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**Marital Conflicts in Dual-Earner Families in Beijing:
A Gender Perspective**

Zhang, Lixi

Ph.D

Department of Applied Social Studies

Hong Kong Polytechnic University

2002



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Abstract of thesis entitled 'Marital Conflicts in Dual-Earner Families in Beijing: A Gender Perspective' submitted by Zhang, Lixi for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University November, 2001

This research is an attempt to study the phenomenon of marital conflict in dual-earner families in Beijing with a gender perspective. The findings highlight that micro- as well as social forces such as societal gender role expectations, gender ideology and power differentials between the couples affect marital conflict interactively, unearthing the connections of this "private" issue with its public roots. The study further points out that such a realization of the importance of the social aspect impacting on marital conflict contributes to a re-examination of the existing framework of understanding marital conflict and marital counseling in Mainland China.

In the study, the interactive impacts of the centuries-old male-oriented family system and gender ideology on the one hand, and the effects of gender equality policies initiated by the Chinese government since the early 1950's upon women's social participations on the other, and their impacts on couples within dual career families were studied. The focus is on how these interactive forces affect marital conflicts between them. Within "tradition" and "change", gender role expectations and power differentials between the couples were taken as the two main areas of investigation. Specifically, the focus is on whether the interacting forces of changing gender role expectations and power differentials in the family have prompted the marital dissatisfaction, and conflicts, of the

wives and husbands. The study also focuses on investigating whether the demand for a reconstruction of a new gender relationship, which upsets the balance of power and “traditional” gender division of labor in the family, affects marital dynamics.

Fifteen married couples from dual-earner families facing marital conflict in Beijing participated in this qualitative research with in-depth interviews. The data indicate that the couples’ conflicts arose largely from, though with varying degrees, their differences in role assumptions and expectations, and different responses to changing demands on the gender division of labor as well as gender relations and power differentials within the family. The data also show that traditional gender ideology, “the man should be responsible for the public sphere and the woman the private sphere”, still lingers on, more among the husbands than wives, and becomes a hindrance to adjustment to new expectations and gender equality within the family. The husbands’ refusal or unpreparedness to accommodate to changing demands in the face of women’s increased participation in the labor market and sharing of the breadwinner’s role is one major potential factor in marital conflict in Mainland China’s dual-earner families. Such unpreparedness can be traced, in part, to a failure on the part of the Chinese government’s effort in advocating gender equality since the early 1950’s. While it has actively urged women to shift their attention from the family to the society, it has neglected the importance, and encouragement, of the corresponding reassignment of the roles of men and women at home.

One limitation of this study lies in the small number of the participants. Thus it has limited generalizability in terms of the complexity of dual-earner families in modern Chinese cities. Nevertheless, the findings of the study do enable us to better understand

the dynamics of struggle among couples in the face of new gender role expectations and invite us to rethink the existing theoretical framework of understanding marital conflicts in a changing China.

Acknowledgements

Just as Confucius said, at the age of forty, a person should not be confused anymore, and at the age of fifty, one should know one's destiny. Now that I am almost the age of knowing my destiny, the completion of this dissertation will bring happiness and joy to all my family, friends and myself. At this moment, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all the people who have supported me during my studies.

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Ho Chi Kwan, for all the academic guidance, advice and spiritual encouragement she has given me while I was undertaking my studies. Her critical demands and warm concerns, as well as inspiring theoretical discussion, helped me a great deal in pursuing a vigorous academic training. Without her direction and guidance, this thesis would not be in its present shape.

I would also like to give my thanks to the Department of Applied Social Science of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I appreciate the opportunity and help offered by the teachers in this Department. It is regretful that I cannot list all of their names here. However, they have made a lasting impression on me. In particular, I wish to thank Dr. Yuen Sun Pong. Knowledgeable and kind, he has given me many helpful suggestions, especially at the beginning of my study.

My thanks go to my classmates of Room EF 309 at the University. I will never forget the times we spent together chatting, and discussing new ideas. I was able to get greater understanding and insight about the things that we were studying. I appreciate the love they shared with me.

Special thanks must be given to all the 30 participants, who, during the 6 months of the interviews, shared their life stories with me. It is their help and trust that have made this study possible. I also wish to express my appreciation to friends and colleagues in Beijing for helping me in identifying the participants and assisting with English editing.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my dear husband and daughter for their support and understanding. During the past few years I was far away from home but I was never away from their deep love and caring. Without them, my continued study and this thesis would not have been possible.

Zhang, Lixi

18/11/2001

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Research Background

In recent years, marital conflict has been consistently on the rise in Mainland China. According to the statistics published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 1,201,000 couples filed for divorce in 1999, an increase of 10,000 from the previous year. In 2000, a total number of 1,212,000 divorce cases were registered, representing yet another increase of 11,000 from the year before¹. A report by a Beijing-based social organization, "Women's Hotline" stated that, between January and December in 1999, the organization received 6,637 telephone calls seeking help with regard to marital problems. The figure represented 23.06% of the total number of incoming calls for that year. Among the 6,637 calls received, some 61.28% were related to marital conflict² (BWH, 1998). Other statistics released by the Local People's Conciliation Committee³ reflected the phenomenon from a different perspective. From 1983 to 1994, the committee mediated a total number of 81,983,315

¹ For details, see "The Society of China", 1997, 4, 28., and The Statistics of Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China. The Web site is: www.mca.gov.cn.

² For details, see (1998) "The Beijing Women's Hotline 1997 Annual Report". Pp.12-17. The Maple Women's Psychological Center, Beijing, China.

³ According to the Constitution of People's Republic of China, the *Local People's Conciliation Committees* are self-governing organizations set up by the local people on the basis of a village, a neighborhood, a factory or an enterprise. Their main tasks are to mediate between parties in civil disputes. Stipulated in the Criminal Law of P. R. China, abuse against family members belongs to a private prosecution case, and would be turned down if there is no accusation. Therefore, abusive action against family members, including domestic abuse against women, is a civil dispute and should be mediated by Local People's Conciliation Committees.

civil disputes, with 14,384,905, or 18% of them, involving marital conflict. In a country that has all along been championing the culture of a “peaceful family, prosperous country”, the unrelenting rise in divorce rates and family disputes has, quite naturally, attracted the attention of social scientists from various disciplines. (Tan 1990; Ma 1992)

Because of the afore mentioned trends, a chain of marriage and family consulting and counseling organizations were set up in the Chinese metropolises, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou during the 1990s. I was teaching two subjects, “Women’s Studies” and “Family Sociology” in the Social Work faculty of a women’s college in Beijing. Between the year of 1993 and 1995, I worked as a volunteer at a “Women’s Hotline”, a non-governmental organization. Meanwhile, I also founded another non-governmental group with some colleagues by the name of “Women’s Consulting and Activities Center”, which specializes in providing services to women seeking help. Through my service as a voluntary counselor at these centers, I often had the opportunity to get in touch with couples from dual-earner families facing marital problems and in need of help. In spending time with them and attempting to help them solve their marital problems, I felt my abilities, more often than not, fell short of what I wanted to achieve, and became rather perplexed by it. In the course of counseling, I began to realize that it was in fact very difficult, and at times almost impossible, to facilitate mutual understanding between the conflicting parties merely by virtue of the skills such as we had learnt. For instance, it was nearly impossible to get the couples facing conflict to sit down and talk civilly or to train them to learn communicating skills during the counseling process. I began to realize that if a genuine understanding and comprehension of the complicated dynamics behind the marital conflicts within

the families was lacking, a solution with clear aims and objectives would be hard to come by for the person seeking counseling.

In my numerous conversations with couples seeking for help, I detected, through their descriptions of their marital conflict, many differences in their experiences and perception of the same incident. Furthermore, the husband and the wife might have almost entirely different perceptions and understandings or experiences about the marital conflict between them. In other words, contrary to most existing frameworks dealing with marital conflicts, many disputes between couples existed not only due to a lack of communication skills and different interests, but also as a result of different readings or views with regard to the same incident under dispute. Without doubt, the different views and attitudes were a potential hindrance to better communication and mutual understanding between husbands and wives.

However, it would not be very helpful when we explore the interactive forces affecting marital conflicts if the study simply focused on attitudinal differences between the couples. I discovered, as far as the disputing husband and wife were concerned, that they were in fact, both convinced of their own “justifiable” reasons, and insisted that only their own views and ways of doing things were correct. The uncompromising positions on both sides are major cause of conflicts. Then, a central question which interests me more than anything else is: why do they have different perceptions of the same incidents. What are the beliefs or assumptions behind the couple’s present perceptions and their recalcitrance toward each other? Why is each of them convinced that she or he is the one suffering a grievance? As I explored further, I began to discover the relationship between the couples’ conflicts and grievances within the dual-earner families was related to their different perceptions of gender role

expectations. A closer examination revealed how these differences resulted from a structured gender division of labor, which stipulates that men are responsible for the public sphere, and women for the private sphere.

All these observations and experiences prompted me to ponder a further question, what are the forces affecting individual perceptions of spousal roles? In terms of the traditional gender division of labor, what kinds of changes are taking place between couples in dual-earner families in modern-day China on the basis of their differences? Does the wife's social participation have a direct impact on the intra-family division of labor and power differentials, causing it to be reconstructed? If the answers are yes, how do the husband and wife understand and respond to the process of "reconstructing the pattern of a gendered division of labor" in a Chinese cultural context? Will the different attitudes and behaviors and willingness to accommodate and adjust to new challenges contribute to their marital conflict?

Having raised these questions, I then found myself confronted by questions from a different perspective. From what angles should I study the issues? In other words, how should I study marital conflict? Should I see it as a private matter between the couple or within the family, or as a social phenomenon that has occurred as a result of various socio-cultural-ideological forces? Different conceptual frameworks result in different questions, how findings are identified and conclusions drawn?

In view of the above-mentioned considerations, I attempt to study marital conflict as a social phenomenon from a gender perspective by situating marital conflict in dual-earner family within macro-gender relations in Chinese society. That such an idea is adopted here is due to the consideration that marital conflict is regarded not only as an event between a man and a woman, but also as a result of family-based unequal

relationships through a gendered division of labor. I therefore try to concentrate on the impact of the mainstream male-oriented patriarchal Chinese culture and gender ideology on the one hand, and cautiously uncover changes in women's role in dual-earner families and its impact on the other. Following this thread, I further investigate the impacts of the interaction among women's changing role, the centuries - old male-oriented family system and gender ideology on the relations between couples and how these interactive forces affect marital conflict in dual-earner families in modern-day Chinese cities.

Objectives of the study

This study has five specific objectives: The first is to identify the role expectations toward self and spouses between couples in dual career families. The second is to examine the similarities and differences in their gender role perceptions and role expectations between spouses. The third is to explore whether women's changing responsibilities are affecting the traditional gender division of labor and spouses' gender ideology, particularly in role expectations and power distribution within the family. The fourth is to examine how these effects are manifested in dual-earner families facing marital conflict in urban China. The fifth is to explore how a realization of the importance of the social aspect such as gender role expectations, gender ideology, and power differentials between couples contribute to a deeper understanding of marital conflicts and marital counseling in Mainland China.

Conceptual framework

I have pointed out in my discussion of the research background that the aim of this study is to examine, from a gender perspective, the phenomenon of marital conflict in dual-earner families in modern-day Chinese cities. A gender perspective helps us to understand more deeply why couples with conflicts have different perceptions of their roles and their conflicts. In relation to this, patriarchy and the impact of a centuries-old male-oriented family system upon gender relations and role assumptions within the family in China serve as an important conceptual frame. The purpose of focusing on the impact of the male-oriented family system is to understand the conditions under which gender relations have been fostered within Chinese society, particularly the ways they affect role expectations between husbands and wives, as well as the gender division of labor within the family. The effect of gender equality policies initiated by the Chinese government since the beginning of the 1950s, as well as the changes that followed, also serve as an other important anchor. What is at issue here are whether the changes in women's participation in the labor market have given rise to changes in the pattern of a gender division of labor within traditional families, and, if such is the case, the ways in which the husband and wife have sought to adjust to these changes or refuse to do so. If the couples have failed to adjust to the new circumstances, is their failure contributory factor to the marital conflict between them? It is therefore, my intention to study and to make sense of the marital conflict taking place within the dual-earner families caught in the middle of the dynamics of "tradition" and "change".

While I have sketched out the dynamics of 'tradition' and 'change' as two main anchors within the conceptual framework of my research, greater attention here is primarily given to the way in which the on-going changes within dual-earner families

can be uncovered, including women's participation in the labor market and their self-awareness. I also try to find out in what ways the changes have prompted the dissatisfaction of the wives and husbands with the existing division of labor and new demands at home. Another focus is whether demands for a reconstruction of a new gender relationship and upset of the balance of power based on the 'traditional' gender division of labor have affected marital conflicts between the couples.

Furthermore, I am of the opinion that, if the focus was only on the traditional gender division of labor, it would not be adequate to explain the marital conflicts within the dual-earner families in modern-day Chinese cities. If both the husband and the wife were not 'aware' of any inequality in the 'traditional' pattern of gender division of labor, or if they did not see it as a 'problem', they would then continue in peaceful co-existence even if a balance as such is truly unreasonable or unfair. However, if there existed between the couples basic differences, or even misgivings in their roles and expectations, and how they related it each other or how power is shared, then it is would be possible for one, or both, of them to feel unfairly treated, and thus, justified to feel oneself to be in a fight rope. It is, therefore, important to explore differences as they may have a great bearing on the marital disputes. In order to do so, it was important to understand the couples' perceptions of their expectations of family roles as well as the distribution of power between them. In short in a study such as this, it is important to comprehend the mentality and way of thinking of each of the couples with respect to gender role demands and power differentials. Along this line of thinking, it is my assumption that because there are 'changes', or new factors that are different from traditional families, different perspectives and responses among couples to the changes and their awareness of their own situation may contribute to marital conflict.

Generally speaking, an awareness of the existence of conflict can provide husbands and wives, a chance to reflect upon the conditions that have given rise to their dissatisfaction, and an opportunity to meet the challenge of changing the existing 'traditional' gender division of labor within the family. However, this is not always the case. One reason is that what the case is varies with the different experiences of the couples. Another is that state policies on gender equality since the 1950s have impacted differently on women and men. Because of these dynamics, I pay considerable attention to couple relationships within modern dual-earner families subsequent to the women's participation in the labor market. The increase in labor force participation by the wives is an important change affecting the couples', especially the wives', experiences of role expectations, gender relations and the distribution of power at home.

It should perhaps be said that, in a more precise way, the changes in women's roles have an impact on gender relations, as well as on the family division of labor. This occurs because the women are confronted with questions that they can no longer avoid such as who should look after the children. Who should make decisions in the family? Or how can power be shared? In searching for answers, traditional role expectations and power relations are challenged, prompting demands to restructure the gender division of labor in response to the changes. In the process, conflicts naturally occur if one of the parties fails to come to terms with the new reality, or if both parties are unable to come to a consensus.

As part of the studies, I focus on the discussion of two major concepts, 'role expectations' and 'power differentials' in a Chinese culture context order to expound

on the impact of the male-oriented family system upon relations between a husband and a wife, as well as on the changes in women's role in post-1949 Mainland China.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology with in-depth interviews is employed in this study to gather data to understand the participants' articulation of their role perceptions and expectations, as well as their emotions, attitudes, motives, and feelings about marital conflict and the forces affecting it.

In view of the objectives of my research mentioned above, a qualitative methodology is an appropriate means because it allows for participants' free articulation of their perceptions, focuses more on the importance of social context in terms of understanding people and society, while also seeking to project social life onto a larger social frame (Neuman, 1991, 1994; Denzin, & Lincoln, 1994; Hu, 1996). A qualitative methodology, especially the in-depth interviews, is an appropriate means because it can help to gather voluminous and rich firsthand data within a Chinese cultural context, "family scandals must not be made public".

Fifteen married couples (30 participants) participated in the research. With the objective of studying marital conflict not only as an event between a man and a woman who "have lost their perspective and optimism and cannot communicate. They both feel lonely, misunderstood, rejected, unwanted and insecure" (Havemann & Lehtinen, 1990:169), but that it is also affected by family-based unequal relationships through a gendered division of labor, I included the following criteria for the selection of the participants. The first criterion is that all the participants come from a dual-earner

family in which the incomes between the husband and the wife are comparable, or the income of the wife is higher than that of the husband. As illustrated in chapter 3 and 4, the first criterion is based on the conceptual framework in which I focus on the change brought about by the wife's social participation in the labor market, and its impact on the relationship between the couples. The second criteria is that the marital rift between the couples from dual career families has been made public, in the sense that they have either separated or were undergoing the process of separation or divorce. The third is that all participants are living in Beijing, a political and culture center since 1950's where a women's situation has been directly influenced by state policies and assumed to be better than that in other places in Mainland. It is also a metropolis, in which tremendous changes have taken place since the economic reform. Family, marital relationships and the marriage are confronted with challenges. The detail explanation for the criteria of selecting participants will be introduced in chapter 4.

A semi-structured interview guide based on the conceptual framework was developed for the study. I also organized the questions, ranging from open-ended to specific, about the various situations of the couples in a systematic way. The themes of the interview revolved around the couples' perceptions and role expectations towards themselves and their spouses, the similarities and differences in their perceptions and expectations on roles at home, the power distribution in their family, and their feelings toward their relative roles.

A pilot study involving couples from two dual-earner families was carried out prior to the actual fieldwork in order to test the workability of the interview guide. It was subsequently adjusted. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted with couples from 15 families over a six- month period. Each and every participant was interviewed

separately. All the interviews, except one, were taped with the participant's consent. After that, I listened carefully to all the interview tapes over and over again, and closely studied the notes that contained all the key phrases taken during interviews. Afterward, I began the process of transcription myself, and the full versions of the recordings and notes were transcribed in the Chinese language. Building on this basis, and guided by my conceptual framework, I continued to study the data, trying to search for and grasp the key phrases and themes that were related to the research objectives. Then I translated the participants' words to be included as appropriate examples to illustrate a relevant point in the chapters on the findings. External validity of the translation was achieved by asking another translator to translate versions back from English to Chinese and have their meanings compared. Throughout the translation, I paid particular attention to the special words participants used in their context, and included the Chinese words with an English explanation whenever necessary.

In the course of describing the data, I used a two- step process. Initially, I tried to make sense of the perceptions and expectations about the roles of husbands and wives from the participants' perspectives while looking for relevant key terms, concepts and themes. At the second step, I concentrated on how women's changing role was affecting the traditional gender division of labor and gender ideology, particularly role expectations and the power distribution within the family. The whole process of data collection and analysis, from the design of the research to the pilot study, is presented in Chapter 4.

Significance of the research

As mentioned in the beginning, the present study tries to investigate marital conflict from a gender perspective and helps to examine the interactive forces affecting marital conflict. Hence, the research highlights:

- (1) The dynamics in the marital conflict within dual-earner families at both a micro and macro forces;
- (2) A gender perspective in understanding marital conflict and marital counseling in a changing China;
- (3) The understanding of power differentials and decision making between couples within a Chinese cultural context

Limitations of the research

A total number of 15 couples participated in this study. While the sample is small, and a generalization of the findings is not feasible, the study nevertheless helps us to understand the dynamics of marital conflict between dual-earning couples sharing similar backgrounds.

Furthermore, in the process of organizing the data of participants' interviews in order that the commonalities and differences on certain aspects can be more distinctly presented, the holistic picture of the stories told by each participant becomes more coherent. As a consequence, the completeness of the data may have been affected to a greater or lesser extent by repeated categorization and induction.

A further understanding of the expectations and perceptions on the role of “husband ”and “wife ” between couples in dual-earner families who do not have conflicts that are as deep should be investigated and their experience of how handling these struggles in their marriage should be shared.

This study consists of a total of eight chapters. The next chapter introduces literature review on the related studies and results of marital conflict. Chapter 3 develops a conceptual framework based on ‘role expectations’ and ‘power differentials ’ as a way of framing the empirical data. The conceptual framework incorporates on understanding of the micro and macro dynamics of the struggle between ‘tradition’ and ‘change’. The design of the research is introduced in Chapter 4. It is not only a concrete account of the methodology, but also an explanation of some of my experience with qualitative analysis, a research method that has been rather controversial as far as the field of social science in Mainland China is concerned.

Chapters 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, present relevant data of the interviews that I conducted with the couples as well as some post-interview data description and analysis. The similarities and differences between the couples toward role expectations, the perceptions of their power differentials and demands for change in the distribution of power within the family are described within the dynamics of the two main foci, ‘tradition’ and ‘change’. The findings and the discussions, and some of my personal experience and reflection, together with suggestions for related studies in the future are included in the Chapter 8.

Chapter 2 Marriage and family conflict: An overview

Because of my career background, I have always come in touch with families in conflict situation, listening to them talking about their troubles and their doubts, and working with them to find a solution to their problems. In the process, while I have come to agree with what many researchers have pointed out that marital conflicts are part of contemporary life, I cannot but hope to find ways to help troubled couples to rebuild their relationships. Before solutions can be identified, however, I need to be clear about what brings conflict between couples in the first place.

Marital conflict has been defined as marital partners being dissatisfied with their relationship as a whole. "The partners have lost their perspective and optimism and cannot communicate. They both feel lonely, misunderstood, rejected, unwanted and insecure." (Havemann & Lehtinen, 1990:169) It is interesting to note that while scholars working on the topic all agree that marital life without disagreements and bruised feeling is a myth, they do have differences in their analysis of its causes (Davis, 1985; Havemann & Lehtinen, 1986, 1990; Lewis et al., 1992; Canary et al., 1995).

Although there is a lack of consensus about the term "marital conflict", all researchers

have asked why and how marital conflict arises in a close relationship. I am no exception. Just like other researchers and marriage counselors, I am very concerned about the reasons that give rise to marital conflicts in the hope that finding out the reasons will help me with my work.

From the abundant research on marriage, family and marriage counseling, the reasons that give rise to marriage conflicts vary from one study to another. For many years, studies on marriage counseling have identified sex, money, children, social activities, friends and religions as reasons that lead to marital conflict (Landis & Landis, 1963). In recent years, other researchers believe that apart from the above-mentioned reasons, alcoholism, drug abuse, marriage life that is considered to be unsavory, different values and outlook, pressure from outside, and differences in role expectations are also reasons that lead to marital conflicts (Havemann & Lehtinen, 1986, 1990; Goodman, 1993). Some scholars also argue that from the perspective of interpersonal interaction, a lack of respect for individuals can also lead to marital conflicts (Canary et al., 1995). Lewis et al. (1992) think that attitudes on the expectations of sex roles are the entry points to our understanding of the experience of and conflicts in dual-earner families. Reviewing the results of studies on marriage and family in the last 60 years, Blumel (1992) also points out that “role expectations” and “power distribution” are two concepts that have been used or referred to most often by

scholars in this field of study. This reminds us that even though conflicts between the husband and the wife in every family might have been due to a different set of reasons, conflicts always involve marital roles and power differentials. This brings me to a review of literature on these two topics, which are related to the topic of marital conflicts.

From many studies on marital conflict and role theory, I am particularly interested in the viewpoints of Havemann & Lehtinen (1986, 1990), Goodman (1993) and Canary et al. (1995). They shed light on the importance of role expectations between couples in our attempt to understand marital conflicts in contemporary societies. The reasons include the difference between husbands and wives in their role expectations, social changes, mutual respect between husbands and wives and the pursuit of and competition for power. Their postulations lead in the direction of recognizing the importance of examining couples' perceptions of their respective roles in marriage.

In fact, once a person is in a marital relationship, he/she will have specific understandings and expectations of what it means to be a husband or a wife and will exert certain standards and demands on his/her partner. When the partner is "up to standard" or fulfills one's demands, one will be very satisfied with one's marriage. When one's partner is not "up to standard" and does not fulfill one's demands, the partner is expected to make adjustment so as to come closer to the standard and

demands. This means that once a marital relationship is established, the people involved are expected to play different gender roles and are expected to adopt attitudes and behavior in accordance with their marital roles. In fact, these expectations are often internalized and shared by the couples themselves (Chu, 1974; Halford et al., 1990; Weiss & Heyman, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Liu, 1991; Li, 1995).

When we use role theory as the starting point to examine people's marital life and the expectations of the husband and the wife of their respective roles, we will find that their expectations are dynamic. This means that in different periods of time and in different types of family, expectations may differ. Some scholars argue that the stability of a marital relationship is directly linked to a clear traditional sexual division of labor between husband and wife in the family. Division of labor in the family that models itself on the social ideology that asserts that men should be the breadwinner and women the homemaker is widely accepted and approved. It is argued that if all men produce and all women take up household chores and childrearing, if men dominate and women follow, if men raise the family and women take care of it, in short, if men and women would follow clear expectations of their respective roles, families would benefit by remaining stable (Parsons & Bales, 1955). In similar accord, Chinese scholar Lin Yu Tang (1933) has said that "getting married is the best, the most proper and the most satisfying career for a woman", and that "a virtuous wife and a

good mother bring happiness to a family”.

However, with social developments such as industrialization and urbanization, and an increasing number of women being employed outside of the family, dual-earner families have emerged and are changing the traditional model of the gender division of labor in families, resulting in new expectations between couples with respect to their marital roles. For example, when women are sharing the economic pressure of their husbands, they also expect their husbands to share in their household chores and in caring for the children (Lewis & Marvin, 1986). Furthermore, the concept of appropriate marital roles is connected with views on the gender division of labor in the large society. In other words, when we speak of a person’s “role” or “a marital role that a person is expected to play”, it means that we should also examine one’s concepts of society, social status, social expectations, gender, self-consciousness, etc. that are related with the “roles” we are discussing. After all, a couple’s perception of the roles of husbands and wives in the family is a construction resulting from the interaction between all different kinds of factors (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969, 1971, 1978; Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Chu, 1974).

Structural changes of the family resulting from women going out the family and taking up paid work and the impact of such changes on marital roles have drawn the attention of many sociologists, psychologists, social workers and marriage counselors

(Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971; Burr, 1971; Biddle, 1979; Atkinson & Huston, 1984; Lewis et al, 1992; Blumel, 1992; Goodman, 1993). Scholars such as the Rapoports (1969, 1971) and Goodman (1993) think that in industrialized societies, the dual-earner family is a most common type of families. In this kind of family, as women take up paid jobs, the economic needs of the family are no longer totally dependent on the husband. Consequently, differences in marital roles between the husband and the wife and the power structure of the family are undermined. Many studies have found that in industrialized societies, compared with their counterparts in more traditional families where men are the breadwinners, women in dual-earner families spend less time in domestic chores as men spend more time in domestic chores (Lewis & Marvin, 1986; Tao, 1994; Sha, 1994).

However, some studies in China still insist that the model of traditional gender division of labor in which men are the breadwinners and women the homemaker be the best model for contemporary families. It is believed that such a model allows men and women to develop and make the full use of their respective strength (Zheng, 1994; Sun, 1994). Indeed, scholars such as Huber (1993) think that the society as a whole has not changed its expectations of the roles of husbands and wives. The roles which they are expected to play are still linked with the traditional gender division of labor. Changes that have occurred in some families have not radically undermined such expectations.

