that government incentives accompanying policies also have an impact on the birth environment. Government incentives include but are not limited to maternity leave, medical expenses reimbursement, housing subsidies for both spouses (Zhang, 2021). Effective incentives can create a favorable environment for women to give birth in society and at home, thus improving their willingness to give birth. Furthermore, it reverses the trend of increasing aging and decreasing fertility rate in China. How these incentives will change the birth environment in China is also a significant part of the media's attitude.

Meanwhile, as another dimension of the integration framework, the practical one is based on the feminist role model to analyze the actual roles played by Chinese women in society and family. Most of the existing research focuses on the conflict between women's family and work. On the one hand, unlike the traditional Chinese household division of labor in which the man takes care of the outside world and the woman takes care of the home, today's young women in China are more willing to accept their own roles with independent work and income. They are no longer willing to sacrifice their roles in working to meet the needs of their maternal roles at home. It means that these young women want their right to equal work protected. Even if they have more children, they will not be treated unfairly in the workplace. In fact, to ensure employees' productivity, some companies have made "childlessness" an invisible barrier to hiring female employees, and even indirectly fired women who are pregnant (Mykhalchenko & Recavarren, 2021). When women's dual roles as workers and mothers are not recognized, their willingness to have children decreases significantly. Therefore, whether the policy guarantees equal rights for women in the workplace affects the media's attitude.

On the other hand, many Chinese women are facing the difficulty of not being able to afford more roles. This is especially true when their parents need them. As a generation born under China's one-child policy, these young women have no siblings to share the responsibility of supporting their parents (Zhang & Harper, 2022). It means that while they are busy with their roles as workers and mothers, they must also take on the role of daughters to take care of their parents. When their parents are under the poor health situation, these women also need to bear the high medical expenses (Jiang et al., 2022). Therefore, upgrading the pension system is seen as another measure to improve women's fertility willingness. Only if the government pension system can effectively share the financial strain women face when juggling multiple roles will they be able to have more children. To a certain extent, whether the three-child policy can improve China's pension system also determines the reporting attitude of Chinese and western media.

In the next step, by combining the impact of the three-child policy on women mentioned in these reports, this study summarized the five key words into five specific aspects: breaking traditional gender norms and patriarchy, reducing women's childbearing costs, guaranteeing women's equal right to work, improving the pension system to reduce women's family burden, and the providing government incentives for women. To explore the influence of these five topics from two dimensions in the process of verifying media attitudes, the author posed the second question:

4.2 RQ2: Do theoretical and practical dimensions have different degrees of influence on media attitudes?

In this paper, the emphasis of the two dimensions is different. The theoretical dimension (social ecological model) tends to explore the effect of internal and external environment on the media's attitude towards the three-child policy, while the practical dimension (feminist role model) focuses on the actual consequences of the policy on women's rights and interests. On the one hand, the

social ecology in which Chinese women live often determines the feminist roles they can play. In an open and inclusive society, women’s roles are less constrained, and they are encouraged to have their reproductive autonomy. Meanwhile, on the other hand, feminist roles can also shape social types. Diverse and equal female roles are conducive to the establishment of a childbearing friendly society (Wang, 2022). Therefore, these two dimensions can play a synergistic role to jointly analyze the influence of the three-child policy on public opinion in China and the west.

