

## Abstract

Son preference, represented by the desirability of sons in China is not a new theme. Early missionaries had noticed the phenomenon of female infanticide in China since the late Qing dynasty while scholars have begun to pay attention to the “missing girls” since the 1990s based on demographic statistics. However, demographic data are not enough to see a more complex and nuanced picture of the reproductive cultures in contemporary China in which son preference plays an important role. Instead, my project will concentrate on the “demographic mentalities” of son preference under the family planning programs from the 1970s to the 2010s. It questions what kind of demographic mentalities are behind son preference, how the discourse of son preference changed in different periods, and who participated in the process of choosing a baby’s sex. According to the change of the policies, it will generally study three periods, namely the period of the “Later-Longer-Fewer Program” (“晚, 稀, 少” “wan, xi, shao”), the “One-Child Policy,” and the “Two-Child Policy.” However, it will not strictly follow the transformation of the birth control policies but try to contextualize the reproductive cultures embedded in son preference in different times. In general, it will combine vertical and situated reading methods to analyze a variety of textual and non-textual resources. First, relevant periodicals covering the three periods mentioned above will be closely examined to figure out the dis/continuities of the discourses of son preference over time. Second, in a situated reading, particular works in different genres in respective periods, including posters, books, broadcasts, theaters, TV shows, movies, and sketch comedies (xiaopin 小品), will be used to see the specific situations in broader historical contexts. Specifically, every period will deal with at least three types of materials, textual and non-textual. Compared with newspapers and periodicals, they show more multiple as well as emotional aspects of son preference. Furthermore, they will not be separately studied. Instead, an inter-textual analysis will be applied. Not only will textual materials be compared with non-textual sources, but also the works published in the 21st century will be used to analyze the phenomena happening in the 1970s and the 1980s.