As a result, wives who work outside of the family often do not find their domestic chores reduced or their familial responsibilities lightened (Bebbington, 1973; Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Chu, 1974; Cowan, 1983). On the contrary, they often have to deal with both at the same time. Hochschild (1989) has meticulously described and discussed the situation of employed women who have to take care of both their waged labor outside of home and their unpaid labor within their families, which she has coined as the “second shift”. Huber and many other scholars hold similar views. They point out that because of the pressure of social norms and traditional gender role expectations, women are still the ones who do the household chores in most families, thus resulting in women playing double roles (Lan, 1982; 1985; Lewis, 1992; Huber, 1993; Goodman, 1993; Rai, 1994; Li, 1995; Ng, 1995). Feminists have repeatedly pointed out that for women, the relation between paid work and domestic labor is not that of one replacing the other. Instead, it involves the question of how to change attitudes about gender roles and the expectations of marital roles because domestic labor is already structured by a gender division of labor. The emergence of dual-earner families has not only led to changes in family structures, more importantly, it has challenged people to rethink the gender division of labor in the family and the traditional expectations related with marital roles, in particular the kind of gender relation that has long been acclaimed by the society.

At this point of this discussion, one is faced with a major problem: in dual-earner families, the sharing of the household chores by both husbands and wives seem to be a natural development because the wives have shared the husbands' responsibility of raising the family. In other words, the reassignment of marital roles in the family and the re-division of labor are considered to be an inevitable trend. However, in real life of dual-earner families, such inevitability does not seem so obvious. When one looks at people's attitudes about marital roles, one observes that many husbands and wives have major differences on the question of the re-division of labor. When husbands and wives differ in their attitudes and expectations, will their marital relationship be affected? In other words, will there be marital conflicts? Marshal (1985) and some scholars believe that the precondition of a happy marriage is not only a question of people learning to play their marital role. What is also important is how married couples conform to each other's role expectations. That is to say, when a couple has a high level of compliance to each other's expectations, they will derive a high satisfaction from their marriage. In their studies of dual-earner families, Rapoport (1969, 1978) notice that the feelings and the experience of the husbands and the wives in dual-earner families are different. Based on their massive studies, they suggest that the satisfaction of a couple feel about the re-division of labor is an important factor that directly affects the quality of marriage of dual-earner families.

While many scholars link satisfaction in marriage life with a couple's expectations of and attitude about each other's role, Blumel (1992) argues that this is not enough. He pointed out that even though the concepts of "role expectations" and "power distribution" proposed in role theory have a very important position in the study of marriage and family, they are nevertheless inadequate. This is so because role theory has not examined the question of marriage and family, in particular marital conflicts, by placing it in the wider social context, and that is, the context of gender relation. That is to say, when one discusses the reasons giving rise to marital conflicts, one has to examine a more complex question. The question is: how does the gender division of labor in the family link with the gender division of labor in the larger society?

Since the sixties, the traditional discourse of the gender division of labor and the related discourse of human biology have come under full-fledged criticism by feminists. Feminist scholars have pointed out that the gender division of labor in society is influenced by cultural and social factors, and that family life and marital relations interact with the gender relations in the economic and political institutions in contemporary societies (wolf, 1985a, 1985b; Weeks, 1989; Ho, 1992). They emphasize that the basic model of gender relations in contemporary societies reproduces the traditional gender division of labor wherein men play the role of breadwinners and women the homemakers. Such a gender division of labor further

affects women's status in the family and in society. They therefore place more emphasis on the relationship between families and social institutions in which men dominate (Weeks, 1989; Ferree, 1990, 1991). The discussion of feminists, in particular socialist feminists, on the relationship between gender relations and the economic system has contributed to our understanding of how the traditional model of division of labor has been affected by cultural and social factors. It also sheds light on how it interacts with the gender relations in contemporary economic systems and in political institutions. The family system and the familial responsibility of woman are structured by the gender division of labor in the larger society that places women in subordinating roles in both the public and private spheres. (Hartmann, 1983; Wolf, 1985a, 1985b; Li, 1995)

The perspective of the above-mentioned scholars in their examination of the division of labor and gender relationship in the family helps us understand why in dual-earner families, men and women experience the relation between work and family differently. Whether it is a question of work affecting family life or a question of work being affected by family life, in dual-earner families, the impact on women is far greater than that of their husbands. This is because of the impact of a family system and women's familial responsibility being structured by traditional gender division of labor. If such differences have not been handled well or resolved, marital conflicts may

occur. However, it is often observed that even if the family structures were changed, under the influences of cultural and ideological factors, the wives and husbands in dual-earner families can hardly escape from the pressures of the social expectations on their gender role (Lan, 1981; Lewis et al, 1992; Xu, 1993; Ng, 1995). If we agree that society's expectations of the roles of men and women in the family has not undergone any qualitative change and that there are differences between the husband and the wife in terms of their role expectations, it is not difficult to understand why conflicts are inherent in dual-earner families who are struggling between the traditional roles of bread-winning husband and the home-making wife to being partners as both employees and homemakers (Blumel, 1992; Blair, 1992; Lewis et al, 1992; Xu, 1993; Goodman, 1993).

At the same time, scholars found that decision-making power in the family is other very important concept in the study of marital relationship. When a person perceives that he/she has no decision-making power in his/her marital relationship, his/her satisfaction with the marriage will definitely be affected (Burr, 1971; Davidson, 1984). In relation to this, feminist scholars have highlighted the distribution of power within the family by showing how the gender division of labor and different expectations of the roles of husbands and wives affect men and women differently. They argue that concepts such as power, justice, fairness and adjustment exist not only in the political

sphere but also in domestic spheres such as in marriages (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1976; Scanzoni & Szinovacz, 1980). Other scholars further postulate that there are power differences between the spouses that may lead to conflicts when either of them is dissatisfied with the situation (Ferber, 1979; Scanzoni & Szinovacz, 1980; Bernard, 1982; Hartmann, 1983; Blumberg, 1984; Berk, 1985; Ferree, 1990; Hertz, 1992). Feminist discussion of the question of marital conflicts from the perspective of the changes in the role expectations of a couple and in power distribution helps us to understand why and how a couple no longer conforms to each other's expectations may experience conflicts.

A general review of the literature on marriage and family in contemporary China reveals that most of the studies on reasons behind marital conflicts focus on the level of family and the individual but not much between the two. Even though some scholars have already started to attend to the question of role expectations and the unequal division of labor between couples within the family, most of the studies have only examined the difference between husbands and wives in the time spent on domestic labor and the difference in the kind of chores each undertakes. Few have looked for reasons at a deeper level by examining the question in the context of gender relations in the larger society (Lu, 1991; Liu, 1991; Tao, 1993; Sha et al., 1999; Zhang, 1999). Furthermore, in the studies on marriage, family and marital conflict on

China, there is a lack of information on the experience of the husbands and wives in dual-earner families and their perceptions of their respective roles and the pressure they feel. There is also a lack of findings from studies that examine the question of marriage and family in the context of much more complex gender relations in society (Tan, 1990; Zhang, 1999). As it is well known, in China, the marital roles of men and women are greatly influenced by the family-based unequal relationship manifested in the gender division of labor and the male-oriented patriarchal Chinese culture. Consequently, men are granted a status superior to that of women (Hsu, 1971; Yuen et al, 1998) and “men the breadwinners and women the homemakers” becomes the basic principle of the gender division of labor. On the other hand, such a model of a gender division of labor is sustained and defended by an ideology of the family in which hierarchy dependent on age and status and the distinction between men and women are the main tenets.

Over the past thousands of years, gender relations in traditional Chinese families has been reproduced by having women completely dependent on marriage (men) and family and men having total control over women. Hsu (1971) once raised the concept of “the Father-Son Axis”. He and other researchers mentioned that from one generation to another, the male-oriented patriarchal culture had continuously occupied a dominant position within the family (Hsu, 1971, Yuen et al, 1998). Such a model of

gender relations has restricted changes in the expectations of, and attitudes concerning, men and women and also the evaluation of one's behavior. In relation to this, both western and Chinese scholars have studied influence which the state system and the family system have on women and women's status in the family. Findings of these studies are published in much of the sociological and feminist literature in this field (Croll, 1983; Wolf, 1985; Weeks, 1989; Tao, 1993; Rai, 1994; Sha, 1994; Ng, 1995; Yuen et al, 1998; Li, 1994, 1995).

But how does one connect and combine this research findings with Chinese studies on marriage and families, in particular studies on marital conflicts? For example, in exploring changes in the marital role of men and women in dual-earner families, what are the perspectives that can help us to best understand the reassignment of gender roles in the family? What are the perspectives that may throw light on how the re-division of labor occurs in a society such as China in which a gender division of labor based on men being the breadwinner and women the homemaker has been instituted for thousands of years? What are the perspectives that may help us to disentangle the kinds of contradictions that arise from such processes? And is it possible to make use of the concepts of "gender role" and "power differentials" to help us understand the power structure of the family which has been the concern of Western sociologists and feminists? These are questions that require further discussion.

As it has been discussed earlier, it is when women start to be employed outside of the family that demands for the re-division of labor based on gender roles in the family arise. These demands of women might have challenged the original expectations of their spouses concerning each other's marital roles and might have therefore led to "doubts" and "pains". In a report on a study about the quality of marriage in Chinese cities, Xu (1999) and Li (2000) pointed out that in dual-earner families, wives are usually less satisfied than their husbands about their marriage. Other scholars have also undertaken similar studies and reached similar conclusions both in China and overseas (Chu, 1974; Davis, 1985; Lewis et al., 1992; Canary et al., 1995). How does this phenomenon arise? Is it because in the process of changes in the roles of the husband and the wife, the wife feels more strongly about the changes and, compared with her husband, her demands are more pressing? I believe that in the study of marital conflicts in dual-earner families in China, more attention should be paid to the discussion and analysis of this question. When we analyze in what way a couple no longer satisfy each other's role expectations, the above-mentioned question will help us to pay more attention to finding out who might feel more dissatisfied, and who is more anxious for change.

The situation is even more complex in China. On the one hand, there is a whole set of family system that has been established and developed on the basis of a

male-dominated patriarchal cultural tradition that was passed down since a few thousand years ago. On the other hand, in a very short period of time and in ways that could be described as almost coercive, women were mobilized to join the socialist construction and thus participated in the various levels in society. In the cities, it was in this way that the process of changing traditional families to dual-earner families was completed in just a few decades. In view of such a complex social background, one should not ignore the efforts of the Chinese government in the last 50 years in its promulgation and practice of gender equality while noting how the kinship system and power relations in traditional families might affect the role expectations of either of the spouses in a family. The existence of traditional thinking, the practice and policy of gender equality, and the sprouting of women's self consciousness are all questions that should be looked into in a study that attempts to understand the reasons behind marital conflicts in families in contemporary China.

On top of all these changes, an understanding of the changes in power differentials or power distribution within the family is another important area for a thorough examination for our understanding of marital conflicts. The concept of decision-making power in the family is very important in the study of marital relationship (Paolucci, et al., 1977; Scanzoni, 1980; Ott, 1992). However, I agree with Safilios-Rothschild (1967) who points out that it is inadequate to focus only on the

result of whom between the spouses makes what kind of decisions in such an examination. Rather, we should study the whole process of decision-making, that is, what has happened during the process and how, as Scanzoni & Szinovacz, (1980, 44) pointed out; “declining sex-role traditionalism results in decision-making becoming increasingly pervasive, significant, and complex”, and (1980, 60) that “couples who are more strongly sex-role traditional are often likely to achieve agreements, though sometimes they may engage problem-solving and consensus development. However when one party is modern and the other traditional, we can expect discovery to be extremely rare, development more common and conflict most common of all”. What they discovered is very helpful for us to understand that changes in gender roles may have altered the characteristics of decision-making in families, especially the power distribution in families within Chinese dual-earner families.

In traditional Chinese families, being placed in subordinated positions, women nearly had no role to play in making decisions in the family since they themselves were considered properties of their husbands and their families (Hsu, 1971; Yuen et al, 1998). Since 1949, many laws have been enacted to grant women’s equal status in the family and in society at large. Women enjoy equality with men in terms of the right to own and inherit properties and the right to education and to employment. These changes have contributed to improving women’s status in the family and inducing in

women some consciousness of gender equality (IOSA, 1994). We have to ask, therefore, in what way has women's expectations been raised in such a context and how do they, in concrete terms, participate in power distribution in the family?

In a study that takes into consideration the context of contemporary Chinese society, we have to take note of the fact that the understanding and expression of power dynamics between couples have their own unique forms. It may well be, for example, that while what major decisions made by dual-earner families on what in western societies may reflect the power dynamics within the family (Liu, 1991; Tao, 1993; Xu, 1999), this may not be the way that the majority of their counterparts in China do. Given the large scope of state intervention in the PRC in its people's daily life, many couples within a dual career family do not need to address a lot of similar decisions couples in the West need to make. These range from the question of purchasing houses to the question of making other forms of investments, the choice of careers or the place to live, and even how many children to have. Because of the strong interference of the state, the central-planning economic system and limited resources, the couples are left with very little room to bargain, negotiate or make any decision on these issues. At the same time, there are other issues, which might appear to have nothing to do with the question of power in western society, yet in the context of the Chinese society in which the traditional ideology of the family still persists, they are obvious signs of a question

of power relations. For example, as long as “Men are superior to women”, “men should dominate, and women should obey” are the main characteristics of the gender relations, and that the wife is the property belonging to her husband and the husband’s family, husbands have the right to say that the wife is “mine”, they are always the masters of the house, playing the role of a ruler within the family. In this power relation, wives are expected “virtuous wife and caring mother”, and “ a woman’s social status is raised when her husband becomes successful”. It is a fact that the traditional gender ideology and culture norms and demands are still very much present and affect the power differentials between the couples. One example is the question of the dignity and keeping the face of the husbands. Taking into consideration such a context, I think that a discussion of the process of decision-making in the family, and the dignity and the face of the husbands under the broader concept of power differential will be helpful in a more thorough understanding and investigation of the power relations in dual-earner families in the cultural context of China (Zhai, 1995). In a Chinese culture, the power status within the family is not merely by virtue of economic influence; the “authority” and “dignity” of a “husband” are also manifested. They cannot accord to be seen as “afraid of the wife”, “the man had to put up with the bullying because of his wife’s higher status”, “if the woman was capable, the man would be inhibited”, etc. All these feelings and pressures of the husbands are directly related to their power and the

authority they used to have. Therefore, when we analyze the power relations within Chinese dual-earner families, the traditional expectations on the family role of the wife and husband, and the feelings of the husband losing over the past “old rules” should be discovered.

In summary, feminist viewpoints that emphasize the interaction between marital relations and the economic and political institutions in contemporary societies help us to understand more precisely the relations between family and social institutions in which men dominate. Feminist studies have shown us how the gender division of labor has structured the family system and women’s domestic responsibilities and how marital conflicts have arisen due to the non-conformance of role expectations between couples in dual-earner families (Wolf, 1985a, 1985b; Weeks, 1989; Ferree, 1990, 1991). Such a macro perspective is important and essential in a study of the marital problems of dual-earner families in contemporary China as it places the question of marital conflicts in specific social context.

When we study the marital problems in dual-earner families in China, we should also ask the following questions: what is the impact on the reconstruction of the gender division of labor in dual-earner families in contemporary China when women take up employment outside of the family? What kinds of changes have occurred in the traditional gender division of labor in which men were the breadwinners and women

the homemakers? Taking into consideration these changes, in a shifting context of Chinese culture, how do women and men in dual-earner families articulate and respond to the process of “the reconstruction of modes of the gender division of labor”? Are the differences in their attitude and behavior with regard to the reconstruction of modes of the gender division of labor reasons for their conflicts? These are all questions that we have to pay attention to in a study of marital conflicts between couples in dual-earner families in Chinese cities. Unlike western societies, marriage counseling has only begun recently in Mainland China. I think that as we look for reasons in the family and on the level of interpersonal interaction that lead to marital problems and as we become concerned for the need to provide marriage counseling, we should also pay more attention to digging out and exploring the reasons on the level of society that lead to marital conflicts. At the same time, we should also be attentive to women’s feelings and experience. I believe that in so doing, both the theory and the practice of marriage counseling in Mainland China will grow and bear fruit which is one of the main purposes in undertaking this study.

Chapter 3 Conceptual framework

Taking the impacts of a male-oriented family system and the changing roles for women on couples in dual-earner families in modern-day China, this chapter seeks to provide a critique on gender dynamics in the family with a feminist perspective. An exploration of two related themes, that of role expectation and power distribution in the family are focused on as the basis of investigation with which the data presentation and analysis will be guided.

I will first concentrate on discussing how some policies and campaigns initiated by the socialist revolutionary movements since the 1950s, which have mobilized women to 'step out of home to work in society'¹, have challenged the traditional gender role and the impact of a male-oriented family system. The tracing of the developments explores the changes of family as developments in the roles for women and men have taken place in the outside world. The effect of the ways in which traditional

¹ It is a social movement at the early 1950s. The new government pulled housewives from home into the participating in the labor market. For the detail see *The Situation of Chinese Women*. Information Office of the Stat Council of The People's Republic of China. p.8 (1994)

culture has affected role expectations between couples and the division of labor within the family and their interaction with the changing forces are also examined.

Since the Chinese family culture is essentially male-oriented and patriarchal, with a consequential, ritual order of 'let the king be a king, the minister a minister, the father a father, the son a son', gender relations in Chinese families are closely related to such cultural norms. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore this system in details. What I am more concerned with here is the ways in which the family culture is featured in a male-female, subordinate order, and seek to explore the interpersonal relations in a male-oriented family, as well as the concept of male being responsible for the public sphere and female for the private sphere. Finally I wish to comprehend how the gender division of labor is connected with male dominance in family life. In other words, one of the themes is the actual effect of male dominance on the conjugal relation both in a cognitive as well as a practical sense.

If we adopt the concept of "male being responsible for the public sphere and female for the private" as a yardstick with which to examine the gender relations in Chinese family life, we are almost certain to come to the conclusion that, before the year of 1949, no substantial changes had ever taken place within the Chinese family in its two thousand year history (Hsu, 1971; Wolf, 1985b). Through the father-son

axis² from one generation to another, the male-oriented patriarchal culture had continuously occupied a dominant position within the family.

In Chinese traditional family, marriage is women's only end station in life. To meet the basic living needs, women have to “嫁漢嫁漢，穿衣吃飯” (*marry a man to be fed and clothed*). As social expectations would have it, “女子無才便是德” (*a woman without ability is a woman with virtue*), women's values are manifested in their hard work inside the family, as well as in their role of “相夫教子” (*supporting the husbands and parenting the children*). Hence, “母以子貴，妻以夫榮” (*mothers are honorable because of their sons, wives are honorable because of their husbands*) (Wu, 1991). As an instrument of reproduction for the family, little is accorded to the woman in terms of status and values outside the reproductive role. It is therefore not at all surprising to learn that men are portrayed as the sun and women the moon, or men the sea and women the river in many popular folk songs and old sayings (Han, 2000). Down through the centuries, the relation between man and woman within the traditional Chinese family has been maintained through a total

²In the studies of Chinese family culture and family relationship, Mr. Hsu, Francis. L.K. once raised the concept of “The Father-Son Axis”. It is his view that the relationship between the father and the son should be the core of Chinese family, in which the relationships between husband and wife, mother and son, brother and sister etc., are set to be influenced by the father-son axis. On top of the father-son relationship comes the entire family system, which goes on to influence the social structures of China. Please see Francis Hsu, Francis. L.K. “A Hypothesis on Kinship and Culture”, in Hsu, Francis. L.K. (ed.) *Kinship and Culture*, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago pp. 3-29 (1971); Hsu, L. K. *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in China*. Stanford University Press, Stanford (1971)

dependence of the woman on the family (i.e., the man) and a complete control of the woman by the man. Various studies and outcomes on this can be found in sociological and feminist research (Croll, 1983, 1995; Wolf, 1985 b; Weeks, 1989; Sha, 1995; Ng, 1995; Yuen et al. 1998), they believe that all the different role expectations, attitudes and comments on behavior with regard to both sexes are also confined to this pattern, “male being responsible for the public sphere and female for the private”.

The step-out-of-the-home movement initiated by the Mao government in the 1950s can be seen as an important campaign to pull women from the private sphere into the public. The resultant changes in women’s status within the family and the society are significant and indisputable. Post-1949 women’s social participation in different levels in the society has always been one of the many objectives of the new regime in its attempt to liberate all labor force and end oppression against women (Tao, 1993; Rai, 1994; Li, 1994,1995;). Meanwhile, encouraging women to step out of the home is also in keeping with the needs of national economic development. As pointed out by many scholars of Chinese studies and feminism, the notion of gender equality has received, institutionally as well as ideologically, an unprecedented boost in the socialist revolutionary movement through the elimination of clans, and the promulgation and vigorous implementation of the marriage law. Women, especially

those from urban areas, have been encouraged to participate in employment and social activities. (Tao, 1993; Li, 1994,1995; Xiong,1993). It is an undeniable fact that women in China do enjoy a new equal treatment in the public sphere and in workplaces in comparison with before. However, scholars also argue that the marked institutional advance is yet to bring about fundamental changes, in practice and in ideology, to the unequal gender relations and the traditional gender division of labor. For instance, should a man also share the duties formerly 'belonging' to a woman, now that the woman has become part of the labor force? Obviously, issues as such are yet to be addressed. That is to say, while the wife is now encouraged to work outside of home, it remains to be seen whether the husband can, correspondingly, also be encouraged to step into the private sphere to shoulder part of the household responsibility. In reality, the impact of the gender division of labor still remain strong in the political and economic policy-making process, as women, being wives and mothers, are required to perform their duty of taking care of their families (Croll, 1983, 1995; Robinson, 1985; Weeks, 1989; Wolf, 1985 b). Women, as mothers, are required to play a very important role in the socialist spiritual civilization movement, which has been sanctioned and encouraged by the government. Through the mass media, women's image as virtuous wife and caring mother has received further affirmation and enhancement (Robinson, 1985; Weeks, 1989; Rai, 1994).

Looking back to three major debates in Chinese history on whether women should return to the home, we find strong similarities in the traditional role expectation towards the woman, as well as in the contexts of socio-cultural development that has had a greater impact on gender relations, despite the marked differences of the debates in time and historical background. While the argument in the 1930s for instance, was “marriage is women’s best occupation.” (Lin, 1933), and the point of contention for the 1940s was that “women should strive to become the best housekeeper” (Duanmu, 1940), in the 1980s, the issue was again changed, this time being the way to achieve the best combined effects of the division of labor (Zheng, 1994)³, with the basic perspectives revolving around the notion of the male being

³ On September 13, 1933, Current News of Shanghai published an article entitled “Marriage and Female Occupation” by Lin Yu tang, in which the author argued “marriage is the best goal for Chinese women,” “to get married is the best, most suitable and ideal occupation for women”. In 1934, the slogans that carried the message that women should be virtuous wives and caring mothers were widely spread in society. Women’s Echo, a periodical, had a special issue on the topic, calling on women to be the virtuous wives and caring mothers of the new era. These views challenged the ideas of women’s liberation since the May Fourth Movement. On July 6, 1940, Duanmu Luxi published an article entitled “About Some Dimness in the Azure”, arguing that women should devote themselves to looking after their families, and be committed to becoming a virtuous wife. This article marked the opening of the second debate in China as to whether women should resume their domestic role. Some quarters of the society even advised those who were concerned about gender equality to relinquish their slogan as such, and to raise the flag of cooperation between men and women instead”. Women’s Journal in Peking stated in one of its articles that, under the circumstances at that time, it was a fact that women should be in charge of the home, and advocated their returning to the kitchen. This round of debate, which came at a time when the Anti-Japanese War was just beginning, carried a much stronger political coloring in its attempt to weaken women’s participation in the war. In January 1981, the influential magazine, Women of China, published a letter from a female worker, in which the

responsible for the public sphere and the female for the private. These attributes served to entrench the traditional role expectations towards women and to sustain the traditional male-female division of labor (Robinson, 1985; Weeks, 1989), resulting in enormous pressure on women already in employment. On the one hand, women had to compete with men at the social level, as the saying goes: “男人能辦到的事,女人也能辦到” (*What the man can accomplish, so can the woman*). However, they were still expected to perform their domestic duty such as, taking care of elderly members of the family, the children, doing all the cooking, washing and shopping (Rai, 1994). The gap between the government's policies, slogans and women's day-to-day real

writer expressed her unwillingness to be a committed housewife at home and her inability to carry the dual burden of domestic duties and career. The same journal later organized a debate “1988: The Way Out for Women”. The debate, lasting for half a year, pushed the argument of “women's homecoming” onto the public arena, further intensifying the issue. People from all walks of life expressed their own ideas about the issue. Chinese women, used to be proud of being portrayed as capable of holding up half the sky, were now beginning to find themselves confused and lost. In 1994, the influential journal in the woman by Sociological Institute, the Chinese Academy of Social Science, published a paper entitled “Sociological Thinking on Equality between the Sexes” (Zheng, 1994), and lifted the debate onto a new theoretical dimension. The question being asked now was: what kind of gender relationship should be put in place in China? Zheng is of the opinion that the forced implementation of equality between man and state through administrative means has caused damage to the originally reasonable and effective division of labor, and chaotic family relationships have ensued. The advent of market economy forces men and women to re-consider the already implemented gender relations and division of labor since 1949, with which many were also identified. The author believed women should have the right to education and employment. However, in view of the undeveloped economy, every family should face up to the reality. He went on to ask: “Who has more potential for social participation, men or women?” “What is the most efficient mode of labor division?” Hence a new round of debate on “Gender Roles and Social Development” initiated by the journal. For further details, please go to the issues from 6 of 1994 to 4, 1996.

life, can make sense for us to understand the different perceptions and role expectations between husbands and wives (Croll, 1995). Nevertheless, in the face of the active participation of women in society, what had been submerged under the slogan of “婦女能頂半邊天”(women hold up half the sky) and the saying of “what the man can accomplish, so can the woman” is the unequal relation between the two genders, with the “male being responsible for the public sphere and the female for the private”, family culture perceiving men to be superior to women.

In view of the above, we arrive at a picture that the patriarchal culture still exerts enormous influence over the urban dual-earner families. In fact, I will go a step further and tackle the issue further, though on a slightly different dimension. It is my contention that a mere admission of the influence of the traditional division of labor and role expectations on conjugal relations will not be adequate to provide an explanation for the marital conflicts arising within the dual-earner families in a Chinese urban city nowadays. In other words, if we do not come to grips with and explore how the “continued” traditional concept and unequal mode of division in gender relations affect couples, then the argument that the ‘continued gender inequality in traditional sense’ would bring about marital conflict remains a *probability* rather than a likelihood. It should be when the ‘handed down’ role

expectations are 'regarded' as 'unreasonable' both in theory and in practice by at least one of the partners, will marital conflict become a reality process.