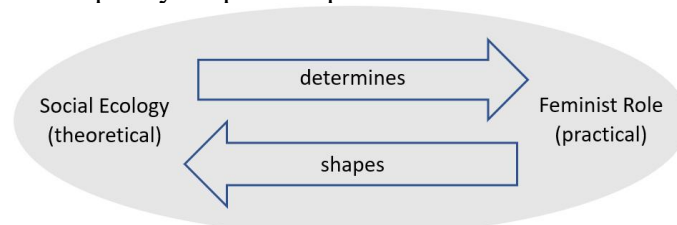


Figure 1. The integrated frame

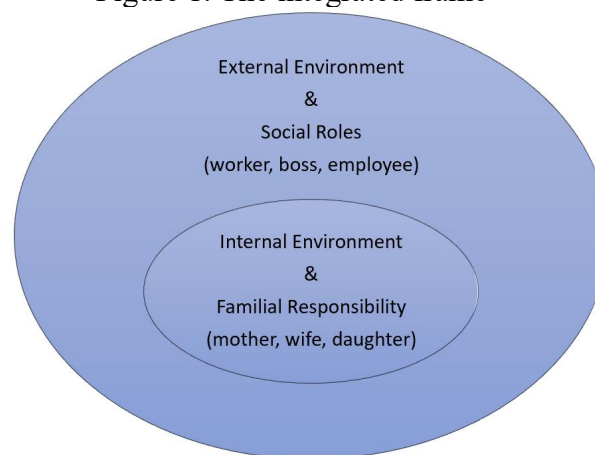


Figure 2. How do the two dimensions work together to influence media attitudes

Having confirmed how the two dimensions work, the author posed the third question:

4.3 RQ3: Which aspects do the two dimensions have the most considerable influence?

To find out the answer to this question, in the following part of this paper, the study will make statistics of the five aspects mentioned above and analyze them respectively by Chinese and Western media. Among the results, the media attitude corresponding to the maximum value, minimum value, and the value inconsistent with the expected common sense will be emphatically focused on, to know how the two dimensions affected the media attitude in these aspects. In a word, these special values represent extreme media attitudes. This research aims to identify the aspects involved in extreme media attitudes, so that to provide meaningful information for policy makers, communication professionals, and the public, thus helping the future development of China's family planning.

5. Sample

5.1 Sample Data Collection

The author selected online news platforms from Europe, America, and China for sample collection. A striking feature of them is that when it comes to intense issues about China, the attitudes of western and local media revealed in their commentaries tend to show a difference worth comparing. Firstly, the western media's view of hot topics about China is generally negative. This characteristic is particularly evident in news events related to human rights. An American student who has lived all over the China observes, "Most Western journalists who write about China were born and raised in the West, and they believe that all societies should develop something like the

American version of democracy" (Lu, 2021). This assessment helps explain why the western media always think that the Chinese government lacks respect for human rights. In the case of China's three-child policy, unsurprisingly, many Western media outlets did not hesitate to attack the Chinese government's actions on the issue of human rights about women. Secondly, compared with western media, Chinese media tend not to take a subjective and clear attitude when evaluating their own policies. It can be seen from the analysis of the following part of this paper that the news commentary of Chinese media mostly quotes objective data and government plans, interviews authoritative figures, and invites them to express their views. As a result of this difference, China's three-child policy is taking on hugely different images in the western and Chinese media.

In addition, the news sources selected in this paper are all authoritative and influential in the world. These include the Daily Mail, the New York Times, the People's Daily, the Washington Post and the Sun, which are among the top ten newspapers in the world (Innfinity, 2020). The BBC, FOX, CNN, and other "world's most popular news channels" were also mentioned (Singh, 2020). These websites occupy the forefront of attention in the world, and their news materials are also widely cited in social media communication. For example, BBC once set a weekly view record of more than seventy million (Southern, 2019).

5.2 Sample Size and Sample Period

According to the popularity, this paper selected a total of fifty media websites to build a corpus of text comments on the "three-child policy" from October 25, 2020, to October 25, 2022. The three-child policy was first proposed by Chinese economist Ren Zeping on Oct 25, 2020. After that, on August 20, 2021, the standing committee of the National People's Congress has passed a resolution to modify the population and family planning law. Then on March 5, 2022, Premier Li Keqiang, on behalf of The State Council, proposed to improve the three-child policy in the government work report. This meant that China has officially entered a new era of three-child policy. Therefore, the sampling period of this paper is from October 2020 to October 2022, and all sampled content is extracted from online news websites.

After that, all news comments related to China's three-child policy were manually extracted from online news sites, and a total of 402 articles were collected. To summarize the sample size to represent the target news comments, this study used the miniwebtool calculator to estimate the sample size to be 109, the confidence level to be 95%, the confidence interval to be 0.08. The method of random sampling was employed. There are six reports identified as outliers and removed from the data pool. Therefore, content analysis was conducted using 103 news reviews from a total of 49 media websites in China, the United States and Europe from October 2020 to October 2022. Finally, a total of 103 posts were included in the corpus of content analysis.