It may be along the level of frustrations arising from the failure in reconstructing traditional gender role, expectations such as men sharing more equally household responsibilities, and all these can be classified as typical examples of the ways the couple perceive their marital problem. Therefore, when it comes to studying the conjugal relations in a dual-earner family, what is important is to look for the differences compared with the past. It is also important to take note of the changes that have taken place, as is very possible that the changes bear a direct impact on the couple's relationship, causing them to re-consider the labor division between them. This point, in my opinion, has been overlooked by Chinese as well as western scholars of women's rights in their studies of gender relations in Chinese families.⁴

⁴ Many west scholars analyzed the gender relationships inside the families after 1949, the main threads of analysis revolved around the point that gender relationship in the family was still traditional. Most of them have failed to adequately discuss the issue from the perspectives of women's participation in social activities, and its impacts on the division of labor as well as on conjugal relationships. And social participation of the wife, generally speaking, was encouraged by the government, for e.g. the step-out-of-the-home movement initiated by the Mao government in the 1950s can be seen as an important campaign to pull women from the private sphere into the public one. The resultant changes in women's status within the family and the society are significant and indisputable. For the detail please see, Rai, S. "Gender issues in china: a survey". *Journal of China Report*, 30, 4, pp. 407- 420 (1994). Robinson, J. "Of women and washing machines: employment, housework and the reproduction of motherhood in socialist China". *The China Quarter*, vol.101, pp. 32-57 (1985). Wolf, M. "Marriage, family, and the state in contemporary China in contemporary marriage". In Davis, K. (ed.), *Contemporary Marriage: Comparative Perspectives On A Changing*

In view of this, I pay more attention, in my study, to the impact of increased social participation of the wife and the couple's reconsideration of their gender relations and their division of labor. That includes the circumstances or conditions under which the couple begin to understand, or fail to comprehend, the changes in women's role which have taken place, and the possible demands for a 'restructuring' of their gender division of labor within the family and gender relationships. Also of concern here is to understand the circumstances or conditions under which the couple may have conflicts during the process of this 'restructuring' of their relationship. Thus, in depth, a study of the differences between the couples in their attitudes and actions with regard to the 'restructuring' of the division of labor within the family is important for it may help to identify as to whether the differences have been the contributory factors in their conflicts.

At the same time, the post-1949 mass mobilization of women by the state to participate in social activity can, no doubt, be seen as one of the great changes in family life in modern-day China. There have been two consequences *vis à vis* the large, traditional Chinese family with the wife's involvement in social participation.

Institution. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, pp. 223 -251 (1985 a); Wolf, M. *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*. Stanford University Press, Stanford (1985 b). Li, X..J. "Loss and gains in the practice of equality between men and women in China". *Sociological Research*, 1, pp. 92-97 (1995). Li, X. J. (Ed.) *Gender and China*. Sanlian Press, Beijing (1994).

These are first, the change in family structure, as the man is no longer the sole breadwinner for the family, and second, changes in the traditional gender division of labor and in the distribution of power within the family which follows as the woman now is also visible in the public sphere (Zhang, 1989). In other words, changes have occurred in the concrete situation of the couples and within the family, dissatisfaction and marital conflicts will occur if there were unresolved differences between the couples in facing the changes.

The impact of the Chinese economic reform that began in 1979 is far-reaching. China has been prompted to transit from the planned economy to one that is market-oriented, and its greater significance lies in the fact that the society has been released from a system that emphasized state and collective interests into a cultural environment that is relatively free. These impacts have made the populace free from the ideological control by the state. Not only are the Chinese today given freedom of movement, to a certain extent, their free will to express themselves is also possible now. The conjugal relationship in the family is no longer subjected to the assessments of others or the 'revolutionary needs' and there is now space for the married couple to discuss their 'personal rights' and 'conjugal feelings'. In other words, a demand for the reconstructing of a new pattern of gender relations that suits the needs of the dual-earner family has become more possible.

The emergence of the dual-earner family has had an impact on gender relations and the gender division of labor at home. The perspectives of reviewing the 'issue' are, of course, multifaceted: it may be along the traditional gender role expectations such as the wife may complain of the husband as not 'taking charge of the public sphere', failing to earn enough money for the family. Or the husband may grumble about the wife being too strong, not 'domestic' enough, and shying away from household chores. The immediate issue that now confronts the couple of a dual-earner family is who should look after the children and do the housework. When the wife is no longer a fulltime housewife, the husband is bound to share part of the household chores. Many studies have confirmed that, in a dual-earner family, there has been an actual reduction in the time for the woman to carry out domestic duties, whereas for the man it has increased.⁵ However, feminist scholars have pointed out that, between the paid job and the time devoted to doing housework, there exists a change that is more than just a change in the shouldering of domestic responsibilities an exchange of relationship. With the 'genderlization' of household chores also comes change in attitudes and role expectations with regard to each

⁵ For the detail to see, Tao, C. (eds.) *Review of Women's status in China*. The Chinese Women's Press, Beijing (1993). Ferree, M. "Beyond separate spheres: feminism and family research". *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 52, (November) pp. 866-884 (1990). "The Gender Division of Labor in Two-Earner Marriages". *Journal of Family Issues*. Vol. 12. 2, (June) pp. 158-180 (1991). Zhang, L. X. "Conjugal conflict: An inevitable phenomenon in the process of the reconstruction of the gender relations in the family". *Women's Studies*. Vol. 3, pp. 4-8 (1999) (in Chinese). Xiong, (eds.) *Choices Towards the 21st Century: the Latest Theories on Women's Studies in Contemporary Society*. Tianjin People's Press, Tianjing (1993) (in Chinese)

gender. Although the resource distribution within the family continues to have an effect on the division of labor, the greater influence is gender relationship. Gender role and attitude therefore become the determinants in the experiences and conflicts within the dual-earner family.

In the unique cultural context of China family, the males are having to compromise on the division of household chores as a result of the change in women's role. That is, whether they like it or not, men are assuming some domestic chores because of practical reasons or because recognition must be given to the fact that the wife is now also an income generator. However, the man continues to hold on to the traditional role expectations on women and internalize the men's role as a breadwinner at same time. Therefore, although he now takes part in doing the housework, his complaint never ceases: "You are really not like a woman. You can't even do the housework properly!"(Zhang 1999) As for the woman, the role change, or, rather, the pressure on her to become responsible for the public sphere, has compelled her to bring in the husband to share the household chores. 'This family does not belong to me alone' is her point of argument. On the other hand, she now has an equal share of resources as her husband, thanks to the paid job which brings to her an income and self-confidence independent of her husband, as well as the equal rights and status under the law, including equal treatments in marriage and education,

and also equal pay for equal jobs (03/w)⁶. Although there is still a great gap between the enactment of legal protection for women and its actual implementation, between the policies and real life, one should nevertheless not dismiss the positive effects of all these resources off handedly, for they have, in fact, inspired the women to fight for equality. Under specific conditions and circumstances of the dual-earner families, the women have now become more aware of 'self' and 'equality' (Tao, 1993; Li, 2000).

Under general circumstances, conflicts arise when one party is so used to imposing its own will upon the other without taking into consideration the interests of the party on the receiving end becomes 'aware' of the unfairness of such action. In a familial environment where the man has all along been holding a dominant position, it is very common for the woman who is more aware now to voice her dissent with regard to the unequal gender relations. One can also explain a phenomenon raised by many from this perspective, that in the majority of the court cases of divorce in China's urban areas, women happen to be the litigants⁷. Apparently, this is almost impossible with families in which women are subordinate to the husbands. Only when the wife

⁶ "03/w" here is one of the participants in this research. The number before the slash ("/") represents the couple interviewed, whereas the "W" represent wife.

⁷ For the detail to see, Xu, A. Q. *Studies on the Chinese Marital Quality*. Chinese Social Science Press, Beijing (1999) (in Chinese); and Zhang, "Conjugal conflict: An inevitable phenomenon in the process of the reconstruction of the gender relations in the family". *Women's Studies*. Vol.3, pp. 4-8 (1999)

is given an equal access to the resources which is the basic conditions causing women's self-liberation, will she become aware of the unequal nature in the division of labor, as well as the imbalance of power. Only when the wife enjoys an equal share of the resources does she become confident enough to fight for power, For example, in decision-making she attempts to maintain a more equal balance of power distribution within the family.

So, if, in a dual-earner family, the wife is dissatisfied with the pattern of the division of labor, as she herself still plays an entirely domestic role, while the husband continues to complain about the wife being incompetent, we can say that if the differences between husbands and wives in perceptions of their realities, and role expectations cannot resolve them, marital conflict is bound to happen. Such conflict is not simply a question of who should do how much housework for how many hours, it also involves the understandings and role expectations of the couple towards the other party as well as themselves, as well as the power distribution and the awareness of 'equality' that comes from the changes of employment right. Because of this, I have set the presentation of my conceptual framework along two lines: the impacts of the male-centred patriarchal culture, and women's role changes after 1949, that is 'tradition 'and "change" while focusing the exploration upon the two major aspects of role expectations and the power differentials in dual-earner families.

In examining marital conflicts within the dual-earner families, role expectation is a very important concept. Role expectations can be described as what others expect you to do or the behavior you expect from others. Roles are the sets of norms or expectations held by others for the behavior of a person in a particular position, such as husbands expect of wives or parents expect children (Paolucci et al., 1977). Role is related to personal behaviors, beliefs and feelings in the adjustment to a complicated social scene (Huber, 1993). Adjustment here refers to personal behaviors that should meet one's conditions or social requirements and norms. In a patriarchal society, a woman as a wife should take care of her husband, heart and soul; and, as a mother, she should put her mind to looking after her children. As a housewife, she should also be a competent housekeeper. In the words of the Chinese, a woman should strive to be a “賢妻良母” (virtuous wife and a caring mother). A man, as husband and father, is expected to be the breadwinner, for his position derives from his role in the public domain, that is the society. All these role allocations are sanctioned by the society to which one is expected to adhere. Meanwhile, marriage is influenced by the role expectations and behaviors of both the husband and the wife towards each other. If their role expectations and behaviors fail to meet with those of the other, if husbands still think that the role of the wives should be at home, taking care of the family and household chores but the wives

perceive it otherwise and want a more equal share of domestic responsibilities from the husbands, marital conflict will, quite expectedly, follow. Put differently, if there is a gap between the role expectations on, and the actual behaviors of the spouse, conflict will ensue. This is especially the case within a traditional Chinese patriarchal culture. The wife, for example, may feel dissatisfied with the husband not playing a more traditional role, e.g., failing to earn enough money to support the family, or be unhappy with the husband simply being too traditional as to not share the household chores. The husband, on the other hand, may also be dissatisfied with the wife for not playing her role right, i.e., not being 'a virtuous wife and a caring mother', or disagree with her demand for a reconstruction of gender relations. Thus, the clashes between the changing role of the woman and the traditional role of the man, the similar role expectations but different demands between the couples, as well as the friction between women's changing role that is recognized by the society but not by both of the couples set the stage for marital dissatisfaction and become sources of conflicts. Similarly, if one of the spouses wants to have more say or holds more power over the other, and the other feels this to be strongly unfair, the chances of conflict will also be higher. In both cases, what is manifested are the defending and the rebellious acts with regard to the traditional role expectations and the power dynamics between the couples.

“Power differentials ” between the couples is taken as another major concept in the present study of marital conflicts within the dual-earner family. Some main concepts which western scholars used in the study of this area such as “decision-making”, “negotiation”, “agreement” and “bargaining” (Paolucci et al., 1977; Scanzoni & Szinovacz, 1980; Ott, 1992) are useful ones but somehow irrelevant in the Chinese context in the Peoples Republic of China. As I mentioned in the chapter two, because of the state intervention in the PRC in its people’s daily life and limited resources, many couples within a dual career family do not need to address a lot of similar decisions couples in the West need to make, such like purchasing houses, investments, changing a job even birth control. Couples are left little room to making decisions on these issues. But in the context of the Chinese society in which the traditional ideology of the family still persists, they are obvious signs of a question of power relations. For example, husbands are always the masters of the house, they have the right to say that the wife is “mine” and wives are always expected “virtuous wife and caring mother”.

Power has been, in general, highly centralized in Chinese families. Unlike its western counterpart, which places great emphasis on ‘individualism’, personal preferences and interests, the Chinese family attaches paramount importance to the notion of shared ‘responsibility’ within the household (Huang; 1988; Zhai,

1995;Yuen et al. 1998). Traditionally, tolerance, conciliation, as well as submission together form the main characteristics of the relationships in Chinese families. (Croll, 1983, 1995; Wolf, 1985 a, b Li, 1994; Yuen et al. 2000) Within the family, for example, the young must obey the words of the elderly, and women must be subordinate to men. Personal interests and rights do not count, as each and every family member is responsible for the 'home'. The wife has a duty as far as reproduction of offspring is concerned, so that the husband can go out and work with peace of mind. Therefore, a wife's main responsibility revolves around the husband and children, to which her value is also attached. Traditionally, "men are superior to women", "men should dominate, and women should obey" are the main characteristics of the gender relations in the Chinese family. As the chief breadwinner at home, the husband has absolute control over the wife. Being a housewife doing all the taken for granted and 'valueless' work, i.e. housework and caring of the family, the wife is in no position to enjoy status and respect that would equal that of the husband – the master of the house. It is impossible that there are discussed agreements or negotiation at home. It is therefore not at all surprising that the traditional division of labor in family that accords men the public sphere and stipulates that the ultimate orientation of women is to domestic matters will give rise to unequal power relations.

After 1949, many legislations and legal cases with regard to equal rights have been passed, with a view to promoting equal status between men and women in society. This no doubt has also raised women's awareness of the relationship between the dominating and the dominated and thus of relationships within marriages and conjugal ones. This consciousness has also raised questions on the traditional role of women's submission and women's dependence on the men. Furthermore, in a dual-earner family, the woman is prompted to reconsider her position in the wake of the changes in women's social participation. With the advent of the dual-earner families and the changes in women's status, this traditional power structure within the family tends to be shaken. How one actually feels is a very important factor that influences his or her married life. When one feels that he or she has no power in gender relationship, his or her satisfaction with marriage also tends to be low. In fact, if one party imposes his or her own will upon the other, neglecting the feelings of the latter, the person on the receiving end will, quite naturally, feel dissatisfied. (Davidson, 1984; Mashal, 1985; Blair & Johnson, 1992)

In light of wife's changing role in China, despite the fact that women are still willing to assume the burden imposed on wives in terms of domestic responsibilities, women have begun to search for 'fairness' in marriage. More importantly, women now have equal access to resources as men, and this is a very helpful factor as far as

their gender awareness is concerned. In any society, distribution of power is decided by those with income (Huber, 1993). As mentioned before, women have been granted equal treatment in terms of property inheritance, education and employment since 1949. In a dual-earner family, the wife has also the same resources as the husband in the areas of education and employment opportunity, as opposed to the couples in a traditional family. A new environment has without doubt spurred a change in the initially unequal power relation. When women step out of the family and begin to enjoy the same opportunities as men in terms of politics, the economy, culture, as well as social and family life, men in turn need to adjust their traditional expectations *vis-à-vis* women's, and to relinquish their monopoly on the power in the family.⁸ (IOSC, 1994).

However, it is never an easy matter for one to surrender past powers or privileges that one has enjoyed and this will very much be the same with the Chinese husbands in dual-earner families who may still be embedded in a patriarchal culture wherein the "dignity" and "face" of men hinge on whether he is "master" of his house, in "control" of all household members, and be the "dominant" one between the couples who can exercise his "authority". It is no surprising why men always complain they

⁸ *The Situation of Chinese Women*, Information Office of the State Council of The People's Republic of China. p.8 (1994).

lost their authority and dignity if they are found to have listened to their wives, or do what their spouses ask them to. Thus, in the present study of power differentials between the couples, their perception on “dignity”, “face”, “authority”, in relation to cultural norms and expectations on gender roles are stressed instead. The power differential between couples in dual career families are not manifested in the kinds of decision one makes on what to buy or how to spend one’s money in China. Rather, it is on how one is treated at home and in front of the others, whether one can command the other to do what one wants, and if the other shows obedience or admiration of him/her in front of relatives and friends.

Thus, it is the exploration of how husbands feel when they were expected to share housework, or how they react to the fact that their wives are more capable and bringing home more income that will be studied as the manifestation of how power is distributed between the couples.

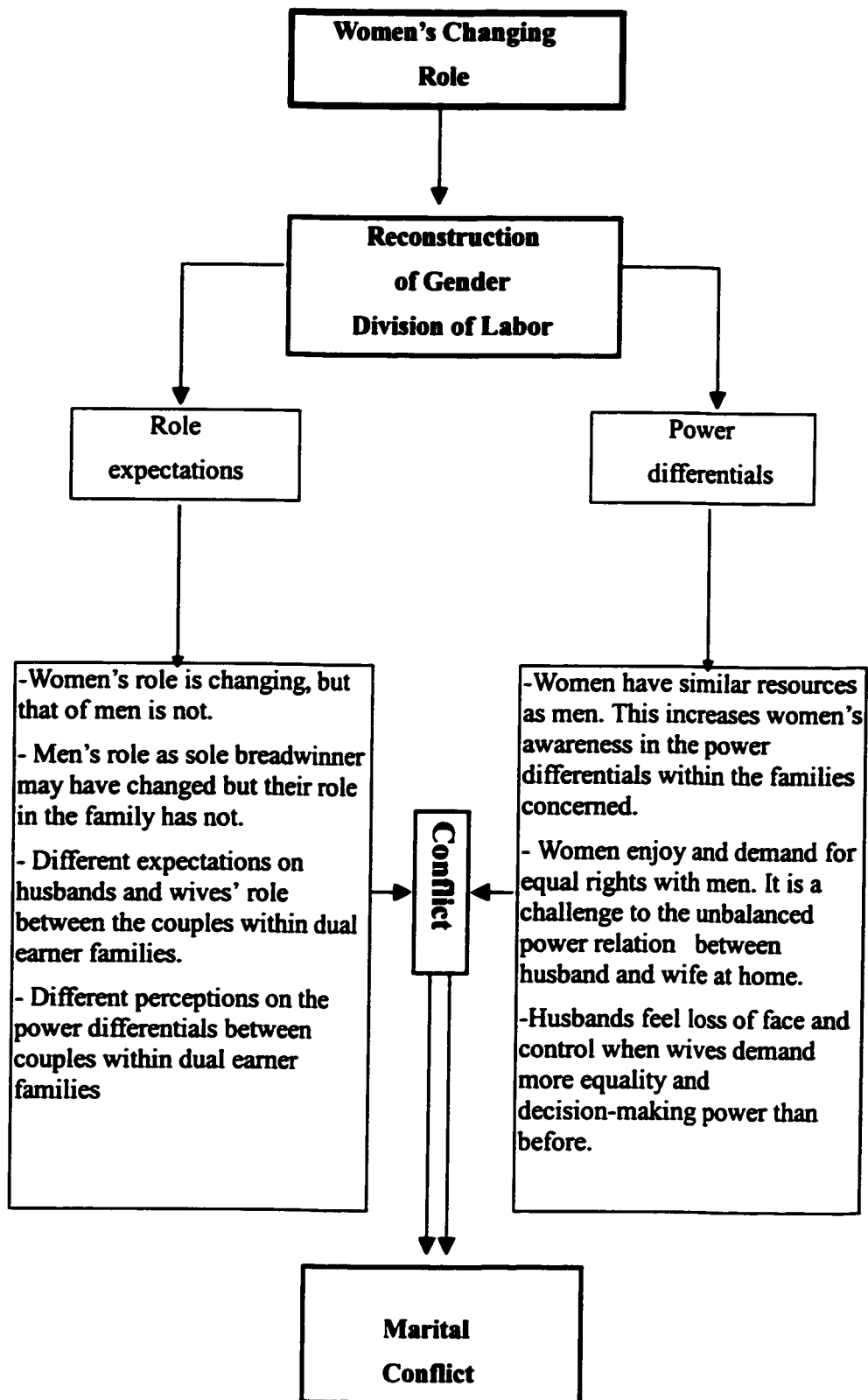
As mentioned before, this study anchors on two concepts, that of gender role expectations and power differentials between couples, both as perceived by them in relation to their marital conflicts. As far as role is concerned, I seek to explore the expectations of the couples in dual-earner families both towards themselves and towards their partners so as to detect the differences between their expectations and to identify the possible connection between the differences and the conflicts. As for

the power in the family, I am more concerned with the differential within the family as expressed through women's gender awareness, men holding on to dignity and face, the process of decision-making and power distribution in the dual-earner families, and the reactions of the couples to cultural norms and expectations. Within this framework, I attempt to explore the possible linkage between the differences in their attitudes and the conflicts that follow.

Since 1949, enormous changes have taken place with regard to women's role in China. These changes have caused a shift in the gender division of labor in dual-earner families from male domination in the public sphere and female control of the domestic matters, to one that requires both man and woman to have their own social participations, and share of household responsibilities. In the process of this shift, there are many differences between couples in their perceptions and expectations about the role of husbands and wives, in their perceptions of their power differentials and demands for changes in the distributions of power within the family. In the course of reconstructing a new pattern of the gender division of labor, and gender relationship in the marriage, conflicts are bound to arise should one of the parties fail to come to terms with this reality, or a mutual agreement cannot be reached by both husband and wife.

In short, this study focuses on the enormous interactive impacts of the centuries-old male-oriented family system upon gender relations, marital conflicts within dual-earner families coupled with 'women's changing role', and demand for a 'reconstruction of the gender division of labor' within the family is examined through 'role expectations' and 'power differentials'. We can find that there are many differences in the role expectations and power differentials between the couples with women's changing role. Based on the different levels of discussion outlined in the present conceptual framework, I hope to be able to delineate the dynamics affecting marital conflict between couples in dual-earner families. The findings will illuminate the interaction of macro forces (e.g. state policy, cultural norms and gender ideology) and personal dynamics as experienced in one social institution, that of the family, thus unearthing the connections of marital conflicts, the seeming "private" issue with public roots.

(Some main concepts and relations in the conceptual framework)



Chapter 4 Methodology

Methodological Concerns

The choice of methodology is closely related to the objectives of the research. Not only is it directly related to what the researcher has in mind in studying and the way in which the question is tackled, it also reflects the researcher's own assumptions underlying the study. The emphasis of this chapter is, first and foremost, to explain why I have chosen a qualitative research methodology with in-depth interviews as the specific method of study in this investigation. In my attempt to introduce in detail the process of conducting the research, I also seek to explain the collection, sorting, analysis and description of the data at the same time.

As I was pondering how to conduct my study, a few questions were deliberated in relation to the kind of methodology I should adopt. The first consideration was that there must be a close connection between the methodology chosen, the focus of the research and its conceptual framework. Second, the methodology must allow and enable the various attitudes and thinking of the participants to be expressed and understood. Third, the methodology needs also to enable the researcher to make better sense of the participants' responses, and to facilitate a better understanding and method in the analysis of the data, so as to allow for the greatest possible significance of the data to emerge. It is precisely on account of these considerations that brought me to conclude that, be it in terms of methodological significance or for practical function, to adopt a qualitative research methodology in this study.

A qualitative methodology is an appropriate one for this study as it fulfils all my earlier considerations in undertaking this research, which is concerned with the way in which the participants perceive and explain their marital conflicts as well as their understanding of the interactions among their role expectations, attitudes and marital dynamics (Patton, 1990; Denzin, 1994; Hu, 1996). With such a study, I am not attracted to investigating the “knowledge” or “objectivity” or “validity” of what the participants feel or think, but rather, their own inner emotions and subjective perceptions. A qualitative approach to the study provides me with the necessary space and possibility to explore participants’ subjectivity. It will also allow me to look into the various differences, and particularly the undercurrents, that have been taking place between the couples in their role expectations, and their reaction thereto, following the change in the female role in the dual-earner families. Furthermore, a qualitative methodology also will enable me to unravel embedded gender issues and deeper cultural dimensions behind the marital conflicts.

As mentioned above, this research attempts to look into the changes and dynamics that have occurred within the dual-earner family caught in the struggle of a traditional gender division of labor, and the changing demands on their roles. Specifically, this means I need to explore on the one hand, the interactive impacts of a centuries-old male-oriented family system and gender ideology in shaping the couples’ perception of their marital roles, and the effects of gender equality policies initiated by the Chinese government since the early 1950’s upon women’s social participations, on the other. How will I best find out these interactive forces affecting marital conflicts in dual-earner families and whether does the social participation of the wife yield direct impact on the gender division of labor within the family, and hence cause it to be reconstructed? If such is the case, how can, or will, the couple in

the dual-earner family ever come to a mutual understanding of the 'reconstruction of a gender division of labor', and what would be their response thereto within a frame of Chinese culture? Will all kinds of traditional heritage and notions free of any discrepancy with regard to the 'reconstruction'? How are they manifested through the attitudes and conduct and could these have brought about the possibilities of conflict? How could I make sense of the answers to all these questions in the descriptions and explanations of their conflict given by the husbands as well as the wives (the participants). In order to understand the perceptions of role expectations and attitudes between both parties through the description and the explanation of their own actions in the conflict, I hope that the issue of gender relationship and the deeper cultural implications behind marriage could be made all the more comprehensible. In a sense, the questions facing me are therefore on 'how' to collect data as well as 'how' to describe and analyze the data, in order to achieve the research objectives as best I can.

Because a qualitative methodology does serve my purpose best, an in-depth investigation through interviews to study the phenomenon of marital conflict and the forces affecting it, is adopted. Of course, what I want to understand is more than a simple discussion of their conduct but also the much more complicated cultural background, including concepts of morality and the yardstick of a certain gender ideology of the participants. Qualitative research places greater emphasis on providing more space and the chances of dialogue for the participants, honors their feelings, values the practice of understanding, explains the words and conducts of the participants from the aspect of social and cultural development, and emphasizes the

characteristic of bringing social phenomena into the entire social structure.¹ All this can help me to better consider the many issues to be explored in this study.

The first challenge that faces me in the selection of a qualitative research methodology revolves around the 'objectivity' of a methodology of data collection and analysis as such. I cannot discuss in detail the epistemological differences between quantitative and qualitative researches here as this is not the focus. However, I would like to point out that I fully agree with the doubt raised by feminists with regard to the existence of a genuine 'objectivity' in the discipline of social science. It is a feminist view that a complete extrication of the researcher from the situation under study, so that neutrality and objectivity could be observed, is impossible. Feminists further pointed out that as women, both as researchers and subjects, have been neglected in the traditionally male-centric social theory building, such theories are at best half baked ones, since they are only built on studying half of the human race. Because of this neglect and the marginalization of women's "characteristics" including emotions from "knowledge", feminist scholars regard the concerted voice of women in formal disciplines and theory building to be important. Along this line of thinking, feminist scholars have put a greater emphasis on the unearthing and inclusion of individual as well as subjective experience as necessary to study "what has been missing" and also the real complex reality which makes up the objective and the subjective. From a researcher's perspective, his or her attitudes and position will wield a direct influence in the entire process of situation of topics, and collection and analysis of data. Feminist scholars regard participants in an

¹ For more introduction and discussion on qualitative research, please see Hu, *Qualitative Research: Theory, methodology, Local Feminist Research*. Juliu Book Co., Taiwan (1996). Ruen, (eds.) *Marriage, Gender and Sex*. Global Publishing co. Inc., Singapore (1998). Patton, M. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. 2nd ed. Sage publication, London (1990)

equal position with the researcher in any study, and hence an inalienable part of the entire process of research. Precisely because of this reason, I believe the choice of methodology to be, from a feminist perspective, more than a selection of mere technique for data collection, for it also involves the types of data to be collected, as well as the way of analyzing them. The criteria set for selecting research topics as well as its objects have to be considered, and the attitudes and the gender sensitivity of the researcher should also be taken into account when it comes to data analysis.