6. Methodology: Content Analysis

The content analysis method is applied to examine 103 news reports from European, American, and Chinese media about China's three-child policy. Content analysis is a quantitative method of mass communication research. According to the definition of American scholar Bernard Berelson, "Content analysis is an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the express communication content" (1952). Therefore, it can be used to focus on the attitudes, positions, and views of the mass media on certain social issues, thus, to reveal the characteristics of diverse groups or individuals in the information dissemination process. In the face of the social hotspot namely China's three-child policy, this method can be used to compare various attitudes of western and Chinese media to this issue, to explore the relationship between this policy and women's interests in China.

Firstly, to answer RQ1, this study divided the topics of media attitude into five aspects as mentioned above: breaking traditional gender norms and patriarchy, reducing women's childbearing costs, guaranteeing women's equal right to work, improving the pension system to reduce women's

family burden, and providing government incentives for women. Secondly, for the comparison of the attitude difference between Chinese and western media, the author sorted sixty-eight reports from western media and thirty-five reports from Chinese ones into two coding tables, respectively. To make a preliminary judgment of the media attitude revealed in each report, the study defined negative attitude as 0, neutral attitude as 1, and positive attitude as 2. Further, code the attitude of each report under each aspect.

For RQ2 and RQ3, this study used SPSS to conduct the mean analysis and paired T-test on the coding content. Then, to find the maximum mean value, minimum mean value, the maximum absolute value of the mean difference in the paired test, and the exceptional value in the results. From two dimensions of the integrated framework, the social ecological model and the feminist role model, the analysis focuses on exploring the causes of these extreme attitudes and their implications for improving China's family planning policy in the future.

7. Intercoder Reliability

The coding process was conducted by the author and a trained coder. We are both undergraduate students in communication studies. To ensure the reliability, the coder was repeatedly trained by the author on coding schemes. All coding requirements were agreed upon prior to coding. Any disagreements arising from the coding process were discussed by the author and the coder. The reliability of the intercoder was measured based on co-coding of five topics in sixty-eight western media reports and thirty-five Chinese media reports. For all categories, the average agreement was higher than 0.8, indicating that the coding results were almost exactly consistent.

8. Results

To study the difference between Chinese and western media's attitudes towards the three-child policy, we first used the T-test to verify the mean difference. By calculating the significance of the five topics under the condition of equal variance, all the values of significance were less than 0.05, with significant differences (sig values were all 0.000). The same conclusion was reached under the heteroscedasticity condition (sig value were also 0.000). This shows that the attitudes of Chinese media and western media when reporting the three-child policy are quite different. In addition to the significance, the difference in average values also reflected the comparative characteristics of the two types of media. The conclusions in the table show that the mean differences of the five topics are all negative, which proves that in the five aspects studied in this paper, the attitude of Chinese media is significantly more positive than that of western ones. Among them, "guaranteeing women's right to equal work" has the largest difference (with mean difference -1.625), and "reducing women's childbearing costs" has the smallest difference (with mean difference -1.270).

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
						Breaking traditional gender norms and patriarchy	-11.611
	-11.409	65.556	0.000	-1.450	0.127	-1.703	-1.196

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
						Reducing women's	-10.169
	-7.649	36.766	0.000	-1.270	0.166	-1.607	-0.934

childbearing costs							
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Guaranteeing women's equal right to work	-16.112	101.000	0.000	-1.625	0.101	-1.825	-1.425
Improving the pension system to reduce women's family burden	-14.932	56.261	0.000	-1.625	0.109	-1.843	-1.407

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Improving the pension system to reduce women's family burden	-13.077	101.000	0.000	-1.523	0.116	-1.754	-1.292
Improving the pension system to reduce women's family burden	-11.912	53.909	0.000	-1.523	0.128	-1.779	-1.267

Next, this study analyzed the specific mean for each topic. Among the five topics, the mean

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Providing government incentives for women	-9.954	101.000	0.000	-1.471	0.148	-1.764	-1.178
Providing government incentives for women	-13.907	67.000	0.000	-1.471	0.106	-1.682	-1.260

values of western media (group 1) were all less than 1, respectively 0.265, 0.044, 0.118, 0.191, 0.529, and the minimum value was 0.044 (reducing women's childbearing costs). The mean values of Chinese media (group 2) were all greater than one, respectively 1.714, 1.314, 1.743, 1.714, 2.000, and the maximum value was 2 (the government's incentives for women).

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Breaking traditional gender norms	1	6	0.265	0.589	0.071

and patriarchy	2	3	5	1.714	0.622	0.105
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	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reducing women's childbearing costs		6			
	1	8	0.044	0.270	0.033
		3			
	2	5	1.314	0.963	0.163

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Guaranteeing women's equal right to work		6			
	1	8	0.118	0.441	0.054
		3			
	2	5	1.743	0.561	0.095

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Improving the pension system to reduce women's family burden		6			
	1	8	0.191	0.496	0.060
		3			
	2	5	1.714	0.667	0.113

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Government incentives for women		6			
	1	8	0.529	0.872	0.106
		3			
	2	5	2.000	0.000	0.000

For western media, the topic with the lowest mean is "reducing the cost of childbirth for women", which indicates that western media have the most negative attitude in this regard. The feminist role model and social ecological model can well represent it together. First, after becoming a mother or during pregnancy, Chinese women cannot stay out of the workforce for a long time like women in Northern Europe (Javornik & Kurowska, 2017). They must face the challenge of paying living expenses such as house and car loans, and saving money for their children's future education, which is not enough to only rely on the husband. That means they are under double or multiple roles: a mother, a worker. For families with elderly parents to support, women also need to consider their identity of adult daughters to provide their parents with companionship, energy, and economic assistance while having kids. This status quo of multiple identities will create a huge childbearing cost for women. On the one hand, this challenge comes from the direct costs of raising children, such as the costs of pregnancy, childbirth, and education, which bring pressure to both women and their families. On the other hand, the indirect costs of childbirth for women should not be ignored. For example, spending time with children does not require extra money per se, but time and energy are invisible costs, which is the concept of opportunity cost in economics. In other words, having more children not only costs women more money, but also makes them earn less money. This has raised the cost of childbirth for women. For instance, a study of more than 30,000 women in China showed that women's annual earnings decreased significantly after giving birth, mainly due to a decrease in labor force participation and working hours (Chen et al., 2021). To sum up, according to the Report on the Cost of Childbirth in China 2022 Edition, the direct cost and indirect cost of raising an average minor child (0-17 years old) are 488,000 yuan and 570,000 yuan, totaling about

1,058,000 yuan (Liang et al., 2022). Some western media have pointed out that the Chinese government has not implemented supporting measures to reduce women's childbearing costs at the same time as the introduction of the three-child policy, which has led to a decline in their willingness to have children.

So, what has caused this situation? From the perspective of social ecology, Chinese women live in an environment where they are no longer willing to give up their job and income to take care of children. Even if they have three children, they are encouraged to work independently. However, Chinese society has not given up its tacit acceptance that women should also take on wider familial responsibilities while making demands on them to have independent job. This social environment imperceptibly caused the increase of women's childbearing costs. Women are expected to do more to take care of their children in the family, while they need to insist on their own work to conform to social expectations as well. In the process, the increasing expenses of pregnancy and child raising, as well as the lower income due to insufficient attention in work, all contribute to the higher cost of childbirth for women. It is the reason which caused most western media remain negative about this aspect.