While I have no hesitation, from an epistemological dimension, in accepting the validity of participants' subjective articulations as long as they are internally coherent, throughout the course of my interviews with the informants participating in my research, I often felt I was included in their articulation or forced to respond to some of their questions, and therefore cannot escape from being "dragged" into the scene. These prompted me to reflect upon the 'objectivity' of my data—isn't it true that the researcher should be value neutral or that participants be left "alone" so that what they told me is entirely of their own mind? What should I do when the following incidents happen? For an example, on one occasion, I was making an appointment by phone with a husband (O1/h) for a chat. Having told him that his telephone number had been given to me by a friend of his, I went on to introduce briefly myself as well as my research, and asked him if he would mind sharing some of his recent marital problems with me. His immediate response to my invitation was, 'You the feminists have messed up everything.' Not only did he decline to have an interview with me, he even suggested that I should get hold of a copy of 'the Book of the Girl'² for some serious read. I did not want to give up despite this

² This is a book on feudal Confucian ethics. Published for general consumption during the Ming dynasty, it teaches various kinds of norms, to be observed by the female members within the family. Many additions as well as deletions have been made to the book after the Ming with wide circulation.

reaction because his wife had shared with me about the problems between them, and I was very much interested in the explanation given by the wife with regard to the difficulties she was facing in her marriage, and would like to make better sense of her feelings. For that purpose, a talk with her husband would surely be helpful, as I would be able to hear the other side of the story from someone in a different position. After some relentless pursuit and numerous phone calls, the husband finally agreed to see me. To use his words, 'Your badgering defeated me.' It turned out to be more than a one-off interview, for he took the initiative to meet with me several times thereafter.³ In the several conversations that I had with him, I noticed a very definite attitude in him that, women, if they stayed at home, could save men all the trouble. The domestic problems nowadays are all related to women's request for independence and equality. And those concerned with the issues are known as women's rights activists. Therefore, in the course of his conversation with "me" – whom he identified as a women's rights **apologist** and did not take kindly to –, and in his explanation of the marital conflict between him and his wife, more often than not, I was included: "**You** women really should just stay at home," "**You**, the All China Women's Federation⁴, in my view, are making much ado about nothing. I *seriously* (emphatic in tone) believe that it is better that women stay at home. Everything is ready-made, what else can they ask for?" Another husband (04/h) also emphasized to me over and over again, "How can one ask for equality when it comes to domestic work? You've mentioned that you are in women's studies; somehow I feel that **all of you** do not have to be that sensitive about domestic duty. It would not be to anybody's benefit if it resulted in confrontation. If the husband had to

³ In fact, what he had in mind was to have me act as a mediator between him and his wife in their conflict. Having secured their consent, I referred their case to a marriage-consulting center in the end.

⁴ He knew that I had worked at a women's college in Beijing, which is an associate institute of the National Women's Federation. Hence his oft-repeated reference as "you, the NWF..." in his talk.

constantly bear the issue of gender equality in mind, how great his pressure was going to be!" While they were describing their "own past" matters, every now and again, they also did not forget to put in their attitudes and comments at me in addition to their description of the conflicts then. To them, I am considered, not as a value neutral, objective researcher, but one who represented what they are against, or even their wives, or someone whom they want to bring their case to so as to be "heard". In the interviews, I observed that they also tried to persuade "me" to tell them they are in the right, or to win over "my" understanding and sympathy if you like. The two examples given here also illustrate that the participants are also not merely "objective" target in a researcher's study. On the identity of the researcher, they too have their own evaluation and approach. Moreover, they also try to influence the perception of the researcher as much as possible. Under such circumstances, would it not be appropriate to say that there exist, to certain extent, some mutual influence and inter-subjectivity between the researcher and the target of study? If we concede this point, would it not mean that we need to acknowledge the fact that all social science studies are not merely a complete objective record of certain incidents, but there is a also need to reflect upon the incident on the basis of the record, and to explore, at a deeper level, the cultural factors behind the "incident"? If such was the case, the issue of "neutral values" or "objectivity" would become impossible. For social science research not only involves the personal values of the research, as well as the way in which the research "analyses" "make sense of" and "interpret" the data, it also involves the participants in that they too have their own selective description and clear-cut approach there to. For the research as a whole, the participant's subjectivity (in relation to his/her account of the matter) and objectivity (in relation to the researcher) are not to be overlooked.

Having chosen the qualitative research methodology, the next immediate question that I must consider is the way to situate the study within or make it more relevant to the Chinese cultural context. To that end, I first look a review and reflection upon the research methodology adopted in China with regard to marriage and family studies in recent years.

If we take a closer look at recent research on marriage and family in Mainland China, we find that almost all large-scale studies have been done through quantitative research methodology (Tan 1990; Ma, 1992). Such a situation is due to the lack of direct contact of Mainland China with the qualitative research methodology by social sciences abroad. When Western quantitative research methodology was introduced into Mainland China and applied in the field of social science in the early 1980s, it was greeted with wide acceptance and strong recommendation on account of its 'strict' form of survey and 'accurate' statistical results. Many scholars considered a research of the kind as most scientific, objective, and being recognized by the international academia⁵.

In addition to this, a significant number of Chinese scholars overlooked the importance of a comprehensive introduction of qualitative research methodology while doing a great deal of recommendation and promotion with regard to quantitative research. Owing to the experiences of others or their own, many researchers regard the 'qualitative research' methods that have been widely popular

⁵ Since quantitative research was formally introduced and applied in social science in Mainland China in 1981 when sociology was just reconstructed, most sociologists tend to believe that quantitative research is more scientific and accurate than qualitative. Some scholars even recognize the quantitative methods as one that can make the research more precise and scientific; they believe that the result of the research would be disregarded at international level if quantitative method was not employed in the research. For further details see Song, J. 'The Family Studies in 5 cities in China: success and lessons', *Journal of Sociological Research*, 4, pp. 121-123 (1991). Ma, Y. C. "A Research on the Development of Marriage and Family" in Xiong, Y. (eds.) *Women's Studies In China From 1981-1990*. Women's Press., Beijing, pp. 393-419 (1992)

in Mainland Chinese social studies over the last few decades as limited in sampling, and hence unrepresentative and inaccurate. Many of them believe qualitative studies (e.g., “蹲點” – fieldwork, “解剖麻雀” ‘investigative reports’ etc.) are nothing more than listening and writing. Such is the reason why many researchers do not take qualitative research methods too seriously in Mainland China for a long time. However, if we take a serious look at what many Chinese scholars know as “qualitative research”, we would find a great deal of dissatisfaction in its dissimilarities between them and the qualitative research as understood by western social scientists, both in terms of epistemological dimensions and concrete methodology. If we look closer, a systematic standardization on methodological grounds, the concept of qualitative research, theoretical frameworks, the method of operation, the subjective experience of the individual or the emphasis on personal feelings, an investigation into the connection with cultural logic, as well as a thorough analysis of firsthand materials, all these we actually find wanting in the “qualitative research” adopted over the past few decades in China. Perhaps this is yet another reason why qualitative research methods are not regarded too highly by serious Chinese scholars.

Due to the mainstream position of scholars to quantitative research in Mainland China, a great deal of research on marriage and family often overlooks the feelings, attitudes, as well as the experiences of the participants; or the research has simply failed to provide exploration of a more in-depth nature. As a matter of fact, the feelings, attitudes and the experiences of the participants can hardly be expressed in exact figures. Take a questionnaire as an example. If the question set by the researcher is, “Does your husband do domestic work when he is at home?” Generally speaking, the wife is only given the choice of ticking either “yes” or “no” or

“sometimes”, even if the several options, at different levels, are listed below the “yes” answer, such as “more than 5 hours”, “3-5 hours”, “2-3 hours”, or “very regularly”, “not very regularly” or “seldom”. No matter how the questionnaire is set, it is conceivable that the wife, when choosing her answer, is basically not being given too much space to express her own mind and feelings, for example, that her husband may be grumbling while doing some domestic work. He may say to the wife, “See, I always have to do so much work for you”, “You really are an incapable woman”... Apparently, the more complicated social factors and the relations between the two sexes contained behind the grumbling could have been overlooked fairly easily in the study in the form of a questionnaire, and thus, actually does not reveal, nor present a “true” picture of the dynamics that is going on.

Choice of Method

On the basis of the abovementioned consideration, I have opted for in-depth interview as a research method for the purpose of data collection, realizing the importance of situating participants’ responses within a cultural context, and taking into account that most Chinese people may adhere to the ideas of “family scandals must not be made public”, I find a one to one, face to face interview, as a place of the participant’s choice, most appropriate for my study. Such personal interviews allow ease both for myself to build the trust between myself and the participants, and for the participants to speak out freely. Thus, it facilitates the gathering of voluminous and rich firsthand data and the dynamics beneath the surface that the method of questionnaire is not able to. Personal in-depth interviews are adopted in this study to investigate the differences between the husbands and wives on the perceptions and

role assumption and expectations, as well as the differences between the couples in their perception of their power differentials and demands for changes in distribution of power within the family, and the different responses and reactions to the wives' social participations through the perception and articulation of the participants. All the interviews were carried out with the husbands and wives separately. Such an arrangement was made in consideration of the following two major reasons. First, the content of the study was related to mutual conflict yet to be resolved; argument and quarrel would be hard to avoid if they were seated together, and the focus of the interview might be affected. Second, both husband and wife would feel more free to speak their minds out if they were separate. In this way, the objectives of listening to their descriptions and explanations would thus be easier to achieve, which could take the study of the disparities in the role expectations between the man and the woman a step further.

-Participants

Qualitative research allows, relatively speaking, a small sample, and this has been helpful to me as I was able to plunge into the thick of the lives of the participants, and to describe their attitudes. In this study, I interviewed a total number of 15 families (30 persons in total). The criteria of selecting participants are basically the family structure, that is the dual-earner family, opened marital conflicts and the living place. The detail explanation of the selection is as follows: First, all the participants come from a dual-earner family background, as the title of the research suggests. "Dual-earner family" refers to the fact that both husband and wife generate incomes, but there are no restrictions as far as their actual working hours and levels

of incomes are concerned. Nevertheless, I have deliberately chosen the families in which the incomes between the husband and the wife are comparable, or in which the income of the wife is slightly higher than that of the husband. To require that the participants have fulfilled such a criterion is in keeping with the theme of my research. As mentioned in my conceptual framework, it is simply insufficient, in the studies of marital conflicts within the Chinese families, to just pay attention to the traditional gender relationship in which man is regarded as dignified, while woman is relegated to a lower position. It is equally inadequate to just concentrate on studying the gender division of labor, a pattern that allocates man the public domain, whereas woman is expected to take charge of domestic work. The continuity and the continued existence of the two phenomena within Chinese society and Chinese families cannot fulfill the task of explaining the reasons of conflicts. For only if we have realized the perception or dissension of an unequal relationship (the oppressor and the oppressed) within the “continuity”, or the dissatisfaction, in other words, if the husband and wife do not regard inequality between them as a “problem”, the contention that conflict feeds on inequality can only remain a probability. Apparently, for the families in the modern cities of China, where the wife participates in some social activity that is monetarily rewarded, and hence receives earnings independent of the husband, it is different from a traditional family. Precisely because of changes of this nature, marital conflict is presumed to be possible on account of the differences in attitudes, perceptions, expectations and the levels of acceptance in reaction to such changes between husbands and wives. The traditional role expectations on the husband and the wife, as well as the women’s social participation are the main areas of examination in the studies. I therefore took into consideration this criterion in my search for participants. The 15 married couples

are of various occupations, and do enjoy some differences, though not great, in their levels of income so that I can go deeper into understanding the dynamics of couples with a certain range of middle income in a major Chinese city. Other factors and possibilities that may have contributed to the marital conflict are not ruled out here, but as explained earlier, I am more concerned with the change brought about by the wife of the dual earner family who participates in social activity, and its impact on the relationship between the couples.

The second criterion for the selection of participants is that both the husband and wife, or either of them has sought help via various official or non-official channels, such as Women's Hotlines, local mediating organizations, women's federations, relatives and friends, or they have formally filed for divorce. In other words, the rift between them has already been made public. This criterion is set in consideration of the cultural background of the Chinese. The family culture of the Chinese has been reiterated in preceding parts of the research. Every member of a Chinese family is expected to see themselves as part of the family and of the whole, and the interests of the family must be uppermost in their minds. Every single act of the person must be accountable to the interests of the entire family. Therefore, insofar as the Chinese are concerned, familial love and interests are identical. It is normal for one to sacrifice one's own interests for the sake of the good of the family or of other members, and a sacrifice as such is to be rewarded. Because you have benefited, it also implies that I will also benefit. On the other hand, if I have failed to gain any benefit, it means that you will also be affected. For each and every member of the family must protect the entire interest of the family. "The esteem of the husband brings honor to the wife" and "the mother is honored by virtue of the son" are examples of the reflection of the culture of this kind. Because of this, "family scandal must not be made public", so

every family member must do their utmost to protect the interests of their family. In view of this background, it is almost an uphill task to gather some firsthand information if the family rift has not intensified, or both the husband and the wife (or either of them) have no desire to see their conflict made public. However, it is also due to the rule and the cultural background under which one must protect the collective interests of the family as such that the couple may go to another extreme by making their conflict known to the public (they have either filed for or reached an agreement on divorce, or one of them has sought support from mediating organization or friends). This means that the marital conflict between them has reached a more critical stage, at which neither of them is willing to shoulder the responsibility of causing damage to family interests, and incur criticisms from other family members or those surrounding them. Perhaps just now they will hence try all means to shake the blame off themselves. It is only at this point can one seek to understand as far as possible the attitudes of the parties in conflict.

The third criterion is that all the married couples live in Beijing. Beijing is a political and culture center since 1950's. Local government has been paying more attention to carry out all policies from the center government as a model of all the other local governments. Women's situation, therefore, can be regarded as much better than that in other places in Mainland. Beijing is also a metropolis, in which tremendous changes have taken place economically, culturally and in lifestyle since the economic reform and the opening- up policy was introduced in 1979. In terms of family, marital relationship and the concept of marriage of the people are confronted with a lot of challenges in the process. According to the statistics, Beijing is among

several Chinese cities in which divorce rates are high⁶. Therefore, the various marriage-counseling centers are more established, and their number is relatively high. Also, I myself have involved in this kind of counseling before, and am more or less experienced in it. Because of this, the chances of my searching for a willing participant are, needless to say, greater.

- Interview Guideline

Prior to the interview, I drew up a preliminary interview outline based on the conceptual framework of my research, which consisted of five sections and were semi-structured. The questions in the outline varied from the simple to the complicated, and in the order of the general to the concrete. These five sections are: the background information of the participants, relevant data of the conflicts between the couples, understanding of and attitudes towards a gender roles for husbands and wives, understanding of and attitudes towards gender division of labor and the current state of power distribution in the family, and the knowledge and understanding of man/woman role changes. Having conducted a pilot study, some changes were made to the interview outline to fill the gap. For instance, I put a new question “ could you give me a example (anywhere from film/novel/history/etc.)?” following the old “who do you think is a ‘ideal wife/husband’? ”, it makes the question more easy to answer. The modified interview guide can be found in Appendix 2.

⁶ For further details, see the Beijing Women’s Hotline, “Annual Report”, The Maple Women’s Psychological Consulting Center, Beijing, China, (1998)

- Pilot Study

Prior to the formal interviews, I conducted trial interviews with two families in Beijing in order to further examine the viability of my conceptual framework as well as the interview outline. They both fulfilled the criteria for the selection of participants that I have mentioned before.

The trial interviews were in actual fact conducted on four occasions. Each occasion lasted for about an hour. In the course of the interview, recording was done after the consent of the participants had been secured. I also took notes of the talks, mainly on some facial expressions, gestures or tones that I thought were important, as well as on some questions that I felt should be pursued further. After the interview, all the data and information were put into words and into my computer in Chinese. I also put my field notes at the end of each of the recordings and went over them to detect gaps to be filled. Some review and changes were made with respect to the original interview outline as a result. The final version of the outline consisted of five sections with some open-ended questions (see Appendix 2). Basing on the pilot study, I began the formal interviews.

-The Interview

Throughout a 6-month period, I interviewed a total number of 15 married couples of dual-earner family facing marital conflict in Beijing. Among them, some were going through divorce proceedings, some were already separated, and some were even going through readjustment or family therapy with some marriage consulting centers. There was also domestic violence between some couples. In short, some of the marriages were in a deadlock due to various reasons, while some could be said to be

going through a more difficult stage of the conflict, and some might have chosen to resolve their conflict by not resolving it but leave the relationship. Because of this unique background, together with the family-scandals-must-not-be-made-public mentality, which is a very part of Chinese culture, I encountered a lot of difficulties in doing the research. As I was looking for participants for the purpose of interviews, some wives were willing to talk to me, but their husbands were not; some husbands agreed to the interview, but their wives were reluctant to meet with me. Some families considered their problems to be a domestic issue and were unwilling to disclose the details to an outsider. Still, some other families made an appointment with me, but declined to be interviewed just before I was about to see them. Nevertheless, with the aid of friends and the help from local organizations, I eventually managed to complete interviewing 15 married couples of dual-earner family who were facing marital conflicts, bringing the interviewing process to a consummate end.

Among the 15 families, seven were introduced to me through the magistrates' courts, local street offices⁷ and district trade unions⁸; while I came to know another three wives through a women's hotline, and I also made contact with their husbands respectively. Friends and colleagues introduced the remaining five couples to me with the exception of a husband, as the friend of mine was not sure if he would be willing to talk. Having got his telephone number from the friend, I contacted the husband directly. As mentioned, since "keeping scandals within the family" is still

⁷ A Local Street Office is the most grassroots power institution within the Chinese administrative structure, the Marriage Unit of which is in charge of marriage registration and matters pertaining to divorce.

⁸ In Mainland China, trade unions are set up in every enterprise and industry, mainly to mediate in disputes between employer and the employee and to monitor workers' welfare etc. If necessary, the union may also be called in to mediate in domestic disputes.

considered important in Chinese society, I made it very clear to all my participants that confidentiality would be kept strictly and considered only in my study.

Since all the participants lived in different parts of Beijing, and some of them had in fact been estranged from their spouse, it was rather difficult to find a place suitable for all the interviews to take place. More importantly, in order to make each and every participant feel relaxed and comfortable, the interviews were conducted in accordance with their requests. The venues chosen therefore included places like the reception rooms of the Women's Hotline, the Street Office, in the parks, or in their own homes. Like the pilot interviews, the actual interviews were also carried out separately.

With the exception of one husband (05/h), all of the interviews were recorded. Recording was as a very sensitive thing to do as far as the couples entangled in marital conflict were concerned, for they were either not sure how the content of the recording would be used, or worried that they might have said something that would count against their interests. I therefore assured them before the interviews that not a single piece of their detail would be disclosed except for academic purposes, and that neither their names nor their real identities would be mentioned or revealed in this dissertation or any subsequent work. For the husband who was resolutely opposed to recording his interview with me, I had no option but to take notes during our talk, having secured his consent to this instead. While taking notes, I tried my best to write down what he said, word for word. Immediately after I came back from the interview with this particular husband, I straightened out the notes lest my memory might fail me later. Since an interview with his wife had been done, and a note of the husband's words was also in place, I kept this couple for my later data analysis.

My initial plan was to have only one interview with each of the participants, so that they would not find themselves having to relive the painful memories that had been tormenting them. However, I felt compelled, having agreed by them, to arrange a second or even third as follow-up interviews with some of the participants in order to gather further information, as well as to clarify some of the issues they had maybe shared. On one occasion, I found that one of the wives was trying to avoid the immediate causes of the conflict with her husband in the interview. Thus, having secured her consent, I conducted a second interview with her, during which she finally broke her silence on the issue. She told me that there had been a third party in her marriage with her husband, and this was something that she was least willing to mention to others. Gaining her trust in the first interview allowed me to reach her and able to collect these data. On other occasions, some participants would take the initiative to contact me and talk to me again, and two to three interviews were hence arranged to that end.

-Sorting out, describing and analyzing data

Prior to sorting out the data, I carefully listened to all the taped interviews over and over again, seriously studying the notes taken during interviews that contained all the key phrases and non verbal features. Afterwards, I began the process of transcription myself. Four months after all the interviews had been completed, the full versions of the recordings and notes were straightened out in Chinese language. I then embarked on to a process of sorting out themes and categories, taking into consideration of my earlier conceptual frame but more to what the participants have articulated. Themes identified and related quotations were then translation, I asked another translator to

turn the translated versions back from English to Chinese and have their meanings compared. And asked yet two other persons, both academic colleagues, to rate the two texts, both in Chinese, there was a consequences of the liability. Building on this basis, I continued to study the data repeatedly, trying to search for and grasp the key words and phrases that were related to the conceptual framework and the research objectives. And what the participants were telling me.

In the course of describing the data, I focused, firstly, on the full versions of the all recordings and notes, trying to make sense of the ways the couple understood their marriage, what kinds of role expectations that they had of themselves and their spouses, and the similarities as well as dissimilarities in their attitudes towards the power relationships within the family. I was also looking for relevant key terms, concepts and themes at this initial stage. Secondly, I concentrated more on pursuing further the inner connections binding the key phrases, concepts and themes, as well as the greater significance embedded in them. While doing so, I was also seeking to use the changing role of the women in a dual-earner family as a main thread connecting the entire process. Therefore, I studied closely on the one hand, the impact that the changing role of the women had had upon their perception of the gender division of labor within traditional family, and the attitudes of husband and wife towards a 'reconstructing' of a division of labor. On the other hand, I was paying greater attention to the ways in which the women's changing role had affected the "role expectations" and the "power arrangement" parts of husband and wife, so that marital conflict in dual-earner family could be noticed. It is in this pursuit of the mutual influence and functions existing between concepts and themes, where I was making every effort to overcome the possibilities of overlooking the process in their context, as well as the specific significance behind the interviews that

the participant might have expressed. Needless to say, the completeness of the data may have been affected to some extent by such categorization. Some data that do not have direct relevance to the focus of the study was excluded as a result of repeated categorization and induction. I will discuss in detail the limitations of this in Chapter 8.

Finally, as discussed earlier in this chapter, intersubjectivity between the researcher and participants is inevitable during the process of data collection, and in the interpretation of the data in a qualitative study. This is how life is and how people find their realities, filled with all sort of interactive forces, while the stories the participants tell to the researcher may be the one that they will tell, for example, to each other, or to their friends, or parents, it is exactly the capturing of what they wanted to articulate, and to them, and why they did that we need to pay attention to, not whether what they told us is the whole truth and the only truth. (Bahar, 1990) What is important is that the researcher is aware of this, admits it and tries one's best to differentiate where each begins and where it ends in the course of discussing the data. This I have bear in mind when I was doing my analysis and interpretation of the data.

In short, this study is more concerned with the way in which the participants describe the marital conflicts, and attempts to look into the changes that have occurred within the dual-earner family in the traditional gender division of labor and try to find out whether the social participation of the wife has a direct impact on the gender division of labor within the family. All findings are based on the participants' feeling and their perspective. Therefore, a qualitative methodology does serve my purpose best, for it places greater emphasis on providing more space to participants for their feelings, perceptions and attitudes. Under this frame, within an open-ended interview guideline, 15 couples facing marital conflict are involved in this study. All the

background including their years of marriage, occupations and incomes, is introduced in Appendix 1, Demographic Profile of the Participants.

Chapter 5 Participants' perception of wife's role

In this Chapter, I will attempt to look into the ways in which the participants – both husbands and wives – understand the roles of 'wives'. To this end, I start with an examination of the role expectations of the 'wife's role by both husbands and the wives. Meanwhile, I also seek to discover the differences in their respective understandings, and as to whether the differences have actually affected not only communication but also relationships between them and hence played a part in the conflicts that have followed. From the interviews, we can find that, in the wake of the wives' social participation, both husbands and wives in the dual-earner families have experienced some changes in their role expectations towards the "wives". However, if we go a step further and explore in depth the effects of these changes upon the couples, we will see very clearly that these changes have brought about entirely different implications for the men and the women.

Husband's attitudes toward wife's role

When it comes to household responsibilities, the division of labor becomes one of the most controversial issues that confront the dual-earner families. Studies have indicated that the allocation of domestic duties between the couple can have a direct impact on the degree of satisfaction as far as the couple is concerned (Bebbington, 1973; Blair, 1992; Canary et al., 1995). But for the families in modern-day Chinese cities, and the

dual-earner families in particular, dispute over labor division with regard to doing housework is beyond question about whether the husband is taking part in household chores. In fact, it is very uncommon in China cities, as far as the dual-earner families are concerned, to see a husband not participating in any housework at all. Husbands in these families will, to a greater or lesser extent, help with domestic work. The causes behind the conflicts arising from housework distribution in the dual-earner families are not merely confined to who does more and who does less. Rather, a deeper dimension lies in the issue of who “should” do the housework, and whose responsibility it is “supposed” to be. It is therefore my view that their different attitudes towards the question of “responsibility” in relation to household chores, is one fundamental disagreement between the husbands and the wives in dual-earner families which need to be examined in the context within which differences may lead to conflicts.

—Housework as wife’s natural responsibility

During the interviews, the majority of the husbands shared the view that “a division of labor in housework is quite unnecessary”, for “it does not really matter who does more and who does less”. They all emphasised that “I will help if I am free”. One of the husbands actually spends more time on doing housework than does his wife. Nevertheless, I notice that, in describing and explaining their marital conflicts, they tended to use such phrases like “by nature”, “in the first place” and “suitable”, when illustrating the relation between housework and women, lending credence to the inevitable connection between the two. To a certain extent, it reflects the role expectations of the husbands towards their wives. They long for a wife who is a “good housekeeper”, “capable of parenting the child”, and “duly responsible for the eating,

drinking and clothing of the husband” etc. Otherwise, as some of the husbands commented, “Why should I have married a wife in the first place?”

Mr. Wen¹(03/h),² is a typical example of this. The 46-year-old husband is a member of the administrative team at a college in Beijing, while his wife, Miss Jin, is an associate- -professor-cum-deputy-director of a faculty at the same college. The couple came to know each other through a friend, and it has been seven years since they got married. This is already a second marriage for both of them. In recent years, Miss Jin has been attending some post-graduate courses, and assuming some administrative responsibilities in the faculty. The husband thinks that the wife has been spending too much time to get her degree, and hence putting the housework aside, while the wife complains that the husband has failed to share some of the household chores, and is unwilling to let the wife achieve better performance in her career. The couple therefore quarreled over this on a number of occasions. The wife finally sought help from the women’s hotline, through which I have come to know them both. In his conversations with me, Mr. Zhang (02/h) said this to me over and over again,

*“... Actually, there is not much to share between us, just some housework, that’s it. If I had time, of course I would do it too. But, **by nature**, she is handier about the house. Not only her, women in general are better at housework than men. Sometimes, she doesn’t even appreciate what I have done, complaining that I can’t*

¹ The number before the slash “/” represents the couples the interviewed, where as the “w” and “h” represent the wife and husband respectively.

even find some small thing, or not knowing where to put it back. I was just helping. She usually does the washing and cooking, but when she is not around, I will do that as well! That is about it really. No big deal whether I do more or she does less. I can't possibly say one is taking advantage of another because of this, or can I?"

Despite his attitude that, as a family, there was no big deal if he did more or the wife did less, and that he couldn't see it as one taking advantage of another, what he was concerned with was the "natural" connection between women and household chores. Like Mr. Zhang, Mr. Han (01/h), a 39-year-old director/manager at a law firm also thinks "women are born to do this housework".

Mr. Han and his wife came to know each other while they joined the work team in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. After the national university entrance examinations were restored in 1977, both of them were successful in getting into university. After their graduation, they settled down in Beijing. Later the husband went on to do his post-graduate studies. Because he had no income, the couple had to go through a very difficult time together. Mr. Han was among the first who went into business (*xia hai*)³ immediately after the economic reform had been introduced. He now enjoys a pretty good income. I first came to know his wife through a friend, and then him. When I got in touch with them, the couple had already been living apart for

² For the confidential reasons, all the name of participants was alternative.

³ "xia hai", which means "going down to the sea" literally, is a popular reference to the phenomenon in which many government officials, after the open-door policy was implemented in 1979, resign from their posts and join the public sector.

more than a month. Perhaps because of the fact that the family had a relatively high income, Mr. Han was the only one, among the husbands that I had interviewed, who insisted that the wife must give up her job and come home. And this was the very cause of the conflict between them. Mr. Han told me:

"What do you think? There must be somebody to do the housework in the family. Women are born to do this. Well, I don't mean to belittle women, and please don't feel offended hearing this. Women are really suitable for the job. You can't possibly let a man stay at home cooking and tending the kid, can you? ... And we are not short of money for her. All that she has to do is just do some housework, read some books, look after the kid, if she doesn't like, ok, we can hire a part time worker, isn't it an easy life? How many out there want to have a life like this! A wife must behave like a wife, take a good care of the children and the house, be more virtuous, so that when the husband comes back from work, he can feel it really like a home... "

For Mr. Han, housework should be divided. But since women are suitable for the job, they should just stay at home so that the husband will be able to enjoy a homey atmosphere. On this, Mr. Zhang (02/h), a producer at a film production company, I have mentioned before, very much agrees. It has been six years since he and his wife split, but for the sake of the child, they are yet to go through the divorce procedures. Mr. Zhang had an extra-marital affair, for which he explained that his formidable wife,

a tough woman, was to blame. She does not care about the family and the husband, and has failed to carry out her duties as a wife. He said,

"...A woman must at least know where the women's responsibilities lie. Just look at my wife: did she look like a wife? The house was in a mess, and people out there would even laugh at the clothes that I put on – she wouldn't even do the ironing for me! There were many modern utensils in the kitchen, but she had made them all dirty. This was the place that she couldn't care less. Apart from her career, hey! All that she did was try to find fault with me, and make a fuss about nothing."

Here, Mr. Zhang's attitude is crystal clear: doing housework is women's responsibility, and a wife must behave like a wife. She must not make the husband's clothing a laughing stock to others, and the house must not be in a mess.

The reasons behind Mr. Liu's divorce from his wife may appear to be very simple to others. Both the husband and the wife were resentful of the fact that neither of them wanted to do housework. Perhaps because both of them are young and highly educated, and neither of them would like to "make do" with the other. Three years into their marriage, they now find themselves in the divorce proceedings. Talking about the conflict between them, Mr. Liu (10/h) said:

"... she is simply unlike other women who do housework, because she feels that she is special, and emphasizes too much on equality. She is too dogmatic,

and too much concerned about her own status. In fact, there can never be a precise division of housework. If one happens to do more, that is it, for it is not done for the benefit of others anyway. Also, it is not unusual if the woman happens to do more. What makes her feel different is that she thinks she is a postgraduate student, and no ordinary woman. I think that we don't really need absolute equality at home, which is also not possible. Don't you think so? It is also not that we don't do housework at all; she does it, and so do I. But I am dissatisfied with her attitude, as if it was unfair if she happened to do more, as if I made light of her. ..."

As far as Mr. Liu understands it, husbands can do housework also, but "it is not unusual" if the wife happens to do more. In the case of their family, the husband is also dissatisfied with the wife's attitude because wife tried to shift her own responsibilities onto the husband, and he thought that:

"It is not right to say that housework is a woman's responsibility, this I agree; but more to the point, it should not be said that housework is a man's duty. I just feel that one should not be too demanding..."

According to Mr. Liu's explanation, the conflict between him and his wife arose because the latter was too demanding of him, while she had failed to fulfill her own obligations. In other words, she did not have a concrete idea of the role of a wife.

Although the husbands' attitude towards the division of labor with regard to domestic duties is: "Those who have time should do the housework" and "there is no absolute fairness in division of labor in the family", yet one can find in their words that their explanation is still premised on the belief that wives should be the "duty-doers" as far as housework is concerned. This is because the husbands think that housework is a wife's "responsibility in the first place". Precisely because of this basic principle, they believe that the role for a husband in domestic duties is merely the role of a "helper", and he is there just to help out, whereas the wife is expected to play a "natural " role as one who is "in charge of the private sphere". The statements of "those who have time should do the housework" and "there is no absolute fairness in division of labor in the family" are, essentially, seen in this light, an empty acknowledgement as best.

—Husband is just a "helper" at home

Precisely because the husbands think that housework is the "responsibility" of the wives "in the first place", they therefore expect their wives to be able to play a consummate role at home and carry out their duty to the best of their abilities. Meanwhile, many of the husbands also believe housework to be merely some sundry duties like cooking, washing, and cleaning. Simply put, there is not much work to do, and the husbands need not pay too much attention to the issue. Furthermore, the husbands do not see much housework to be done, as "there are washing machines, fridges and gas, so the hard work is not as much as before" nowadays. For the husbands to do housework is merely a "participation", or a "help", the wives should therefore not be too demanding. In view of their role expectation, the husbands' attitude on their domestic responsibility as such is only to be expected. Not only does this role

expectation determine their attitude towards doing housework, it also decides the household responsibilities that they are to take part in, the schedule for doing housework, as well as the modes of participation.⁴

Mr. Guo (04/h) is a professor at a university in Beijing. He thinks that, nowadays, housework no longer involves much physical labor. In his view, housework need not be time-consuming if women could be quicker and neater (more capable):

"There are only the three of us at home, since we have only one child. And the child is grown up now. Now we don't have to buy flour or coal, and there isn't much physical labor. As for the time spent... it is all up to you. If you are quick and neat, it is not going to need much time. We don't have much problem with housework, and there isn't much work, just washing, cooking, room cleaning etc.."

Although Mr. Guo (04/h) is of the opinion that housework today does not take up a lot of time, but when I asked if he could tell the actual hours that his wife worked, he thought for a while and said, "actual hour... who knows how many hours... this...? (pause) I haven't thought about this. Two, three hours maybe?" Similarly, he failed to give an estimate of the time he had spent on doing housework, when asked, his only comment was: "sometimes, I do help also".

⁴ Among the 15 couples taking part in the interview, almost all of the husbands spend less time on doing housework than the wives do, and some large-scale social surveys conducted in Mainland China also testify to the findings. For the full results of the investigation, please see "The Women and Men in

Mr. Wen (03/h) and his wife work in a same university. Because his wife has just successfully applied for a place at the graduate school, he now has to take charge of a lot more domestic duty, and is now the main housekeeper, compared to his assistant role before. About this, Mr. Wen complains a lot:

“... she worked while studying, and it has lasted for three years. It takes two half-days every week, plus Saturdays,—— I am left with two children to take care of, all by myself. I am like one who is without a wife. I told her the same, that I am like a married man living a wifeless life; there is nobody to take care of things, while I still have to look after the children... now they still say women have no status, is it a fact?”

Mr. Wen's words are very typical. In his view, the most marked difference between a “married man” and a “wifeless man” is that, once a man is married, there should be somebody to take care of everything, including housework, children etc. Simply put, everything should be taken care of after marriage.

Although Mr. Wen reiterated his stand in the same interview that “since we are a family, it doesn't matter if I do more or she does less”, when we place his words under different context, apparently, the understandings nevertheless become different also. The husband can use the words to comfort the wife, who has been doing a lot of domestic work; on the other hand, the husbands can use them as a subterfuge to release himself from the heavy workload. When the husband says “since we are a family, it

doesn't matter if I do more or she does less", it can be interpreted as "it does not matter if you work more", as well as "why can't I work less?" However, once the husband does more housework than the wife, his explanation and attitude will not be the same. To use Mr. Wen's own words, it would be, "I am already like those men who are unmarried." In short, from the husbands' point of view, it is abnormal, and also unfair, for them to do more and for the wives to do less.

– Family as wife's first choice

Many of the husbands mentioned in their conversations that "home" should be the first priority for women. They believe "people will laugh at" women who have no "family" (being unmarried). Having had a family, it is a women's obligation to maintain it. When we explore this thread further, we will find the importance of women to family, despite the men's emphasis on the importance of family to women. When a husband emphasizes the importance of families to women, the value behind him remains one that insists that women's activities should be confined to the house, the private sphere. For quite a number of years, Mr. Zhi's (15/h) wife has been a self-employed person, having taken over a photo studio business. When I interviewed the couple, they were in the course of processing their divorce. Mr. Zhi said,

"...Family should still be a woman's first priority.

*No matter how capable she is, without a family, others
will still stab her in the back. Isn't Wuyi⁵ capable enough?*

Yet she is single. I think men dare not have her as a wife.

What is the use if a woman only excels at work? Don't you think so? Although we are not on the verge of ruining the family, and our family members are not scattered or dead, but she should be entirely responsible for the damage to the family. She must change her problem of not wanting the family. She only cares about making money, having got married but now wanting to divorce... in fact, she was quite a virtuous wife before, and good at housekeeping. Now the house is in a mess... her greatest problem is that she only wants money but not the family."

Although there are many complicated factors behind the conflict between Mr. Zhi and his wife, he does think that women cannot afford not to have a family. For him, family must be the very first choice for a woman, and people will look down on those women who are without a family. Since his wife wanted only her career but not their family, she must be in the wrong.

Mr. Wen (03/h), an administrative personnel, complained to me about his wife's obsession with seeking the limelight. When I asked him to elaborate on the ways in which his wife sought to attract others' attention, his response was still not far away from the theme that women should give their priority to their family. He said,

"...I am still quite supportive of her. She wanted to go to university, and then went on to graduate school,

⁵ A female high-ranking official in China, now a member of the State Council.

and I gave my blessing to her on both occasions. She is like that, enjoys trying everything, not knowing where her priority is. In fact, leading a life like this can be quite tiring as well. Everything at average level is fine for me. Women especially, they already have enough things to do at home, so why give themselves more work to do? ... Since she had taken up a job, I actually didn't stop her from working. But she shouldn't have been on a look out for more. She didn't have to aim for perfection. If her consciousness was clear, then it was already okay. After all, this family should be most important to her. If the home was in a mess, or the family was not happy, what good would it do if she had a flying career? Don't you think so?... Women who are clever should have their families uppermost in their minds, for it is the only reliable thing in life."

Mr. Wen's attitude is the same as that of Mr. Zhi, that is, without a family, women will also be without happiness. Quite a few husbands actually echoed the same view in their conversations with me. They all think that, for a woman, success in career will not bring her real happiness if she neither wants the child nor cares about the husband. Their statements seem to provide us with some clues here: instead of saying that family is important to women, their perception in reality is that women are important to the family. In the cases of these husbands, it is precisely because the wives were not

wholeheartedly committed to the families, in their norm that dissatisfaction or conflicts have arisen.

It is clear from the husbands' explanations that, on one hand, they have expressed the attitude that "those who have time should do housework", and that "there could never be absolute equality in the division of labor at home", while arguing for the "natural" connection between housework and women on the other. It is therefore safe to say that, as far as dual-earner families are concerned, there have not been fundamental changes with regard to the various expectations of the husbands towards the traditional role of a "wife", as opposed to the traditional family that has adhered to the belief that "men should dominate the public domain and women should concentrate on domestic duties". This is precisely the area with which the wives are most dissatisfied.

—Family comes before job

As far as the husbands are concerned, it is an undeniable fact that the incomes of the wives are of a very significant proportion in terms of supporting their individual families. Meanwhile, the choice of the wives to look for a job is already a fact over which the husbands have no control, they are therefore "left with no option but to support" their wives to go out and work. But on the other hand, it remains their wish that the wives would be able to run the house and shoulder the domestic duties, because "housework is a wife's obligation which she should fulfill". From a man's perspective, how exactly do these husbands consider the difficult position of their wives, who have had to make a choice between "family" and "job"?

As explained before, the majority of the husbands here agree that their wives should be given a chance to find some job. However, they also think at the same time that their wives should set a clear priority between job and family. That is to say, they have to consider as to which between the two is actually more important than the other.

Mr. Wen's (03/h) wife is a university professor. In his conversation with me, he mentioned that he did not object to his wife's looking for a job. However, he recalled that he once asked his wife to resign the administrative post, but remained only as a deputy director at the faculty, to which she did not agree. When I asked him why he wanted his wife to resign from her administrative post, he said,

"... we have two children at home, one is preparing for high school, the other for university, and they both need our attention. But she simply cannot care less. You cannot expect me to take care of everything, can you? She always says that I have not been supportive enough..... Can't she see that life goes on as usual with those who have failed to make it to the graduate school? And there are not many who can make it to deputy directors. But she is such a workaholic, and likes her competence to be recognized by others..... Family is really the most important thing. What would be the use if we excelled at work, but were without a family, or the family was one that was not harmonious? Women who are intelligent will put their families in the very first place, for it is something that is truly reliable.

Mr. Li (05/h) is currently serving in the army. He once suggested to his wife, who was a policewoman, to change to an easier job, but his wife would not agree. Since his wife is willing to work, and he is not an “authoritarian” person, he therefore thought that, should his wife fail to look after the family, it would be “her own problem”. He hopes his wife could strike a ‘right’ balance between work and family relationship:

“She is not the only working woman, but others come home on time, and their homes are in perfect order. I advised her to change jobs, but she said she was used to the job now, and could not do any other. I didn’t persist. It is her own choice to work, she should not complain about the heavy workload, about having no time. She does not care about the elderly at home..... So long as I feel that she strikes a right balance between her work and the family, it is fine with me. She cannot use her busy work as an excuse to put the house to one side, and leave the elderly to themselves....one cannot take care of two things at the same time.....she has chosen to have a family, she must develop a sense of responsibility..... it is useless for a woman to do well in her job while not knowing how to do housework and look after the family.....”

We can see from the conversations of the husbands that, although for economic reasons, they are not opposed to their wives participating in the job market, they nevertheless have a very definite attitude as far as solving the conflict between ‘work’

and 'family' is concerned - their emphasis that the wives must place the family in the very first place that is. This can be said to be a clear expression of their "traditional" role expectations of their wives.

Wife's attitudes toward wife's role

Comparing the expectations and understandings towards 'the role of the wife' between the couples in dual-earner families, it can be said that the biggest difference between them lies in whose duty housework belongs to. While the husbands may share some of the housework, they continued to think that doing housework "should" be the "obligation" of the 'wife', hence their complaint about the 'wives' taking up jobs outside of home as "not carrying out a wife's duties". Meanwhile, the wives while in actual fact shouldering most of the housework, nevertheless felt that housework "is not my responsibility alone", for "I am not a housewife". For the wives in dual-earner families, they do not merely regard their employment as an indispensable portion to family income, more importantly, they also receive job satisfaction as a result of their social participation. For them, the participation in the job market is not only an economic necessity, it is also some kind of affirmation with regard to their capabilities and social values.

- As breadwinners and housekeepers

Ms. Dai (10/w) works as an editor at a newspaper. Although she only got her master's degree in recent years, her income is nevertheless quite satisfactory at her age. She enjoys her work, for it has brought her a new meaning in life:

"In fact, with his monthly salary of 1000 yuan, plus the 1000 odd yuan of mine, we could have a comfortable life in Beijing. But I am not willing to lead a humdrum, meaningless existence. I like to try my abilities. Even for a rich woman with servants tending to her needs, life would be dull if she just stayed at home. We only have one life to live, and we should live it for ourselves but not others, don't you think so? When I split with him, this was how I thought. I couldn't stand his indifference. Both of us are educated, so we should know how to respect others..."

Ms. Bian (02/w), a company administrative staff, shares the view that it is not only for economic reasons that women choose to work, but they also feel fulfilled and able to realize their own "self":

"I feel that one can realize one's self and one's personal values in work. Although I have a very tiring and busy job, I also feel fulfilled. Even if he could feed me, I still would not go back to being a housewife. I think it is not only for economic reasons that one chooses to work; it is some kind of fulfillment also. Moreover, if I didn't work, I would have had to put up with all the

bullying. Could I possibly just stand up and say 'I want to move out' then?"

For wives, employment opportunities are not confined to the financial needs of the family; they have also achieved some kind of economic independence as well as dignity by virtue of their social participation. Moreover, in the course of our conversations, I have a deep impression that, as far as these married women are concerned, being able to work is also seen as an important opportunity for them to demonstrate their personal values. Contrary to the husbands' view, the wives of a dual earner family are opposed to the view that housework is "their job". They believe that husbands should share housework, because they themselves have shouldered the responsibility of feeding the family. That is a different perception on wife's role between husbands and wives. I remembered that when a husband insisted the wife do the housework, the wife responded: "I am not a housewife, and housework is not my responsibility alone." She expressed to me:

"He just wouldn't do any housework at all. Everyday after work, I had to go shop, cook, wash, pick up the kid, while he was doing nothing... he only said to me that all these were a woman's duties. Yes, I have to admit I am a woman, but I am not a housewife... I have my own work to do..."

Ms. Dai (10/w) and her husband were classmates at university, and the couple are now in divorce proceedings. The main conflict between them is the wife's dissatisfaction with the husband's non-participation in housework, and the "male chauvinism" that she saw in him. The husband, on the other hand, thought that his wife

had failed to carry out her duties as other peoples' wives did. Talking about housework division with her husband, Ms. Dai said,

"..... (Before marriage) I didn't think anything about housework, after all, the house belonged to the two of us, and of course we should share the work between us, isn't it so? He didn't talk much about dividing the responsibilities, and I think he had actually thought of what he should do. Yet he didn't say he wouldn't do it either; neither did he say that I must do it. But, in actual fact, he simply wouldn't do it. I became resolute in demanding that, after coming back from work, he must also do the cooking. He then said that, since he finished work later than I did, he couldn't do it. So we had to reach a deal that whoever got home earlier must cook. It turned out to be I was the one who often got home earlier. I finally became angry one day, so I chose not to come home right away after work, and I went to shop around at a shopping mall near our house instead. Hey! I bumped into him, as he was walking mindlessly there. So he was waiting for me to go home and cook. Should I not have been angered by it?"

During my conversation with Ms. Du (15/w), the lady who took over a photo studio as mentioned earlier, I asked her to recollect and describe the scenes of the quarrel with her husband over cooking dinner on one occasion. She described the incident to me in

very detail, still shaking with emotion. Her description can perhaps help us to understand in depth the marked differences in the attitudes towards housework division between husbands and wives:

"One day, I came home at around 7pm,.....usually I was the one who did the shopping after work. If I couldn't make it, I would give him a call. On that day, I got home and found that, well, he hadn't done anything at all. My kid was doing his homework. I first thought that he would have cooked some rice or else, but he was there watching TV, and doing nothing. Not saying a word, I went and made the soup. Once it was done, I called my kid to eat, and he came along. Having taken a few sips of the soup, he asked, 'Where were the main dishes?' I said, 'There is none.' He said, "So what are we going to eat?' I said, 'You can eat whatever you fancy. ' He said, 'You want to have a row today?' I said, 'Yes, so what? Since you were at home, why didn't you have some rice ready?' He said, 'You think I am hanging around with nothing to do?' I said, 'So just tell me what you have actually done? Haven't you been watching TV?' He said, 'Why on earth should I report to you?' I said, 'You work nearer to home, and came back over one hour earlier than I did today, why couldn't you just cook some rice?' He said, 'I don't care who you are in your

workplace. You can continue to be a manager, but never ever think that you can lead me at home. Don't show me your arrogance. 'I became particularly angry, so I said, 'I am not up to serving you! You are hard to please!' Then he said, 'You get lost!' I also became infuriated and said, 'I was the one who bought this house!'In fact, things like this were pretty common....."

Every time when I read the notes about the above row, I recall the shaky emotion and the discontented tone of Ms. Du at the time of interview. Through her description and explanation of the row between her and her husband, the grievances against what her husband had done, as well as her dissatisfaction with her situations, I came to have an intimate grasp of the intense feelings behind the conflict between the couple. The wife's resentment of the husband not sharing any responsibility in cooking (housework), and the husband's bitter feeling of the wife being a manager (a leader), while failing to fulfil her role as a wife. If we study in depth the conversations above again, and seek to interpret the explanations made by the husband and the wife for it, we realise that, not only does their conflict involve the issue of housework division, it also brings in the issue of power distribution and the balance of power between the husband and wife within the family. Not only are wives reflecting on the marital relationship and her questioning the traditional gender division of labor as vitally influential in the marital relationship in the dual-earner family, the two factors have also become a starting point for the wife to demand a reconstruction of the marital relationship and a reexamination of the power equilibrium. This point which will be further discussed in chapter 7.

--Domestic duties must be shared

I mentioned in the previous section that the difference between husbands and wives as to who should do housework has been a highly controversial issue constantly raised by the couples of a dual earner family in their descriptions of their respective expectations towards the role of a “wife”. However, their differences are not merely confined to who should do more or who should do less. Rather, their division involves disputes on a deeper level – the question of division of labor based on gender. If we try to study the role expectations of the wives towards the husbands from a different perspective in this chapter, we further realize that, not only do the wives question the traditional division of labor based on gender (“housework is not mine alone”), they are even definite in demanding that the husbands be able to “share the housework”. It is precisely on this point that the husbands differ greatly from the wives in terms of their respective expectations. An understanding on this may assist us further in making sense of the conflicting role expectations between the couples of dual earner family and the mutual dissatisfaction that has followed. Furthermore, conflict has not just taken place on the dimensions of ‘who should do what’ and ‘how long would it last’. In fact, it has involved the role understandings and expectations of both husband and wife, as well as the issue of power distribution and the awareness of equality⁶.

⁶ Many social scientists in China have pointed out in their research on family and marital conflicts that, for married women, their degree of satisfaction with marriage is lower than that of the married men, with “the sense of fairness in the division of household duties” and “the right to economic independence and determination” being the, *inter alia*, two indicators closely related to marital relationship. For further details on this, please see “Women’s Development over a Half Century”, Li Qiu Fang (eds.)

Textile factory worker Ms. Meng (11/w), when talking about the issue of division of labor at home, often revealed her lack of satisfaction with her husband's failure to participate in housework:

"... after coming back from work, he would just lie himself down and then watch TV. Once he had finished with the meal, he would do the same again, continuing with the TV program. I had to do the washing up and the cleaning up. I was so terribly upset... everyday, we had to travel a few dozen miles to work, and each one of us had to take charge of a few dozen machines. We even had to run a bit. The work of the textile worker in our factory was the most tiring. Others had time to just sit around while at work, while we did not even have time for toilet. Sometimes, I didn't even dare drink water. I was so deadly tired after work. At times I just thought to myself: why on earth should I be serving you? ..."

Although the wives are of different opinions as to who "would be the more suitable person to do housework", when it comes to getting the husbands to share out the workload, their attitudes are nevertheless highly identical. Ms. Dai, who has successfully completed her post-graduate studies, has a profound experience with this:

"He sometimes does help me with the housework, rather reluctantly. It is because I ask for his help. He

said he could do the hard work for me. But what hard work do we have now? The hard work besides, I do the rest. But how much of the work can be said to be hard nowadays, work that one must do? ... in fact, I am not upset just because of housework. What is more annoying is his attitude..... Sometimes when I am not around, he would do it also. I am annoyed mainly because he first firmly believed that I should be the one doing it, as if he was kind-hearted enough to help. But who said I should do it? ”

In our conversations, many of the wives expressed that they were not merely dissatisfied with the husbands not sharing out the housework; more importantly, they were dissatisfied with the husbands' perception of the role of a “wife”, as well as their insistence on the concept of a division of labor based on gender. Hence their ill feelings about the fact that the men are unwilling to perform domestic duties, while the women have been feeding the family.

—Wife's labor in housework must be acknowledged

For women who have been nurtured in traditional Chinese culture, although they may think doing housework for their husbands should not be “their responsibility alone”, in actual fact, the majority of the wives continue to carry out their duties as a “wife” at home, willingly or unwillingly, aware or unaware. Their dedication of time and physical labor, as well as the conflict between work and household chores, both make

it easy for them to complain about their husbands' inability to show understanding and sympathy.

Ms. Meng (11/w), who stays with her mother-in-law, thinks that her husband should at least understand the sacrifice that she has been making, although she does not dispute the difficulties in dividing up the housework equally:

"... having got married, I am a housewife at best, or a slave at worst. Either way, one has to serve the family. If the relationship between the couple is good, things will be easier. I am not arguing who should do more and who should do less here, am I? Everybody likes to hear something nice. If the relationship is a bit cordial, and both sides are able to understand each other, so I will just do my work. At least I know something good will come out of this. I often tell my mother-in-law, I am not frightened of laboring, neither am I lazy to work. Just that I feel unhappy. After a whole day work, quite often, nobody says, 'Oh! It must have been hard on you! Well, just take a rest and have some water.' No, nothing like this has ever happened. The moment I step into the house, he is already lying there. Once the meal is ready, I still have to give him a shout, "Come and eat." How can I possible not feel angry? I am very angry indeed..."

Ms. Zou (13/w), who found a new job after lay-off, also said that it was okay for one to do all the housework oneself. Recalling her mother, she said, "It is a woman's

destiny to suffer.” Meanwhile, she also thought that her husband should understand the hard work that she had done, and sympathise with her difficulties:

“... I don't rely on him for anything at home. I do all the housework myself, and there is nothing much I can say about it. This is my job, and I have never argued with him over these things. Now the kid is grown up, and he never has to worry about it. Sometimes, I feel quite angry also: why on earth should I be serving him? My mum toiled and toiled, serving the young and the old all her life. She said to me, “It is a woman's destiny to suffer.” At that time, she had no money, no job. Look at me now, I have a job, but so what? I still have to look after the old and the young. Okay, I was born to serve him, this I accept it as my fate. But he at least has to have a limit, and should not have made me angry, right?”

Ms. Fang (01/w) works as a senior executive manager at a foreign-owned restaurant. She is the one whose husband wanted her to return home, as I have mentioned earlier. Because she was persistent in her view that women should go out and work, hence the conflict with her husband followed. In my conversation with her, acknowledging the traditional family role for women on one hand, she expressed her wish that husbands should also recognize the value *of doing housework on the other*:

“Actually, I don't really care how much or how little. If I am willing, I can finish it all within minutes. The problem is not whether he does or not. The problem is

that he simply doesn't concern about me, not at all. He is not understanding and sympathetic towards me. When I step into the house carrying bags with me, large or small, as if he didn't see it, he just turns around and walks away, never offering his help. He is simply unaware of the need to help, and never says, 'Wow! You are carrying so much. Let me give you a hand.' I just want him to be a bit more understanding, a bit more caring, nothing else. Just a couple of nice words will go a long way to making me happy..... "

In their descriptions and grievances, we can see that wives on one hand, are opposed to the view that housework is a woman's "inborn responsibility" on account of their social participation, while, on the other, they cannot help being confronted with the reality that there is nothing they can do if they choose not to do housework. Precisely because of this, the wives have to continue to take up their role in a traditional family. Perhaps on this basis, the wives' expectation of recognition for doing housework can only be expressed through their grievances against their husbands' lack of understanding with regard to their labor, at least, husbands should show their appreciation and their acknowledgement.