By comparison, the top scoring topic for positive Chinese media was "providing government incentives for women". This suggests that the Chinese media trust the government to give ample benefits and subsidies to women who have a third child. From the socio-ecological model perspective, the purpose of these incentives is to create a "childbearing friendly environment" for Chinese women. At the first press conference held by the National Health Commission of China in 2022, Yang Jinrui, deputy director general of the Family Department, pointed out that "the steady implementation of the three-child policy and supporting measures is conducive to the formation of a childbearing friendly social environment" (Xie, 2021). The types of incentives can be mainly divided into maternity leave and social insurance. First, the main audience group of maternity leave is working women in cities. The Special Regulations of China on Labor Protection for Female Workers emphasize that the maternity leave for female workers who have a third child is 128 days or more, including maternity leave, prenatal leave, and breast-feeding leave (Xie & Springerlink, 2015). The salaries women receive during the holidays must also be paid according to the standards set by the state. During maternity leave, women are also entitled to maternity allowance and nutrition allowance based on their average salary. Secondly, the target group of social maternity insurance is mostly rural women. Maternity insurance is a social insurance system through which the State provides medical services to women and their families through legislation. For rural women, the excessive cost of having three-children can be covered by a rural health insurance scheme called the New Rural Cooperative Medical Care (NRCMC). The maximum insurance coverage can be more than ten times the rural per capita income, greatly easing rural women's concerns about having more than one child. The Chinese media's optimism about these policies shows in their coverage. They believe that if these policies can be conducted smoothly, there is no doubt that a childbearing friendly society will take shape in China.

In terms of "guaranteeing women's right to equal work", Chinese and western media showed completely different attitudes (the mean value difference was the largest in absolute value). It has to do with social ecology and the role of women. On the one hand, according to the global gender equality index released by the World Economic Forum (WEF), China ranks 102nd in the world. For western media, a country with a large population but serious gender inequality cannot provide women with equal job security. In addition, according to the Survey Report on the Status Quo of Chinese Women in the Workplace in 2021, about 60% of women were asked about their marriage and childbearing status, while the proportion of men was less than 20%. Many companies even set invisible thresholds such as "whether to have a second or third child" in the recruitment process (Global Times, 2021). The current situation of gender inequality in China's social environment makes the western media retain a skeptical attitude.

By contrast, Chinese media are more upbeat and confident about the topic. This is mainly due to the adoption of the newly revised Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests at the

37th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress. The new Law has incorporated the basic state policy of gender equality into the national education system, improved the system and mechanism for preventing and dealing with sexual harassment and sexual assault, strengthened the protection of women's fairness in the workplace, and stipulated details such as "standardized" public toilets and maternity rooms (Zhu, 2022). These government initiatives are moving China's social environment toward gender equality. Similarly, the law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests also emphasizes that mothers are not the only ones who take care of their children, and husbands can no longer be the ones who do not share housework or take care of their wives and children (Thomson, 2022). A Chinese expert said, "Compared with the general social labor, women's care for the family, in addition to the physical, mental, but also emotional, this social value cannot be ignored" (Gong et al., 2022). These changes to the law are a sign that women's multiple roles as mothers and workers are increasingly being accepted by Chinese society, which is why Chinese media are more optimistic.

Among the findings, it is worth noting that although the western media presented an overall negative attitude on five topics, they were still most optimistic (maximum mean, 0.529) on the topic of "providing government incentives for women". In comparison, as mentioned earlier, those positive Chinese media also had the highest average in this category (maximum mean, 2.000). In other words, they were both most optimistic about it. This is not a coincidence. Firstly, combined with the social ecological model, some western countries have a long tradition of encouraging fertility through policies. For example, France was one of the first countries in the world to encourage childbirth. After World War II, successive French governments have persisted in implementing policies about childbirth encouragement (Bamat, 2013). By providing childcare subsidies and guaranteeing maternity leave, the fertility rate in France reached 2.04 in 2020 (Statista Research Department, 2022), much higher than 1.3 in China (Statista Research Department, 2021). Therefore, as China also gradually moves on the path of increasing women's willingness to have children through policy guarantees, many of the policies introduced by the Chinese government, such as maternity leave and social insurance, have a lot in common with western ones. When Chinese government is also facing the crisis of declining fertility rate and aging population today, the success of policies made by western governments makes western media relatively optimistic about Chinese government's behavior. It is precisely in the social ecological model that the original historical background of western countries promotes the most cheerful outlook of western media towards "providing government incentives for women" in China.