If we notice the marked differences existing in the expectations towards housework division between the husbands and the wives, or, so to speak, if we can acknowledge the fact that men and women have different perceptions, expectations and understandings towards the tasks of the 'wives', husbands still think that the role of the wives should be at home, taking care of the family and household chores but the wives

perceive it otherwise and want a more equal share of domestic responsibilities from the husband. If we pay more attention to this mismatching demands and unresolved differences between couples, it will then become easier for us to make sense of marital conflict occurs.

Chapter 6 Participants' perceptions of husband's role

In the previous chapter, I sought to identify the various differences between the husbands and the wives through their perception of the wives' role, and tried to find out that how the conflict occurs from those different perceptions and expectations towards housework division between the husbands and the wives. Meanwhile, we would find some attitudinal similarities between the husbands and the wives on the husband's role that "feeding the family" is their "responsibility". Therefore, in this chapter, I continue to explore the issues through the married couples' understandings and perceptions of the role of the "husband", and focus on what happened behind the no seeming conflict on the surface in terms of gender role expectation on the husband.

Husband and wife's attitudes toward husband's responsibility

The issue of the role of husbands in earning money and feeding the family is probably one that the husbands and the wives of dual earner family share identical opinions on. Although the wives of dual earner family also have to shoulder the responsibility of

feeding the family¹, their articulation clearly supports the view that “feeding the family” should a husband’s obligation, and the wife hence has the right to complain about the husband’s failure to carry out this duty. On the other hand, the husbands also agree that feeding the family is a ‘man’s’ business, they therefore feel extremely pressurized and burdened when they think that they have failed to fulfill their obligation.

–Internalized husband’s ‘responsibilities’

Just like the husband’s view that “doing housework is a task that women are born with”, they also unanimously think that “earning money, feeding the family” is a “responsibility” that men cannot have.

Mr. Wu (08/h) was a farmer in a pastoral farm who moved back to Beijing with his wife, an intellectual youth, in the later days of the Cultural Revolution. He thought:

*“... even the animals know males go out to look for
food, while the female ones stay home. It is the same with*

¹ In the area of employment, the Chinese government has been promoting the policy of “low wages, wide employment”. As a result, almost all the families in the city are dual earner families. According to a white paper, *The Current State of Women in China*, published by the Chinese government in 1995, the incomes of the women comprise 47% of the total family incomes. Another report, “Women and Men in Chinese Society: Facts and Figures (1995)”, also points out that, among the working population (female 16-54 years old; male 16-56 years old) in China in 1995, a total number of 35,300,000 were women, and 84% of them were employed. The male working population was 38,500,000, or 92% of the employed population. In the urban areas, women and men comprised 23% and 25% of the employed population respectively. In the 25-34 age group, the proportion of male’s and female’s was 29.7% and 32.4%. (p. 41)

human beings, in my hometown, anybody knows, anyhow, I don't think that (wife) staying at home is some kind of inequality, but I know a man, if married, he must feed his wife and kids..... "

Mr.Li (05/h), a general in the army shared the same opinion with Mr. Wu, after he told me that his wife's income is important in their family and he said:

"woman have choice between career and family but men have not..... I cannot give you many reasons why wife should stay home and husband go out to work, some time just because everybody knows, right? She (wife) is earning money now, this is a fact, nobody thinks that it is wrong if she stay home, but I cannot stay home because my responsibility is to feed my family, ... a man who takes a good care of the family but fails to excel at work, people will talk behind him. This is not just my personal opinion. It is how the society looks at issues like this, isn't? "

From what Mr. Wu and Mr. Li said, we can find how the internalized role as breadwinner and what "husband' should be like still influence the husbands' expectation of themselves, although the wives of dual earner family has shouldered the responsibility of feeding the family. Meanwhile, I discovered some attitudinal similarities between the husbands and the wives on the expectations and perceptions on the husband's role as a breadwinner despite the fact that, in a dual earner family,

both the husband and the wife have to shoulder the responsibility of “feeding the family”.

- Wife's expectations on earning money and feeding the family

As for the wives that I interviewed, all of them have fixed incomes, and also believe that their employment is vital to realizing their own values as individuals. Nevertheless, once we touched on their role expectations towards their husbands, they seemed to forget about themselves, and used phrases such as “if he (the husband) was capable, I would not have to work so hard” and “marry a man who will feed me and clothe me” to express the traditional concept of division of labor based on gender, as well as the expectations of dependence on the husband.

Ms. Xiu (08/w), who moved from the countryside in Inner Mongolia with her husband back to Beijing after the Cultural Revolution, is a case in point. When the interview took place, Ms. Chen had separated from her husband for more than six months, and was living with her son. During our talk she drew a picture about her expectation on a “husband”:

“... well, when I was young, I just wanted to find someone who was handsome, able, reliable, someone who would put my mind at rest. But now, when I come to think of it, I know I need to be a bit pragmatic. So long as he shows concerns, and can feed the family, like a real man that would be fine by me... like my husband, he is easily satisfied with everything, and has no desire for greater improvement. I told him before. I married him

because he was exceptionally reliable, and I felt quite at ease with this person. But now I just feel uncertain about things. If one day he was laid off, to whom should I go for help? I can't count on anybody..."

Like Ms. Xiu, many of the wives believe that a husband should be "dependable", and "able to put a woman's mind at rest". Ms. Bao (12/w) is one of them. Due to illness, her husband recuperated at home for a long period of time, and her son was studying at university at the time of the interview. After she had been laid off from the factory, she went through a great deal of hardship in order to look for another job, and worked as shoe vendor, sales person and bicycle-keeper. As she was sharing with me her own experience with job-hunting and the hardship, her voice was choked with grief, and our conversation was constantly stopped. Although she mentioned the fact that the idea of jumping from the bridge had crossed her mind on quite a number of occasions, but to me, she looked rather tough. Still, a wife like her, who has in actual fact been supporting the family independently, could not help but express the regret of "failing to find a good husband" in the conversation. When I explored further with her the meaning of " a good husband " she said,

"em... must be well educated, able to support the family, and committed to his job; stable, not too outgoing, caring about the family, caring about the child; and does not have those habits like smoking, drinking, gambling, dancing etc.. I think that's about all... Since I have been carrying out the task of supporting the family on his behalf, he could at least be a

guard or a newspaper deliverer, yet he has chosen to stay at home, surviving on the labor protection². A man must in any case have a sense of duty, and feed the family. What a weakling for a man to rely on a woman. Illness is an exception. (But) he must stand on his own feet in other times, otherwise, we wouldn't have called a someone who is manly a real man, would we? Now I have lost my woman's feel... if I did not act like a man, going out to work hard, the whole family would have nothing to survive on... "

Despite her taking up the responsibility of feeding the family, as far as Ms. Bao is concerned, there is still a clear division between the duties of the man and those of the woman. In her own view, she is feeding the family "for" the man, like going out to work as a "man", lacking a "woman's feel". She therefore thinks that everything she does, she does it in order to fulfill her husband's obligations. But in actual fact, she has been supporting her family to the very best of her abilities. It is her view that she has to work so hard because her husband is incapable.

Based on the similarities of expectations on the role of a 'husband' both husbands themselves and wife, perhaps it is easier for us to understand the husband's feeling why they need to be "stronger" and like "real man". Meanwhile, although the

² The Labor Protection stipulates that, if a worker in any of the Chinese state enterprise has failed to report for work for up to six months, all his other benefits will then be terminated. The worker will in such situation will only be paid 60% of his salary until the doctor certifies that he/she is fit to return to the job.

expectations of wives on the role of husbands is still “traditional”, we cannot ignore the fact that wives have shared the role of “feeding the family”, the change translated into real life situation and husband will feel extremely pressurized and burdened.

Pressure of a “breadwinner”

-Wives sharing the role of a breadwinner

The attitudes of the husbands towards their wives’ taking up employment are very different from those of the wives themselves as I mentioned last chapter. Although they admit that the social participation of their wives has indeed lightened their family burden, and they also recognize the fact that the incomes generated by the wives are important to the present families, they nevertheless share an entirely different experience from their wives in terms of the latter’s going out to work. It is the inner belief of the husbands that women should stay at home, and they actually wish that their wives could choose to do so. However, the husbands are now confronted with the dilemma that, from an economic perspective, it is no longer a viable option for the wives to stay at home. And this should be the greatest difference as opposed to the wish of the husband in a traditional family.

Mr. Wang (07/h), who had just contracted a construction company, talked in absolute frankness of his wife being “one of the pillars” in family economy,

“Yes indeed. In the current family, it is no longer feasible if the female comrade did not earn money, but chose to be entirely dependent on the male comrade,

who was only a wage earner but not an employee in a company. This is because the meager wages that he earned would not be enough for both. If I worked in a company and earned as much as I could while she stayed at home, we might be able to survive. Now we only have around 1000 yuan salary; if the big financial pillar collapsed, so would the family."

Mr. Xiao (06/h) works as an administrator at a Beijing-based factory. Although he has been complaining about his wife devoting too much time to her job and hence neglecting the family, he nevertheless makes it clear that, in dual-earner families, the incomes from both parties are very important:

"Her salaries are, of course, important to the family. In fact, incomes from both husband and wife are important in a dual-earner family. The standards of living are bound to be affected if one of their incomes is not forthcoming..."

Mr. Li (05/h) is a general in the People's Liberation Army. It may appear that the conflict between him and his wife derived from the uneasy relationship between his wife and his mother; nevertheless we can come to understand his role expectations towards his wife in his statement. Since I have touched on the issue in other parts of the thesis, I just want to discuss his attitudes towards his wife's employment here:

"If the wife did not work, that would of course reduce the conflict within the family considerably. There

would be nothing to grumble about if the wife could actually stay at home, do the housekeeping well and take a good care of the elderly. These were what she was supposed to do. But see what has happened now? No matter what they say, even if we put women's emancipation to one side, from an economic point of view, it is already impossible for a married woman to stay at home. In a family like ours, we cannot afford to lose the income of either party..."

In terms of family economy, as far as the married couples' incomes are concerned, the impact of the long-implemented "low wages, mass employment" policy of the Chinese Government on their standards of living has been huge. This is a fact that even the men have acknowledged. In the course of interview, almost all the husbands admitted that their wives' incomes had been important to the families.

—Wives' participation in the job market as a matter of fact

Because of the high proportions of the wives' earnings in family incomes, all the husbands, with the exception of Mr. Han (01/h), whose income is relatively high by Beijing's standards, and who thinks "the family now no longer needs her to earn money", agree that their wives have been playing a role as co-breadwinners. If the wives' incomes were not important to the families, or, in other words, the husbands could shoulder the responsibility of supporting the families completely by themselves, what would then be their attitudes towards their wives' social participation? Almost all

the husbands thought it no longer possible for their wives to stay at home instead of going out to work. Although in their innermost beings, they would prefer otherwise. Their nearly unanimous opinion as such is rather intriguing.

The husbands are rather passive in their attitude as far as their wives' employment is concerned; yet they feel that there is nothing they can do about it. Their attitude as such caught my attention not only because of the importance the husbands attached to their wives' incomes, but, more importantly, also because of the fact that whenever the husbands touched on the issue of the wives homecoming, almost all of them agreed that the attitudes of their partners had to be taken into consideration. In view of this, we can perhaps realize the enormous impact of the policy of gender equality, implemented by the Chinese government since 1949, on the populace. Of course, for men and women, the outcomes of the impact are different. Mr. Wang's (07/h) wife is a master-degree student. When I asked him as to whether he would let his wife come home if he could bear the expenditure of the family completely by himself, he thought it impossible. This was because, having lived with his wife for years, he knew full well that his wife would not make such a choice:

"... As for myself, I won't do it. Even if I could earn a few millions, I still would not let her do the housework and cook for me. I understand her, and I know she is a career-minded person. We have been living together for 20 odd years, so I know this very well..... there is no way that she is going to accept an arrangement like this."

Mr. Zhi talked about his mother during our conversation, speaking from his own experience, he felt his mother's generation was different from that of his wife, because for women of his wife's generation, they already "knew equality":

"My mum was a housewife for all her life, and my dad was an intellectual. In fact, my mum was a high school graduate too. At that time, women would be regarded as "cultured" if they managed to complete high school education. So what? My mum ended with my dad for the rest of her life. Wherever he went, she just followed him.....when we were in the Qinghai province, my dad alone earned a hundred odd yuan (the Chinese dollar). My mum had to take care of the family of five entirely by herself. Nowadays, things are so different. Women now know what equality means. Nobody can stop them from going out to work... "

Professor Guo (04/h) remarked that, speaking from his own heart, he would prefer his wife to come home. However, he also made clear that, "since women have stepped out of the house, it would be difficult for them to return." He said,

"... If I put aside her attitudes and her feelings, of course I would say I preferred her to stay at home, and we wouldn't have had the conflict that we have now. However, it is my view that, once women have stepped out of the house, it would be difficult for them to return....."

Mr. Liu (10/h), who is the youngest man in my interview, For him, whether or not wives should be allowed to “come home” is no longer merely an economic issue within the family, for there is now also a social dimension to it:

“Honestly speaking, I would prefer my wife to stay at home. But our society has already changed. It is very difficult to ask the wives to return home. Furthermore, my wife is not the type who would choose to stay at home. No matter how heavy the workload was, she would, by all means, go out and find a job, for this would be the chance for her to show her capabilities.”

From the words of these husbands, such as “the society has changed”, “since women have already stepped out of the house, it is difficult to get them back in again”, “now women already know what equality means, and nobody can stop them from going out to work”, “there is no way that she is going to accept that (coming home)” etc., it is crystal clear that the husbands actually felt that they did not have a choice as far as their wives’ decision to find a job was concerned. From their statements, it may appear quite easy for us to link this sense of inability with the economic considerations that the families needed the incomes of the wives. However, what has aroused my greater concern here are the personal feelings of the husbands, or their feelings as a “man”. What I am trying to say here is that, although the husbands may have thought that they had no option but to agree to let their wives go out and work, as compelled by the economic conditions at home, their sense of loss and resentment were nevertheless manifested in their words, and this has more to do with their understanding of power relations between the sexes. Because the husbands already showed their sense of

resignation, I have incurred from this a strong impression that they might have come to terms with the fact that they were no longer in a position to make any decision on behalf of their wives. This, I think, is perhaps the very cause for their sense of loss.

–Earning money, feeding the family

Perhaps because of the fact that, among the 15 couples that I conducted interviews with, the wives had an income that was similar to or more than that of the husbands, many of the male participants appeared to be rather “uncomfortable” when we touched on the issues such as the status and income of their wives. During the interview, I discovered from the husband’s talking, most of them agreed the greatest difficulty in being a good husband is “I earn less than my wife does”.

Mr. Wu (08/h) was a farmer in a pastoral farm who moved back to Beijing with his wife, an intellectual youth, in the later days of the Cultural Revolution. Because of his low educational background, he constantly finds it hard to get a good job, while his wife’s income has all along been higher than his. He said,

*“... only if I could earn more, it would be good for
me, and right for me. I wouldn’t have to put up with her
chattering. Since she earns more, I cannot lift my head
up before her, as if my words carried no weight at all.
Even the child thinks that I am incapable...”*

Mr. Zhi (15/h) works at a laboratory of a zoo in Beijing, and earns some 800 yuan a month while his wife works as a manager of a photo studio. He shared the same view as Mr. Wu that it is not normal for a woman to earn more than a man. In his view, the

reform in the economic system has brought benefits to the people. Nevertheless, to allow women to be tougher than men, and for the former to have more income would be too “abnormal” indeed:

“If I were rich, she could have stayed at home, and taken a good care of the house. Neither of us would have been cross with one another, and we wouldn’t have ended up like this... when a man is without money, he has to put up with all the bullying. I feel angry about myself; but since I am incapable, I have to put up with my wife’s bullying. If I quarrel with her, she would say, ‘well, if you are capable, go and earn money yourself then.’ Hey! I can only stare at her and think: this is not normal...”

If we deconstruct carefully the conversations of these two husbands, we would find that what really causes their anger is not the fact that their wives earn more money than they do, but the pressure that comes with it. That the wife has more money is making the husband feel small before her, for this implies that he has failed in his obligation of feeding the family, and has lost his dignity as a real husband. I am afraid the feelings that come with these facts are the real causes of the husbands’ grumbling and indignation.

Mr. Wang’s (07/h) experience may sound very unusual, but he is one that was rather common during the Cultural Revolution era. As a response to the appeal by the Party, Ms. Ting (07/w) left Beijing for the rural areas in *Shanxi* province upon her graduation from a lower secondary school. While there, she met her current husband, Mr. Wang.

Later, Ms. Ling went to study in Beijing as a worker and peasant corps student³. She then returned to *Shanxi* to work, and was married. After the high schools' examination system had been reinstated, Ms. Ling successfully applied for a place at the graduate school in a Beijing-based university, and stayed in the capital. Although Mr. Wang came from his village to Beijing to join his wife, he could not get a proper job because of his household. He is very adverse to others talking about the things between him and his wife,

"... some friends in the village joked with me, saying that it would be better to look for a submissive wife in the village, rather than putting up with one in the city.....The villagers had never seen things like this. It was very rare to see a woman feeding a man... I was not feeling happy staying there (in the village), in 1982, she entered the graduate school successfully. A local reporter came to interview us, the report later wrote an article entitled 'A Postgraduate Student Still Has Her Peasant Husband at Heart' ... what did that person mean to say? He was actually implying that I was not as capable as my wife.....in the mouth of other, our mutual agreement became like I was taking advantage of her success..... it brought enormous pressures upon me..."

³ During the later days of the Cultural Revolution, universities across China began to take in students. No nationwide examinations were held, as the students were recommended by departments at all levels. The main objects were workers, peasants and soldiers in the Liberation Army. Together they were called

Ms. Ting told me that she was usually very cautious, so as not to make her husband feel embarrassed. Because of the social conditions, she knows his feelings,

"... especially when somebody is around, he won't work, and I cannot tell him to in front of others... this is an issue about face, a very heavy issue indeed. He can be considered to belong to the lowest classes in Beijing, but you cannot correct him in a casual manner. If I told him to change this and that, and to reconsider the colors while there were people around, he would then say, 'what do you know about this?' In fact, we normally have discussions at home, and he listens to me as well, which he wouldn't when there is somebody around. He feels that he has no status at home, although I do not think likewise. He really take things to heart, he really does. He cares about his dignity especially. He often says, 'I don't care if you are a postgraduate student or not, you are my wife anyway.'"

There have been no serious conflicts between Mr. Wang and his wife. However, in my conversations with them, I have noted quite clearly the indifference between the couple. All along, Ms. Ting has also been feeling that it is very difficult for her to communicate with her husband. They are mutually very courteous. This is because Ms. Ting has been very cautious to safeguard her husband's dignity in every area, while the

husband has been feeling the pressure as a consequence of his wife's superior status at all times.

Mr. Zhang (02/h), who works in a film production company, has been living apart from his wife for quite a few years due to an extramarital affair. Explaining his own disloyalty to his first marriage, he believes that "it is hard to be a good husband nowadays". When I asked him why, he mentioned, "the pressure is too great",

"She always had the final say, and was always like that, perhaps she think she earns more than me..... I know she was capable..... so I could only put up with her bullying. Were there any other men like me? Others simply thought that I was pretty free. I was just so small before her... all the while, I kept all this to myself. I met a girl, and there was so much we could talk about,.....I found her to be a real woman then, ... My wife asked me where had she failed me. I told her in explicit terms that I no longer desired to live under her glitz, that I was tired of having to raise my head before her, that I no longer desired to live a hopelessly stupid life myself... although others wouldn't say it in public, but behind me, who would no laugh at me for depending on my wife....."

Mr. Zhang's pressure came from the fact that his wife "was tougher than he was in every area", and the "glitz" of his wife had inhibited his "feeling as a man". The husbands explained a lot of their pressure as such in the conversations, e.g., "the man

had to put up with the bullying because of his wife's higher status", "if the woman was capable, the man would be inhibited", "if the wife was capable, the husband's status would be denied". I realized through their conversations that the pressure of the husbands had arisen mainly from two areas: firstly, the changing role of the wives, as well as the changes in social status or income that followed. If the status and income were higher than that of the husband, the pressure facing the husband would be even greater as well as the reallocation of family roles, i.e., the pressure experienced by the husband as a result of division of labor with regard to housework. "Could I possibly feel balanced if I, a real man, had to do housework at home like a woman?"(15/h) "By doing housework at home, would I not make myself a laughing stock to other people?" (08/h) Apparently, all these feelings and pressures on the husbands are directly related to the expectations of both husbands and wives about the husbands' role.

- A man's dignity and sharing housework

Husbands do not want to be talked about and laughed at by others is one subject that the husbands touched on when describing the marital conflict with their wives. I think this phenomenon actually reflects the demands and assessments of the social conditions in China on the relationship between husband and wife, between gender awareness and power differentials. Therefore, I focus on the relationship between the husbands' face and housework sharing, and elaborate on it in chapter 7.

Contrary to the husbands' argument that housework is the "responsibility" of the wives "in the first place", the wives of dual earner families are opposed to the view that housework is "their job". They believe that husbands should share housework, because

they themselves have shouldered the responsibility of feeding the family as I have mentioned in the last chapter. Meanwhile, when husbands explained that “there is no absolute fairness in division of labor in the family”, they believe “women are born to do this ” and “they should do this”. Based on this principle, on the one hand, wives “should not be too demanding” and husbands will help to do some housework “ if they have time”; on the other hand, husbands will feel pressure and lose face if they carry out a wife’s duty especially in front of others.

Mr. Hong, who is a policeman, also considers men to be very keen on face-saving. One of the conflicts between him and his wife was also aroused by the issue of “face”. In his view, the issue of “face” becomes all the more important for a man when he is in front of others.

“... That day her mum was joining us for a meal here. I usually wash the bowls, but on that day she purposely said to me, ‘You just go and wash the bowls’, right before her family members. That was not all. She even told me to wash this and that, as if she was teaching me how to do it. Her mum and younger sister were there that day for the meal. To me, (they) are just outsiders, and she told me to wash the bowls before the outsiders! Even her tone sounded like an order.....”

Mr. Hong’s attitude is very definite, that washing bowls is a trivial matter. The issue is that he must not lose his face in front of outsiders. The dispute that took place in Ms. Xie’s (05/w) family was also because of the same issue. She said,

"One day after the meal, I took all the chopsticks and bowls to the kitchen, and cleaned the table too. Because I had another engagement, so I wanted to go out. I told my husband to wash the bowls. His mum overheard this from her room, then told his son in loud voice, 'Oh no! Li Fang, are husbands supposed to do things like washing the bowls?' I became quite angry then. I was not going out for fun. Moreover, why can't husbands do the washing-up? I was also quite angry, so I answered back loudly, 'If the husband cannot do the washing up, you must do it then.' On hearing this, his mum was extremely furious. She said to her son, 'It is like heaven had been turned upside down! Can one possibly treat an elderly person like this? If you don't discipline her today, we will leave. We were at the height of the quarrel, and my husband came forward and slapped my face. There had been many incidents like this. Now you be the judge: how can I possibly be happy to have them (the parents-in-law) stay with us?"

The incident that took place in Ms. Xie's family was also related to the dignity of the men. As to why were things like washing-up are crucial to a man's dignity, Mr. Hong did not provide to me with more elaboration. Similarly, neither did Ms. Xie explain in detail as to why she had engaged in heated argument with her husband just because of the washing-up issue and her mother-in-law. This being so, nonetheless, if we include

washing-up as a minor matter into the system of housework labor, and relate the latter to the gender division of labor within traditional family, and finally to the power relations between the sexes that follow, it would then be easier for us to comprehend why Mr. Jin lost his temper and became furious on account of his wife's "ordering" him to do the washing-up, and why Ms. Xie's husband was accused by his mum of having failed to discipline the wife simply because she did not do the washing-up.

From the conversations and descriptions of both the husbands and the wives, it is clear that there are similar role expectations towards the role of a 'husband' between the husbands and wives, and great disparities between their understandings as well. On the issue that husbands should feed the family, there is nearly an identical view between the husbands and the wives, despite the fact that the wives have been shouldering part of the husbands' responsibility. Yet, precisely because of the identical opinion, the husbands have become further entrenched in the notion that it is a man's duty to feed the family; husbands are in face of cultural norms and expectations and social gender ideology, otherwise it would be a disgrace to the wife. Meanwhile, in terms of the wives' expectation that the husbands must also share the household responsibilities, the husbands consider it only necessary if they have spare time. We may therefore get the impression that husbands, on the one hand, refuse to share the responsibilities at home because they still think they are breadwinner at home; on the other hand, they feel extremely pressured and burdened when they think that they have failed to fulfill their obligation, and excel their wives who are capable and also bring home income. Therefore, they feel lose of face and no power and control at home. In view of this, it seems that conflicts have also come into play.

Chapter 7 The Imbalance of Power

Between the Husband and Wife

In the previous two chapters, I have related the “role expectations” of the husbands and the wives towards one another by way of analyzing the developments and changes in gender relations within the society. I have also discussed the disparities in their mutual role expectations, as well as the possibilities of these disparities giving rise to marital conflicts. In the course of explaining and discussing, I have found that both the husbands and the wives in conflict often mentioned phrases such as ‘inequality’ and ‘on what basis’ in relating their mutual complaints to me, their discontent and feelings of indignity being clearly expressed. Following this discussion, I will, in this chapter, shift my focus to the field of power relations in marriage, so as to understand the feelings of both the husbands and the wives towards power differentials in the family. On the one hand, I will look into the ways in which the traditional power relation in marriage have been challenged by the conflicting expectations of the husbands and the wives, while seeking to explain, on the other, why the emergence of conflicts between them has been unavoidable in the

process of deconstructing, reconstructing, as well as searching for a new balance in the traditional power relation in marriage.

Power differential between the couples

In Chinese traditions, there are two characteristics that define gender relations: firstly, the belief that “men are superior to women” and, secondly, the view that “men should dominate, and women should obey”. Nevertheless, as repeatedly mentioned in the previous two chapters, the decades-long education and practice of the notion of gender equality in the new China, as well as its advance into the ideological realm, have undoubtedly yielded some positive impact on traditional gender relations¹. Women’s awareness of ‘equality’ and ‘self’ have been awakened,

¹ On this, please refer to the series of laws legislated and implemented, as well as campaigns launched by the new Chinese government, such as the *Land Reform*, under which rural women were allowed to acquired land just like their husbands, and became masters of their piece of soil. Also *The Electoral Law of the People’s Republic of China (1953)*, which stipulated that women must enjoy the same right to vote and to stand for election as men. *The Step-Out-of-the-Home Movement*, as a result of which women were encouraged to participate in productive labor with an independent source of income. *The Illiteracy Eradication Campaign*, the mass campaign that witnessed three upsurges in 1952, 1956 and 1958. *The Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China (1950, 1980)*, which clearly declares the abolition of the feudal marriage system. *The Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women (1992)*, which provides an effective legal instrument for enhancing the social status of women further and guaranteeing their basic rights and interests.

which has put some restraint on 'chauvinistic' concepts and behaviors to a certain extent. Needless to say, there remain huge differences in scope and extent in terms of the impact upon the two sexes. However, the appearance of their self-awareness is the result of their concerns about their status in family and of their demand for their own rights. In searching for these, they have discovered inequalities, and hence their pursuit of equality. As I mentioned in my conceptual framework, had there not been an awareness of 'inequality', conflicts would not have arisen even if things were unreasonable to women. I will elaborate on this in greater detail in the latter part of this chapter. As for men who have long been enjoying a superior position, they will do everything necessary to stay clear of any 'suspicion' of 'male chauvinism' in order to be in line with the Party and the government's policy while continuing to hope for the maintenance of the current power relation in marriage.

--Economic independence: the basis for the wife to decide for herself

As we look closer into the various measures adopted to implement the policy of 'gender equality' since the founding of the new China, we must first consider the movement initiated by the Chinese government to encourage women to step out of the home for the purpose of social participation. During the socialist revolutionary

movement, the notion of gender equality made an historic advance into the institutional as well as ideological realm, as women, especially those in the urban areas, were encouraged to participate in the society. There was, however, a lack of education and encouragement in terms of the men's obligation to take part in housework, while the patriarchal system had yet to be thoroughly criticized. Women were introduced into the society, and gradually into a dilemma in which they had to confront the role conflict². In noting the negative factors in this movement, it is undeniable that women's social participation and the economic independence that followed led to the construction of their awareness of 'self-support' and of 'self'. This is, indeed, vitally significant, and the wives' conversations have left me with a very deep impression. Their understanding of 'work' is, more often than not, related to their life experiences, with implications extending far beyond the scope of economy.

² On this, please see Rai, S. (1994). 'Gender Issues in China: A Survey', *Journal of China Report*, Vol. 30. 4, pp. 407-420; Robinson, J. (1985), 'Of Women and Washing Machines: Employment, Housework and the Reproduction of Motherhood in Socialist China', *China Quarterly*, 101, pp. 32-57; Wolf, M. (1985), 'Marriage, Family, and the State in Contemporary China', *Contemporary Marriage*. Davis, K. (ed.) New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Wolf, M. (1985 b), *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

In explaining the significance of work to a woman, Ms. Du (15/w), a manager at a photo studio who was in the divorce proceedings when my interview with her was made, said to me the following:

"...Of course I like my current job... now I am under a lot of pressure, and I have a responsibility. But it is more meaningful. Seeing myself being able to achieve something in my career, I consider myself to be quite useful. But what is more important, I think, that women must have their own careers, must have money. Once they have money, they will dare to speak out. Maybe we would not have ended up in divorce if I did not have money, but what about if he had money and decided to walk out on me? I think women still have to look for money themselves."

From Ms. Du's point of view, not only has her job brought her sense of achievement, it has also brought with it economic independence as well as the power in the family at the same time. It is now possible for her to realize her own wish at

home because of her own income. Furthermore, having her own income has enabled her to control her own fate.

Ms. Xiu (o8/w), who was a housewife before but now works as a civil servant, has the following to say:

"... I have been a housewife before. I know the workload for a housewife is not light, even though she stays at home. However, my words simply didn't carry any weight when I looked after my husband and took care of my child. They thought it was only right and proper for me to do these things. Now I am at work, but have to do housework as well. Still, I feel different now. I now have the right to ask for an extra hand from him, like buying things..... I don't have to feel awkward..."

I have, in total, interviewed 15 wives. Despite their differences in age, cultural background and working environment, which resulted in their different experiences at work, they nevertheless shared an almost identical attitude when we touched on the impact of work. In their own words, "I (the woman) have my own income, so I

am bold enough to speak out, and my words carry 'weight'." In the words of the husbands, "Women nowadays are quite tough, and they don't depend on us for food anyway..." (15/h). From their expressions as such, it is quite easy for us to realize the fact that, not only has women's social participation brought them economic benefits, more importantly, it has also brought them self-confidence. It is the self-confidence that has prompted the women to doubt, and then to challenge, the traditional power relation. As a step further, they have also begun to demand the rights that are supposed to come with their marriage.

Generally speaking, when one party seeks to impose its own will upon the other, or fails to take into account the interests of the other party, hence creating a state of inequality, this in itself may not be the necessary condition that gives rise to conflicts which I have made a more detailed discussion in chapter 3. It is my view that conflict will only arise if one becomes aware of the existence of inequality. Under this presumption, to become 'aware' of inequality is a prerequisite. For a wife of a dual-earner family, who has long been living in a traditional family culture that holds that 'men should dominate, and women should obey', how is she supposed to become aware of the existence of 'inequality' beside their employment? Differently put, what are the prerequisites that have prompted her dissatisfaction with the initial power relation in marriage? To answer this question, we must bring in the notion of

gender equality that was once vigorously advanced by the Chinese government on the ideological front after 1949. For instance, once the new China had been established, the authorities did away with laws related to clans, and promulgated and implemented, in earnest, marriage laws, encouraging women, especially those in urban areas, to participate in social activities. They also promoted mass education and made an effort to eliminate illiteracy. The passage of this series of legislation and policies, together with the launch of the related campaigns, enabled the slogan 'The Time Has Changed, Men and Women Are the Same', initialed by Mao Ze Dong, to receive widespread circulation. Regardless of the dimensions on which the notion of gender equality received a genuine recognition through this kind of propaganda, my question here is: what are the effects on women as a result of the propaganda and practice?

Ms. Fang (01/w) is a manager of a foreign-owned hotel. Because she did not want to give up her own job in order to come home and do the housework, a conflict between her and her husband ensued. As we were chatting, she told me about her life before she came to Beijing:

*"... before I came to Beijing, I stayed with their
(the husband's) family. His father just wouldn't do*

anything, and was behaving like a manager. His mother (the mother-in-law) took a good care of everything, so my father-in-law was at a loose end all day long. He wouldn't even do the washing up after every meal. But his mother was a housewife, while I was not. He just wouldn't do any housework at all. Everyday after work, I had to do the shopping, to cook, to wash, to pick up the kid, while he was doing nothing... Was it fair? ... "

Ms. Fang's recollection of her own experience has prompted me to ponder: why, in her view, was it right and proper for her mother-in-law to look after her father-in-law, but it was unfair for her to look after her own husband? Why was it all right for her father-in-law to be exempted from housework, but unfair if her husband did not share the household chores? Her answer to this is simple: yes, it was indeed hard on her mother-in-law, but the elder was, "after all", a "housewife". In other words, her mother-in-law had no reason to not to do housework. She herself was different in that she had a job, a resource not available to her mother-in-law. Therefore, it would be unfair if one were to hold an identical role expectation towards her and her mother-in-law. In a similar vein, it is unfair also for her husband

to not share the household chores, now that both of them are participating in the society and having the same resources. Apparently, Ms. Fang has developed her thinking in a way that is directly related to the changes in her own status. Had she remained a housewife, she could well have thought like her mother-in-law, and would not have grumbled about domestic duties. Under such a condition, she might simply believe that she had no right to complain.

Since the propaganda for the policy of gender equality and its implementation in a certain extent have taken place, does it mean that women are now fostering an awareness of the pursuit of equality? I think the answer is a positive one. If the women had neither achieved economic independence nor played the same role of the husbands of “dominating the public sphere”, and if they were denied their right to education and legal protection, they would then be without a basis and conditions on which to demand “equality”. To be more precise: because of the education on gender equality, together with its practice in certain quarters of the society, women have been inspired to pursue equality in marital relationship.

–The Policy of Gender Equality: a Challenge to a “real man”

In a traditional Chinese society, we find the situation in which the husband continues to be the master of the house, playing the role of a ruler within the family, even

though he nearly does not have any economic resources at all. Therefore, the acquirement of the power status within the family is not merely by virtue of economic influence; the authority of a “husband” is also manifested through a strict clan system as well as a series of constraints put in place by moral values. After 1949, this set of system and moral principles have, at least in the fields of law and the media, been challenged as never before. The image of a “male chauvinist” or a “real man” have become unpopular in the media³. Regardless of the actual level of acceptance on the part of men with regard to this fact, the men, at least in public, have no option but to stand firm on their stance against male chauvinism and lend their support to equality between the sexes. As I have repeatedly mentioned in the previous chapters, in a situation where the words of the Party are the ultimate order, it would be against the trend for the men to act otherwise.

Professor Guo (04/h) is the highest educated among the fifteen husbands that I interviewed, who has a keen interest as well as different opinion about my research topic. Perhaps because we both teach at universities, our conversation appeared to be

³ During the 1960s, the Chinese government initiated the nationwide socialist education campaign in order to promote the new thinking and the new practices of the new society, with the media carrying out massive propaganda in co-operation. Many influential movies were made to that effect, such as “Li Shuang Shuang”, which depicted the story of a village couple who made efforts to do away with traditional concepts. The movie encouraged women to actively participate in the society by examining the role changes of the husband and the wife of a dual-earner family, while criticizing the traditionally male chauvinistic role of a husband.

more relaxed and frank. Nevertheless, once we touched on the issue of gender roles, he insisted that there must be a difference in the division of labor based on gender, i.e., women should adhere to the role of assisting their husbands and teaching their children at home, while being very cautious in selecting phrases, so as to avoid being classified as one of the “male chauvinists”.

“...gender equality means some kind of political equality. You (the woman) have your right to employment, your right to education, your right to choose... don't you? All these cannot be denied, and they are the right thing to do. This is what we call equality. It is wrong to not take women into consideration... I am no male chauvinist, which man doesn't want to be a real man, is this wrong? Like I said, I would like to see equality between men and women, but there must be a gender division of labor at home. There must be a difference..... As I have told you just now, I am not male chauvinistic, neither am I opposed to women's going out to work. Even if I could feed her, so long as she wanted it, I

still would not be opposed to her working... I am no peasant, so I know this is her right.... I don't think there would be happiness for a woman who does not care about her family, does not want the child, and does not bother about her husband, even though she may have a very successful career... ”

From the above conservation, we find Professor Guo's interpretation of gender equality to be one that is entirely one-sided. His attitude can be said to be very typical of the conflicting sentiment of the husbands of dual-earner family in China. They are least willing to let go of the initial pattern of gender relations, while having no option but to accept the changing role of the wives as a matter of fact. Although they are unwilling to go against the slogans of gender equality advanced by the government (in actual fact, there is no space for them to do so), yet, deep down in their hearts, they tend to safeguard the pattern of division of labor that stipulates that men should be responsible for the public sphere, while women are assigned to take charge of domestic affairs, and the power relationship at home. Some examples include reference to the “glitz” of a wife inhibiting his “feeling as a man”, “the man had to put up with the bullying because of his wife's higher status” and “if the woman was capable, the man would be inhibited”. Apparently, all these feelings and

pressures of the husbands are directly related to their power and the authority they used have.

As we ponder over the words of the husbands and unearth their innermost feelings, we may discover their sense of loss over the past “old rules” and the “authority” of a husband. This, as I have mentioned earlier, also has to do with the government’s vigorous effort to promote gender equality in the ideological realm over the years. Perhaps the government has never painstakingly aroused the self-awareness of the women and encouraged them to safeguard their own rights; rather, it has shown encouragement and support for the women to play a traditional role at home⁴. Regardless of any political purpose, and of the propaganda and acknowledgement in society and in law, the positive impacts of gender equality as a slogan on women cannot be overlooked.

⁴ We can find many examples in social policies as well as the mass media: the inheritance law caters only for men but not women; maternity leaves are for women but not men; and the effort to promote the virtuous-wife-and-caring-mother type of women in the mass media etc.. For related discussions, please see: Robinson, J. (1985). *Of Women and Washing Machines: Employment, Housework and the Reproduction of motherhood in Socialist China*. *The China Quarterly*. 101. 32-57. Weeks, M. (1989). *Virtuous Wives and kind Mothers: Concepts of Women in Urban China*. *Women’s Studies International Forum*. 12. No. 5, pgs. 519- 528.; Li Xiao Jiang (ed.) (1994), *Gender and China*, Beijing: San Lian Publishing House; *Gender Equality: the gains and the losses of the implementation in Chinese society*, Beijing: Sociological Studies, (1995) No. 1, pgs. 92-97; Zheng Ye Fu: *The Sociological Thought on Gender Equality*, Beijing: Sociological Studies, (1994) No.2, pgs. 108-113.

A rebalance of power relation between the couples

Tolerance, conciliation, as well as submission together form the main characteristics of the relationships in Chinese families, for only this can ensure a high degree of centralization in terms of family power. The young must obey the words of the elderly, and women must be subordinate to men. Personal interests do not count, as each and every family member 'is responsible' for the family. Only in the course of obeying and contributing can personal values be manifested. Being the main breadwinner for the family, the husband has absolute control over the wife, while the wife, who is merely a housewife carrying out her "valueless" domestic duties, finds it difficult to acquire the respected status of the husband at home. The culture that stipulates that "the man must dominate and the woman must obey" has formed the main characteristic of the gender relation within the traditional family.

--Power differential in decision-making at home

Nevertheless, the emergence of dual earner families, together with the fact that the role and status of the women have undergone changes, have upset the traditional family relations and the unequal balance of power that followed. Once the wife is given an equal access to the resources long enjoyed by the husband, and when the

woman becomes aware of the inequality in the division of labor based on gender as well as the imbalance of power, it is highly probable that she would begin to demand equality and the right to participate in the process of decision-making within the family.

The husband of Ms. Fang (01/w) runs a fairly good business. Therefore, he once asked his wife to give up her job so that she could stay at home and look after their daughter. Mr. Zhang simply would not agree. Not to let housework be a burden to her so that she could continue with her job, she sent their daughter to a boarding school without consulting her husband in the first place. She explained to me that, had she consulted with her husband, he would definitely not agree. Worse still, he would not share her household chores either. Therefore, she had no option but to decide for herself:

*“... now that we have moved into the new house,
even if we had a car, sending our daughter to and
picking her up from school would still be a problem
for me . I can't possibly stay at home all day long. If
I discussed this with him, he would only have one
thing to say – asking me to come home. So I could*

not bother to talk to him about this. Without securing his consent, I sent our daughter to a private boarding school near our house..... Since I have the responsibility over our child and our family, he should just trust that I would take a good care of the things, don't you think so?he was so extremely furious, and quarreled with me. He accused me of failing to consult him on this important matter, saying that our daughter's education would be jeopardized. He even reminded me that I should not treat the family like my own office..... In fact, I had wanted to discuss this with him, but I was absolutely sure that he would not agree. He just wanted me to come home.....and work like a logistics minister to him..."

Not only did Ms.Fang demand the right to participate in decision-making at home, she even made decisions without consulting her husband. Whether or not it was right for her to do so is not a point of discussion at this point, but there are at least two points that have caught my attention: firstly, she had speculated what the outcome

would be if she were to consult her husband and, secondly, she 'considered' herself to be able to make a decision, and hence should have the right to do so.

As far as this case is concerned, it is difficult for us to explain the necessary connection between the authority pattern and economy. In the words of the husband, Ms. Zhang's income was nothing more than "mere pocket money" at home. If such was the case, in addition to the economic factors, there must also have been change from within the society, coupled with the effects thereof on her that had given her the courage to do what she did. In other words, her self-confidence has not just arisen from the changes in her economic status; more importantly, it has arisen from her knowledge of her own rights. The formation of such knowledge is directly related to the laws and policies on gender equality, as well as to the development of the self-awareness on the part of the women, as I have repeatedly mentioned in the previous chapters.

There has also been tremendous impact on men in the area of decision-making power within the family. For husbands who have long enjoyed their dominant position and control over family matters, it is very difficult for them to give up their power. Although they are no longer the sole breadwinners at home, they continue to expect that the control over their wives and other family members be accorded to

them. They therefore feel rather indignant at the fact that the wives have begun to demand the right to participate in the process of decision-making or even to practice it. Whereas the wife considers that one should listen to whoever is competent, the husband sees it as a loss of status should he have to listen to the wife, Mr.Wu (08/h) was the only minority national among all participants, he came back to the city together with his wife towards the end of the Cultural Revolution. He was so angry about his wife who accepted the birth control:

"... We the Mongolians are allowed to have more than one child. There is no birth control on us⁴. Isn't marriage for the purpose of reproduction? In our region, there are many families that have quite a number of siblings. If you want to have more children, just do it.....After we came back to Beijing, we were even allowed to have one more child, and others were quite envious of me because I am a minority national. But she was just unwilling to have more children... citing economic constraints

⁴ China's birth control policy stipulates that every couple can only have one child, but the minority nationalities are not subject to this restriction.

as the reason and saying that she would not have time to look after the child. In fact, her mum had told us that, if we had another baby, she would be willing to look after it. Yet, my wife just said no, she told me she would go to school and she had made the decision..... if she happened to be in our region, I would have given her a punch... the women in the cities are really tougher than those in our region..."

Perhaps because of his long stay in the pastureland, Mr. Wo finds his wife's self-decision on the issue of childbearing even more unacceptable. If she happened to be "in their region", according to their rules, he would have "given her a punch".

In my conversations with other husbands, I also found that they use words like "instruct", "order" and "inform" quite regularly as a way of expressing their resentment, criticizing the behavior of their wives in the process of decision-making at home. This reminds me of the resentment of the wives with their husbands' failure to share housework, as these two sentiments are very similar. If we study in depth those conversations again, we will quite easily realise that, not only does their

conflict involve the issue of decision-making at home, it also brings in the issue of power distribution and the balance of power between the two genders within the family.

We have seen the actual and positive impacts brought by the government's promotion of women's emancipation on the emergence of self-awareness on the part of the women. The government's efforts to this end have included policies to raise women's productivity, encourage greater women's social participation, eliminate illiteracy, as well as to promote women's education. As a result, women have begun to understand more about the issues concerning them and to 'feel' unfairly treated. Consequently, they have chosen to enter the struggle for their own rights and to demand equality. Meanwhile, in the process, the husbands have begun to 'feel' unfairly treated and to 'feel' that their shaky position is now untenable. Of course, the experiences of the husband and the wife with regard to "inequality" are entirely different. Whereas the wife's sense of inequality has derived from her dissatisfaction with the gender-based traditional division of labor, the husband's understanding of unfairness has its roots in his resentment towards the deconstruction of the traditional balance of power in marriage. In view of their differences as such, the eventual conflict has become a process that is not too difficult to be interpreted.

--A husband's dignity and power relations

The “dignity” of a husband is another subject that the husbands touched on when describing the marital conflict with their wives. Husbands must protect their dignity, and cannot afford to be seen as “afraid of the wife”, which they explain that they do not want to be talked about and laughed at by others. This phenomenon actually reflects the demands and assessments of the social conditions in China on the relationship between husband and wife. A substantial number of discussions have been made by Chinese and foreign scholars with regard to the issue of “dignity” of the Chinese.⁵ In what ways is this guiding principle of the interpersonal relations in Chinese society reflected in the marital conflict between the couple? What is the relation between “power” and “dignity”? In order to understand the issue further, I have therefore attempted to approach in my interviews it with these questions: under what circumstances would a husband feel that he had lost his face? And “in what ways” would a husband consider his wife to have failed to protect his “dignity”?

⁵ For the detail please see: Hsu, L.K. “Chinese kinship and Chinese behavior”. In Ho, P. T. & Tang, S. *Chinese Heritage and the Communist Political System*, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago , pp. 79-609 (1968). Zhai, X.W. *The Dignity of Chinese*. Guiugan Press, Taipei (1995)

In the interviews, husbands frequently touched on the words “dignity”, “authority” “face” when complaining of their wives including that they are not able to influence their wives, do housework, incapable of earning money even a wife’s misbehavior.

In Chinese culture, the wife is the property of the husband; she is “mine”; she is “the family’s”. If a husband fails to have any influence over his wife, or if the wife’s behavior is “not in keeping with the rules”, the husband must feel very humiliated. On the surface, the causes of the participating couples’ marital conflicts appear to be straightforward, and nothing more than trivial matters such as the division of household chores or the touchy relationship with the elderly. However, when we listen carefully to the conversations, analyze them in depth and study the contents further, we find that the actual causes behind the simple disputes are, more often than not, very complicated indeed. In many of their explanations, the conflicts are often associated with the “dignity” of the men as well as with power relations.

Ms. Xie’s (05/w) husband is a soldier. The husband applied to a judicial court for a divorce on the grounds that Ms. Xie had failed to respect his parents. All the conflicts between Ms. Xie and the parents-in-law were explained in the court. Ms. Xie’s husband considered that, since the elders were rather old and conservative in their thinking, as juniors, they both should be more understanding, but the wife just would

not respect his parents. In defense of her own conducts. Ms. Xie described the violence that her husband had inflicted upon her. I was once in the court witnessing the first hearing of their divorce proceedings, and went on to interview Ms. Xie and her husband respectively thereafter, asking them why the husband beat his wife. They both told me their own reasons and problems. The husband said:

"I went to Fujian province in 1991 doing my cadre training⁶, I took my parents to stay with me. During winter holidays, my wife and my son came to visit me... (once she heard) that my dad and my mum was there also, she made a face at me, and went upstairs immediately after entering the house without greeting my parents.....She said my family was dragging my feet... do you not think she did all this on purpose? How could the elders not become angry after hearing it? My parents said: 'what we

⁶ It is called *Gua Zhi* (挂职) training is a discipline within the Cadres' Administrative System in China, through which the cadres are trained to be leaders. The overall objectives include training on the leadership abilities of the cadres and familiarization with the grassroots work. In general, the cadres' training refers to one cadre of higher rank going to work at a lower ranking department. Should the results of the training turn out to be satisfactory, the cadre will return to his/her original department and be promoted.

eat is paid for by our son, and we rely on our son, you don't have to worry.' After a few days, in order to calm down the tense atmosphere, I bought some seafood and then cooked some dishes, hoping that we could have a nice meal as a family. But she simply wouldn't behave herself at the dinning table, only serving the dishes to the son and totally ignoring my parents. The elders got quite upset about this, and my dad cast the chopsticks onto the table and said, 'This is too much!' To everybody's surprise, my wife stood up and walked away. I became extremely furious, and slapped her face. She then overturned the table....."

And the wife described the same incident as follows:

"My husband's unit sent him to Fujian province, during holiday, I took our son to visit him. He only told me that his parents were also there when he was fetching us at the airport. I became very angry

then, for two reasons: firstly, he had never told me about this; secondly, I had suffered all the hardship at home (in Beijing) just to make sure that he would not have to worry about the family. Well, he took the two elders to stay with him, was it not a special treatment?... I was extremely furious.....After a couple of days, we were having dinner together. During the meal, I had already been angry for a few days, and none of us talked much while having meal. A plate of crabs was placed next to the wall, rather far off from my son, I just picked one for him with the chopsticks and put it in his bowl, his dad (father-in-law) cast the chopsticks on the table and said, 'This is simply way out of rule'... he went on to say, 'The Li family cannot have a daughter-in-law like this'. I was extremely furious also, so I cast my chopsticks on the table, stood up and wanted to walk away. I just did not want to eat, so what? I had not even stood up, my husband gave

me punch, and I was pushed onto the floor. He even lifted a stool, wanting to hit me with it. My son was dragging him and would not let him hit me. My mother-in-law was pulling my son, saying, 'Hands off, let her be beaten to death'. My head was broken then, and my son was rather desperate. So he just let off, and my mother-in-law fell on the floor It was already a mess by then, and the table was upside down... I was given four stitches on my head, and there were wounds on my face and arms. I went back to Beijing the next day, staying at home for more than two weeks. Because of the injuries on my face, I could not go to work... "

Having described the whole incident respectively, both the husband and the wife had their own feelings and complaints. The husband said:

"...so, in your opinion, do you not think the whole incident became a joke in my unit at that time? I told our leader then that it'd be better if we

divorced. Our marital problem had been going on for years... my parents came to Beijing a few times, and every time, they quarreled with her (the wife), and they become angry, then left after that. My younger brothers and sisters also complained that there was no rule in our family, and regarded me as afraid of my wife now that the woman had taken control. They even said that my father's anger with her cost him his life. I was really very saddened..."

Later when I talked to the wife, she told me as follows:

"...(On this matter) (in the court) he now made it appear that I was too tough, and intolerant of the elders. But nobody cared to ask why was it like that? (Weeping)... yes, I admit that I am bad-tempered, and don't have a good personality... but some things are not to be put up with. He only cares about his dignity, what about mine then? (Weeping) I am a bit stubborn, not knowing how to take it. In

*order to show his authority as a powerful husband,
he often hit me in front of his parents, yes, he hit me
with his hands... this is exactly what I hate about
him...He got no conscience at all... he hit me just
for his parents to see..."*

A husband may view his wife's behaviors as "a laughing stock to others", or a "cause of siblings' grumbling", or he may think that "the woman at home had taken control", and that one should be rather understanding with regard to the elders' conservative mindset. However, from the wife's point of view, she cannot accept the old rules set by the elders. The husband hits her precisely because he wants to show to his parents that "he can control me". On the surface, this couple's conflict appears to have its roots in the interpersonal relationships within the extended family. However, as we listen to their comments further, and begin to look into each and every factor involved, we find that the core causes that have given rise to the conflict ultimately are closely related to a man's "face" as well as power relations.

I found in the interviews that there are a lot of things that can actually make the husbands feel disgraced. However, as I seek to sum them up, they are invariably linked to the power differential between the men and the women. For instance, in

Chinese culture, it is only right and proper that men and women should marry. But when it comes to 'marrying off', it actually means a woman is married 'out of her family'. It is therefore a disgrace for a man who has to live with his wife's family after their marriage. Although there is only one such family among the 15 couples that I interviewed, but the cases as such are not unique at all in the cities. I therefore record the conversation as follows, (Ms.Chen, 06/w)

"... We live with my family after we got married... last year, his unit allocated a flat to us. Because our child went to the school in this area, and my mum was already quite advanced in age and felt rather lonely to, so my child and I continued to live here..... but he insisted on keeping his own flat, and wanted me to move out, my mum was quite saddened by this, saying that we were giving her a cold shoulder. (weeping) I only have one mum. I had lost my father in 1994, and it was hard on my mum if she had to live by herself... I just felt that it would be a comfort for her if we stayed together. But he was unwilling to

stay in my house because he was afraid that other people might laugh at him... he felt that it was a disgrace to live in his wife's house. The workers kept asking him about our child's surname⁶... he said my mum could stay in his flat if there was no-one who could look after her. But my mum just did not want to move..... In her view, it was also rather unusual for a mum to live with a married daughter's house. Either way, I was a loser..."

The husband has his own private grief too:

"... At the end I was allocated the flat after we married many years, she did want, She cried and pleaded with me, so much so that even the director of the Residents' Council⁷ had to mediate for us, saying that this matter should not affect our marriage, and that it was right and proper for us to

⁶ According to Chinese customs, if the husband is married into the wife's family, their children must then take up the wife's surname.