The other side of the integration frame, the feminist model, also has an impact on this phenomenon reflected in the coding table. A study by the China Entrepreneur Club shows that countries with higher status of women generally have higher fertility rates. Sweden, the country with the second highest fertility rate in Europe after France, for example, has reduced the burden of childcare for women by providing both parents with paid maternity leave (Howard, 2018). The immediate effect of this policy has been to reverse the stereotypical role of Swedish mothers in staying at home and turn childcare into a shared responsibility. This policy provides a good reference for China's policy making. Among some government benefits introduced along with the three-child policy in China, "paternity leave" is especially added, which requires men and women to share the responsibility of child-rearing (China Briefing, 2015). It shows that policies can also improve women's willingness to give birth by changing their roles. That is also the reason western media remain more positive on the topic.

To sum up, western media have the most negative attitude towards "reducing the cost of women's childbearing", while Chinese media have the most active attitude towards "government's incentives for women". The western and Chinese media showed the biggest difference in their attitudes towards "women's rights to equal work." It is worth noting that western media received the mean of "government incentives for women" far higher than the other four topics, showing a relatively cheerful outlook.

9. Implications

The study helps to show the difference in attitudes of Chinese and western media when reporting the three-child policy, and explains some of the most positive, negative, and controversial aspects. Most western media will focus on the basic rights of individual women, such as gender equality, work equality, reproductive freedom, and then empathize with their individual experiences. Therefore, it can be seen from these interviews that western media decide their attitude towards the three-child policy more from the perspective of individual human rights of women. In contrast, the Chinese media is more of a collective interest perspective. Of the 35 Chinese reports selected for this article, 85.7% of them analyzed objective data related to China's current population reproduction, including the number of annual births, the annual natural growth rate, and the proportion of the elderly population. Chinese media would explain the importance of the three-child policy and the changes in the domestic status quo after the implementation of the policy through data, to pursue the enthusiasm and objectivity of the report. To sum up, Chinese media tend to give their own attitudes from the perspective of the country and the collective, combined with authoritative data and evidence.

10. Innovation

In addition, the integration of the social ecological model and the feminist role model in the framework is an innovation of this paper. Previous research has demonstrated that the multi-layered environment of social ecology and the diverse role of women in the role of feminism can play a role in health communication and policy making. The innovation of this paper is to focus on the perspective to media attitudes towards policy, to consider the impact on women in context and their roles, and to demonstrate that the two models can work together to determine whether the media attitudes towards policy are positive or negative. The three-child policy, as a new stage of China's family planning policy, will have a profound impact on the rights and interests of Chinese women. In other future studies, analyzing issues from the perspectives of social ecology and feminist role can help policy makers better analyze media attitudes to grasp the direction of public opinion. At the same time, it can also help the public understand the causes of different media attitudes and avoid being misled by them.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, by building an integrated framework consisting of social ecological dimension and feminist role dimension, this paper compares the attitudes of Chinese and western media towards the three-child policy from five aspects, to explain the media's recognition of the impact of the three-child policy on Chinese women. Among five aspects, "breaking traditional gender norms and patriarchy" and "government incentives for women" can be identified through the social ecological model, "guaranteeing women's equal right to work" and "improving the pension system to reduce women's family burden" can be explained through the feminist role model. In addition, "reducing the cost of women's childbearing" should be analyzed through both dimensions. In general, Chinese media holds a more cheerful outlook towards the three-child policy than western media. Specifically, "reducing women's childbearing cost" is the least favored topic among western media, and "providing government incentives for women" is aspect which Chinese media showed the most optimistic attitude. Furthermore, Chinese and western media showed completely different attitudes on "guaranteeing women's right to equal work". However, it is worth noting that compared with other four aspects, western media still show a relatively upbeat attitude on "providing government incentives for women", which is not as predicted as other studies.

12. Limitations

The limitation of this study is related to the sampling period. Since only news reports of a specific period were selected as samples for coding in this study, media attitudes and results may vary in different periods when the three-child policy continues to be perfected in China. In future phases of this research, the author will continue to use the developed integration framework to enrich the coding perspective based on changes in media attitudes over time and to include more media from other cultural backgrounds. As more young people prefer to visit new mass media, such as Twitter and Weibo, their opinions on new these social media are also directly or indirectly influencing the attitudes of traditional media in their reporting. Therefore, other new social media platforms, such as Weibo, WeChat, YouTube, and Twitter, can be used to further understand the research aspects of this paper.

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