⁷ A self-regulating group organized by the residents in the cities.

take care of the elder. The director was right, but they were two different things. I insisted on having my own flat, and this was not because of some old thinking. It was also not because I did not want to look after the elder... but I just wasn't feeling comfortable. Doesn't the book 'Four Generations Under One Roof'⁸ say about the family affairs of the men? After all, there are not many men who stay with their wives' families. Although we no longer talk about men marrying into women's families, I still feel uncomfortable about it. As if the man was so incapable."

Even though the number of small families is on the rise in Chinese cities, and big families with several generations living under one roof are becoming less and less, many young people continue to stay with their parents after marriage. This is because of the economic constraints facing them, but also due to the original welfare system, and the housing policy in particular, as a result of which they will not be able to have

⁸ A novel by the renowned Chinese writer Lao She. The book is a story of a family of four generations.

their own accommodations for a certain period. Owing to the traditional Chinese concepts of marriage, it is right and proper for a wife to live with her husband's family. However, if the husband were to live in the house of his wife's parents, he would be expected to bear a certain degree of psychological burden. The pressure does not just arise from the role expectations of the husband himself, but also from the living environment surrounding him.

I overcushy introduced the family in which the husband, Mr. Wang married Ms. Ting who left Beijing for the rural areas in Shanxi province during the Cultural Revolution. After the high school examination system had been reinstated in 1977, Ms. Ling successfully applied for a place at the graduate school in a Beijing-based university, and stayed in the capital. Although Mr. Wang came from his village to Beijing to join his wife, he could not get a proper job because of his household. He is very adverse to others talking about the things between him and his wife. It looks like there have been no serious conflicts between them. However, in my conversations with them, I have noted quite clearly the indifference between the couple. All along, Ms. Ting has also been feeling that it is very difficult for her to communicate with her husband. They are mutually very courteous. Ms. Ting told me that she was usually very cautious, so as not to make her husband feel embarrassed. Because of the social conditions, she knows he feels:

"... especially when somebody is around, he won't work, and I cannot tell him to in front of others... this is an issue about face, a very heavy issue indeed..... you cannot correct him in a casual manner. If I told him to change this and that while there were people around, he would then say, 'what do you know about this?' In fact, we normally have discussions at home, and he listens to me as well, which he wouldn't when there is somebody around. He feels that he has no status at home, although I do not think likewise. He really take things to heart, he really does. He cares about his dignity especially. He often says, 'I don't care if you are a postgraduate student or not, you are my wife anyway.'"

The main reasons for the couples communication are that Ms. Ting has been very cautious to safeguard her husband's dignity in every area, while the husband has been feeling the pressure as a consequence of his wife's superior status.

-Husband's expectation of an "ideal wife"

The perception of an ideal wife is another perspective to examine the husbands' feeling and willingness about power and control in the family. In their description of the marital conflicts, I often heard the husbands complain of the wives for not "behaving like a wife". I therefore put a question to them: in their opinion, how would an ideal wife look like? Some of them thought a wife should be able to "enter the hall and but also go down to the kitchen" (14/h). Some cited Liu Hui Fang⁹ (5/h, 8/h, 13/h) as an example. Still, some said an ideal wife should be "like those characters in Qiongyao's novels"¹⁰ or "the three Song sisters"¹¹. One of the husbands mentioned that " (wives) shouldn't be too anxious to outdo others, but shouldn't be a housewife either" (10/h)"... in all their depictions of an ideal wife, I

⁹ Liu plays the protagonist from a working class family in a TV serial "Yearning". The serial tells the story of the various sufferings and hardships experienced by Liu and another intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution, as well as the changes in their lives in the post-Cultural Revolution era. Liu, in the serial, manifests self-sacrifice and the image of woman as a "virtuous wife and caring mother" in traditional Chinese family. After the serial was launched in Beijing in 1991, it was followed by a debate focused on the issue of women's image in a modern world.

¹⁰ Qiongyao, a Taiwanese novelist. The majority of her works are based on perfect romance between the male and female characters.

¹¹ Here they refer to one of the four great families of China, the Song, the other three being the Jiang, the Kong and the Chen. Song Zi Wen had given three daughters. The eldest of them was Song Qing Ling, who was the wife of the founding father of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. The second daughter was Song Ai Ling, who was married to Kong Xiang Xi, also one of the four great families. And Song Mei Ling was the youngest, who was the wife of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, the President of the ROC.

have discovered that, although the husbands long for a wife who is “cultured”, “educated”, and one that has a job, their wish is nevertheless poles apart from the traditional role expectations, i.e., the traditional belief that “it is virtuous for a woman to be without talents”. On a closer examination, it appears quite clearly that, in dual-earner families, the husbands’ expectations of the wives have not yet gone beyond the scope of gender division of labor, the husbands’ construction of various “standards” and perfect images of the wives notwithstanding.

When describing their marital conflicts at home, the husbands often mentioned that, had the wives been able to keep to certain “rules”, the conflicts would not have occurred at all. So what are the rules as mentioned by them? And what principles are included in the rules?

In my conversation with Professor Guo (04/h), he said to me the following with regard to his expectations of an ideal wife:

“..... the wife should at least adhere to the rules. As they used to say in the old days: women should keep to their codes of conduct. You can’t really say this is wrong, can you? Is it wrong to expect a woman to be virtuous wife and caring

*mother? This can be said to be a virtue of the
Chinese nation."*

In his statement, Professor Guo has employed two concepts, which are “**婦道**”(women’s codes of conduct) and “**賢妻良母**”(a virtuous wife and caring mother). Although he tried his best to refrain from assessing the right and wrong in the concept of “women’s codes of conduct”, and chose to use words like “even if this is not right” as a way of expressing his views, we can nevertheless see that his attitude towards the concept is in fact a positive one. As for his view on the concept of “a virtuous wife and caring mother”, he projects it as a national virtue. We have therefore come to have a clearer idea about Professor Guo’s role expectations of a “wife”.

Mr. Wo (08/h), who had followed his wife to move from a village in the Inner Mongolia to settle down in Beijing, also talked about the “rules” that a wife should observe. Although the content may differ from that of Professor Guo, their attitudes are nevertheless identical:

*"Anyhow, men and women are different. Women
cannot harness a horse, and men cannot give birth
to a child. Who should do what, there are some*

rules to be followed. Even a capable woman cannot afford to not have a family, can she? Yes, women in the city are more competent than we are, because they also have to earn money. I am not saying it is not good to earn money, but... she is just not like a woman, and it is not good for her to try to control the man (all day long), which is me. I am not capable, but the able man would have abandoned her long ago... em... women should be obedient and have no nasty temper, that would be okay... Hui Fang¹² is exceptionally virtuous and has good temper. No matter how serious the situation is, she never flies off the handle..."

We can see in their conversations that, whether it is Professor Guo, who is a senior intellectual living in the city, or Wo, a lowly educated factory worker from the countryside, they both share an almost completely identical view as far as the women's codes of conduct are concerned. Therefore, husbands believe, "The man

¹² A female character in a popular Chinese TV serial in the early 1980s. The program depicts the story of endurance and submission of the female protagonist, who is faithful to her role of assisting the husband and teaching the children.

must show his manliness, and a woman her womanliness". It sums up the expectations of men towards gender roles and behavior in society. I therefore asked about the husbands' opinions with respect to this saying in my interviews with them. They all showed approval to it. I then asked further: what would be counted as 'womanliness'? The majority of them gave answers like "good woman", "soft and gentle" and "virtuous". In their view, these are standards by which a woman is to be judged to have womanliness. Mr. Wen (03/h) of the university administrative team appreciated highly the Japanese movie star Yamakuchi Momoe, for she manifested all the characteristics of womanliness:

"(womanliness) I don't mean that men should go out to earn money, while the women stay at home doing housework as was the case in the old days. What I mean is, in terms of feeling, women should act like a woman. It is all right for them to go out to work, but as wives they must also carry out their responsibility... (He paused for a while) Yamakuchi Momoe is quite a classic example of this. She was a famous actress, but decided to withdraw herself from the limelight after marriage, and is now

committed herself to taking a good care of the family, showing concern and care to her husband and children. Even Mrs. Thatcher has to make breakfast for her husband, doesn't she?"

Many of the husbands I interviewed had also given the kind of description Mr. Wen used to explain "womanliness". Although they may have expressed it in different ways, the fundamental quest is nevertheless the same.

Therefore, in the husbands' understanding, women with "womanliness" must be gentle and soft, care about the family, and must not dictate to the husbands while at home. They must also reproduce, serve the elderly, and take a good care of the house. It is clear, that husbands still want to keep the power and control in the family, they refuse to share responsibilities at home because they think it is the responsibilities of wives, and they feel losing face or losing dignity also think they are the masters of the family, that is why they feel pressure if their wives are "not soft and gentle enough" or "too tough".

Based on the conversations and descriptions of both the husbands and the wives, we have seen the actual and positive impacts brought by the government's promotion of women's emancipation on the emergence of self-awareness on the part of the

women. The government's efforts to this end have included policies to raise women's productivity, encourage greater women's social participation, eliminate illiteracy, as well as to promote women's education. As a result, women have begun to understand more about the issues concerning them and to 'feel' unfairly treated. Consequently, they have chosen to enter the struggle for their own rights and to demand equality. Meanwhile, in the process, the husbands have begun to 'feel' unfairly treated and to 'feel' that their shaky position is now untenable. Of course, the experiences of the husband and the wife with regard to "inequality" are entirely different. Whereas the wife's sense of inequality has derived from her dissatisfaction with the gender-based traditional division of labor, the husband's understanding of unfairness has its roots in his resentment towards the deconstruction of the traditional balance of power in marriage. In view of their differences as such, the eventual conflict has become a process that is not too difficult to be interpreted.

Chapter 8 Some Thoughts and Conclusions

In this chapter, I am going to focus on discussing the findings in the previous three chapters and their implication for this study. The discussion will explore whether women's changing role is affecting the traditional gender division of labor and gender ideology, particularly the dynamics in the marital conflict involving both micro and macro forces and how this is manifested in the dual-earner families facing marital conflict in urban China. Furthermore, based on the major findings and discussions the significance of understanding marital conflicts with a gender perspective and its contribution to the existing conception of marital conflict and marital counseling in a changing China will be highlighted.

I conclude that, firstly in the wake of the wives' social participation, both husbands and wives in the dual-earner families have experienced some changes in their role expectations. However, these changes have brought about entirely different implications for the men and the women. The changes in women's concrete situations and their roles have prompted differences between husbands and wives in their perception and demands of gender role and responsibilities between them in the family. Women's social participation, as well as their monetary income, has served to raise their position at home and in society. Precisely because of this change, there is now a basis for them to demand that husbands also shoulder the task of a traditional "wife". That men should be exempted in sharing housework is, for the wives, not fair because they themselves have shouldered the responsibility of feeding the family. The

hope that husbands would also “share” domestic duties has, no doubt, compelled the husband to face up to the challenge that there must now be a reconstruction of the division of labor within the family. Although the traditional concepts of the husband’s role expectations towards his wife, are now under pressure in many aspects, it can nevertheless be said that few fundamental changes have taken place as indicated by the male participants’ responses on this theme. The husbands continue to expect that the domestic responsibility is still a wife’s “responsibility in the first place”. On one hand, they have expressed the attitude that “those who have time should do housework”, while arguing for the “natural” connection between housework and women on the other.

It is clear that there have been no great changes with regard to the various expectations of the husbands towards the role of their “wives”, compared to the traditional family that adhered to the belief that “men should dominate the public domain and women should concentrate on domestic duties”. This is precisely the area with which the wives are most dissatisfied. Actually, some of the wives expressed that they were not only dissatisfied with the husbands not sharing the housework, but also, more importantly, they were dissatisfied with the husbands’ definition of the role of a “wife”, as well as their husbands’ insistence on the concept of a division of labor based on gender. If we can acknowledge the fact that men and women have different perceptions, expectations and understandings towards the role of the wives, perhaps it will become easier for us to make sense of the conflict which occurred when wives thought husbands should share the domestic responsibilities while husbands affirm that these responsibilities belong to the wife only. When a wife says “I am not a housewife, and housework is not my responsibility alone”, her husband answers to the

dissatisfaction with the express: “Women are born to do this (housework)”. Their differences are not merely confined to who should do more or who should do less, rather, their division involves disputes on a deeper level – the division of labor based on traditional gender relations in face of rapid changes in Mainland China in the past 5 decades.

At the same time, we can also find that there are some similarities in terms of the expectations of both husbands and wives towards the role of a ‘husband’ despite their different perceptions and expectations on the wives’ role. There is nearly an identical view between them on the role of husband as one who should feed the family. Just like husbands’ view that “women are born to do this housework”, they also accept that “feeding the family” is a “responsibility” that husbands cannot forsake. Meanwhile, wives also believe that husbands “should be earning money and feeding the family” despite the fact that they themselves are already sharing the responsibility as breadwinner in dual earner families.

Although those attitudes, expectations and perceptions on the husbands’ role as breadwinner in the family between the husbands and the wives are very similar, their responses are quite different. While husbands accepted and internalized that the feeding the family is a ‘man’s’ business, they, therefore, refuse to take up more household responsibilities as they expected housework to be the wives’ responsibilities; they also feel extremely pressurized and burdened when they think that they have failed to fulfill their obligation of feeding their family, or when they feel they are not as strong as their wives, or when their ‘feeling as a man’ was inhibited by the wife’s “glitz”. Meanwhile the wives, while regarding that the husbands should be the breadwinners sometimes complained, “If he was capable, I would not have to work

so hard". It is no doubt that some wives still hold on to a traditional gender division of labor and also expect their husbands to be better than themselves. Thus, similar attitudes towards the role of the husbands did not bring harmony to the couples, but further sharpened the conflicts they were in.

In the process of advocating for gender equality, the Chinese government actively encouraged women to shift their arena from the family to society, while neglecting the reassignment of the roles of men and women at home. Still the pattern that "the man should be responsible for the public sphere and the woman the private sphere" has been allowed to continue, and become a hindrance to gender equality within the family. Although the positive effects of policies on gender equality have to be acknowledged, we should, nevertheless, not overlook the fact that the focal point of the government's effort has been on liberalizing the productivity of the women. Therefore, the government has done much to pass legislation and administrative regulations to mobilize women to leave the family in order to participate in paid employment. These have been very effective measures in terms of advancing women's social participation following the establishment of the new China. As far as the system is concerned, the notion of women gaining gender equality has received a huge boost as more women worked with pay outside of the home and gained some economic independence from men. Nevertheless, while women are being encouraged to "step out of the home", men have not been mobilized to take up responsibilities in the family simultaneously.

The scope of the present study does not enable us to go into a detailed discussion of the causes that have given rise to this neglect, though some Chinese and foreign scholars are of the view that the leadership of the new Chinese government did not, either self-consciously or willingly, attempt to shake the fundamentals of the

patriarchal fabric of the society (Rai, 1994; Sha, 1994; Ng, 1995, Yuen, 1998; Li, 2001). However, the immediate consequence of the neglect is obvious, leading to the continuation of the traditional division of labor based on gender. In other words, despite decades-long effort, no fundamental changes have taken place as far as the basic pattern of the division of labor in the family is concerned; it is still rooted in the minds of the people and in the China's traditional family culture. The continuation of this pattern has, no doubt, brought with it many problems to dual-earner families. For the wives, they have no option but to take up employment, i.e., the political as well as economic factors have prompted them to step out of the home, hence their "public presence". On the other hand, the need for them to shoulder most of the housework, because of the demand of traditional role expectations, again has left them with no option but to assume the double roles of paid workers and unpaid housewives, which have brought upon them a heavy burden. Meanwhile, the husbands never think the household responsibility is their "duty" despite the wife is playing the role of a breadwinner. In other words, the continuation of the pattern has brought with it many pressures to both husbands and wives when husbands think they cannot carry the responsibility of feeding family and wives are facing role burden.

Based on the perceptions and the role expectations on the "husband" and "wife", we also find how traditional gender ideology and culture norms and demands are very much present and affect the power differentials between the couples. Men should be stronger and women weaker, husbands are the breadwinners and wives the homemakers, the relation between man and woman within the traditional Chinese family have been maintained through a total dependence of the woman on the family and a complete control of the woman by the man. All the different role expectations,

attitudes and comments on behavior with regard to both sexes are also confined to this pattern. Further, in the process of implementing the gender equality policy, the traditional balance in gender relations is challenged and marital conflict is therefore a natural consequence if these changes and challenges are not met.

As I have mentioned in chapter 7, in a traditional Chinese society, “男尊女卑”(men are superior to women) and “男主女從” (men should dominate, and women should obey) are the main characteristics of gender relations between couples. In this relation, the husband is always the master of the house, playing the role of a ruler within the family. Therefore, the acquisition of the power status within the family is not merely by virtue of economic influence; the “authority” and “dignity” of a “husband” are also manifested through a strict clan system as well as a series of constraints put in place by traditional norms. Husbands should be strong and the one in control, they must protect their dignity, and cannot be considered as “afraid of the wife”, cannot carry out a wife’s duty especially in front of others, or they will be “talked about and laughed at by others”. This phenomenon actually reflects the ‘demands’ of Chinese culture on the relationship between husband and wife. When we analyze the explanations of the husbands and unearth their innermost feelings, we may discover their sense of loss over the past “old rules” and the “authority” of a “man” on the one hand, and on the other, their dilemma brought about by a realization of the wives’ participation in society on different levels. We can have a deeper understanding of the complex and mixed emotions they find themselves in. These uncertainties may bring to the husbands a sense of indignation. It is not surprising that husbands might have misgivings to come to terms with the fact that they are no longer in a position to make

any suggestion they want, particularly on behalf of their wives. This is especially the case when they are in the company of others such as parents, relatives and friends.

Once family responsibility and division of labor are associated with gender and are institutionalized by the model of gender relations in the society, the gender division of labor in which men play the role of breadwinners and women the homemakers, the status of women within the family and in society will be affected (Mitchell, 1984; Ferree, 1990, 1991; Croll, 1995). Therefore, once the state encouraged gender equality through its policy and re-education programmes and campaigns after 1949, and both husbands and wives of dual-earner families have taken part in social life, the situation begins to change. Wives have experienced what it means to be unequal, and fostered an “awareness” of inequality, and the husband has also experienced “inequality” because of the collapse of the initial power relation in the marriage. Of course, the experiences of “inequality” of the husband and the wife are different, and this is related to the status of the two sexes within the society. The wife’s understanding of “inequality” derives from her discontent with the continuation of the tradition role expectations, as well as with the traditional power relation in marriage, while the husband feels things to be unequal because of his resentment of the deconstruction of the traditional power relation in marriage. The differences in their sentiments towards this power relation in marriage are clear: the wife considers herself to be unfairly treated, and therefore seeks to improve the pattern of the gender division of labor and power distribution, whereas the husband envisages himself to be losing his own power and control, and therefore attempts to defend this pattern of the gender division of labor further. Seen in this light, it is not difficult to grasp the origins of the husbands’ refusal to change their household responsibilities, nor their power sharing pattern in

the family. In view of this, the differences between husbands and wives in their perceptions and demands for change in the distribution of power within the family, rooted in their adherence to original patterns or demanding for a new one turns into yet another potential factor for the emergence of marital conflict.

All the differences of both husbands and wives in their expectations and perceptions of gender role and their struggle to maintain traditional roles or demands for changing arrangements affect their relations and dynamics. Whereas men and women have different perceptions, expectations and understandings towards the tasks of the 'wives', the husbands refuse to change not only in their household responsibilities, but also in their perceptions of their power in the family, and the wife's sense of inequality has derived from her dissatisfaction with the gender-based traditional division of labor. The eventual conflict has become an inevitable process of conflict in which each party claims to be in the right. However, once the relation differentials between them have been perceived as refusal by either of the couples, the situation begins to change.

As we study the conflict between husband and wife through the vein of gender relations within the society, it is demonstrated that the conflict itself is far more than just an issue between two persons. Therefore, in seeking the solution for marital conflict, we cannot simply search for the causes and answers between two individuals or within a family. Rather, we need to explore and understand the issue of marital conflict also at a social level. Based on the findings and explanations mentioned above, this research adds to existing concept of marital conflicts taking into consideration of a gender perspective, linking concrete differences and different demands to a more theoretical understanding of how the struggle between traditional gender role and gender ideology and changing demands and relations are played out. By bringing the

aspect of gender into the theoretical dimension of marital conflict, we are able to provide the social work theory in China, and especially the theory and practice of marriage consultation, with a much wider perspective research and practice possibilities.

Significance of the Study

In Mainland China, education on social work, and on the theories and practice of marriage counseling and family therapy in particular, has only begun to emerge in the early 1990s, and have adopted the theories as well as models of the West in general. In the process of introducing these theories and models, social workers and educators in China, despite their enormous effort at localization, by paying attention to Chinese culture and family systems, have tended to focus on the aspects of skill and techniques of marriage consultation and family therapy. As for the issues of relating marital conflict to a large socio-cultural background, and of considering the conflicts between husband and wife through an examination of role conflict, a comprehensive study is still wanting. Some professional counselors in Mainland China, in their mediation of marital conflict, have, more often than not, tended to concentrate on the application of Western theories and models and techniques; in the process, the influence of the traditional gender relations within the family, as well as the unequal rights for women within the dual-earner family that followed are largely left out of the picture. The neglect in this aspect often affects the outcomes of marriage consultation and family therapy. As far as the two persons with entirely different roles expectations as well as interpretations of marriage are concerned, a mere technique of communication falls far

short of offering effective help. The causes behind their conflict are not only an issue between the two individuals, but a reflection of the power relation between the two genders in society as well. Precisely because of this realization, this study did not attempt to explore marital conflict between the couples only. It also examined the conflicts within the couples' socio-cultural background as well as bringing the aspect of gender dynamics into the more macro, theoretical dimension of state policies and cultural heritage. I am not the first person exposing the so-called "private issues" in a social context, but by bringing in a gender perspective. It is hoped that the theories and practice of marital counseling in Mainland China can be raised to a higher level of understanding within the context of a Chinese culture.

Limitation of the Study

Because this research merely focuses on 15 dual-earner families in the city of Beijing, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to other families and women of different background. It is hoped that in future studies on the topic, working couples with different class backgrounds and especially those living in the countryside or small cities can be examined so that more adequate generality in terms of the complexity of the families in the modern Chinese cities can be developed. Nevertheless, I did not start this study with a pursuit of general significance in mind. In the chapter on methodological concern, I have made a rather detailed introduction on the nature of qualitative research as well as on the purpose of my research, in the hope that it could be of some help with regard to a comprehension of the marital conflicts in families of similar backgrounds in big cities in China.

Furthermore, because of the notion of the 'family scandal must not be made public' cultural tradition of the Chinese, I encountered a certain degree of difficulty in the process of conducting my research. Despite the assistance extended by some friends and organizations, and that I have managed to finish the investigation in 15 families eventually, some husbands were unwilling to be interviewed again after the initial interviews, making it impossible for me to include, and discuss some newly found issues in my data.

Meanwhile, in order to find out more precisely the common opinions of the participants on certain issues, there have been much categorizing and organizing of the records of their interviews to highlight their commonalities or differences. However, because of this, as a result of the repeated categorization, a certain degree of the specificity of some participants has to be left out too. The continuity of the stories told by the participants has therefore become less coherent. Although I paid much attention to the words chosen by them, so as not to distort the process of narrating, the limits of words and the categorization of concepts have invariably affected the participants' internal correlation in their wording.

To further understand the expectations and perceptions on the role of "husband "and "wife " between couples in dual-earner families in China, and their handling of any differences between them, dual earner couples who do not have conflicts that are as deep should be investigated. Their sharing of their experience of how they resolve similar contradictions and how they handle these struggles in their marriage will be illuminating.

Conclusion

The devotion of the Chinese government to implement the policy of gender equality has had a far-reaching impact on Chinese women and even on the entire development of Chinese society. The slogans that once brought honor to Chinese women, such as “時代不同了，男女都一樣” (*the time has changed, and men and women are the same*) and “婦女能頂半邊天” (*women hold up half the sky*), have been given different interpretations in the post-Mao era. As we examine the reflection of the people on the gender equality policy, we may conclude that, in the implementation of the policy, the government has solely concentrated on women's emancipation, releasing women from the family into the society, while overlooking the need for education to encourage men to enter the family from the society. Therefore, Chinese women feel alienated by the rift between the gender equality policies issued by government in their day-to-day reality. It is a major deficit. There is yet to be a truly significant improvement as far as the pattern of gender division of labor, especially in the home, is concerned, which accords to men the exclusive right to assuming the public role, and stipulates that women must only be in charge of the domestic arena. It is precisely because of this deficit, that Chinese society, which has gone through a vigorous experiment with the policy of gender equality, once again finds itself today to a debate on “women should go back home” now.

Perhaps it should be mentioned here that the current re-assessment of women by Chinese society, as well as its acknowledgement and reminiscence of the traditional role of women, is not a consequence of the vigorousness of the Chinese government in the implementation of gender equality. Rather, it is the gap between the policies and implementation of gender equality, between the policies and real life. The government,

in its effort to expand the role of the women, has failed to change the role of the men simultaneously, hence the situation today. As far as the wife is concerned, the improvement in her status has inspired her to fight for her rights and equality. As for the husband, his loss of the traditional authority has given rise to his resentment against his wife. It is in this vein of social and gender dynamics that marital conflict needs to be studied and understood.

In short, there are differences between husbands and wives in their perception and demands of gender roles, and power differentials and demands for change in the distribution of power within dual-earner families. These differences, if not addressed and resolved, will escalate into marital dissatisfaction and marital conflict. The interaction among differences in the couple's perception, expectations and demands with macro forces such as social sanctions, cultural norms, gender ideology and state policies in affecting marital conflict can be identified. Marital conflict is therefore, not just a private issue, it has public roots.

A gender perspective helps us to examine the hold of traditional gender expectations and gender ideology, consider the couples' perceptions of the gender dynamics and power differential between them in gender equality both in the family and society. As we understand the complex forces impinging on marital conflicts, we are more aware that a lot still needs to be done on various levels. For instance, state policies, professional intervention, and individual efforts are important contributors to the resolution of marital struggles within the family. It is with such an exploring and understanding, that a marital counseling practice with a gender perspective in Mainland China, in particular, can be made possible.

Appendix 1 Demographic Profile of the Participants

Name *	Age	Yrs. of married	Educ.	Occupation	Monthly Income (Yuan)**
Fang (01/w)	38	12	under graduated	Restaurant manager	¥ 4000
Han (01/h)	38	12	graduated	Own Business	¥ 4000
Xia (02/w)	44	15	under graduated	Company manager	¥ 4000
Zhang (02/h)	44	15	under graduated	Technician	¥ 2000
Ling (03/w)	45	7 remarried	graduated	Professor	¥ 1000
Wen (03/h)	46	7 remarried	under graduated	Carder	¥ 1000
luo (04/w)	50	24	primary	Kindergarten teacher	¥ 1000
Guo (04/h)	58	24	under graduated	Professor	¥ 1000
Xie (05/w)	46	26	Middle school	Policemen	¥ 1000
Li (05/h)	51	26	under graduated	Soldier	¥ 1000
Chen (06/w)	47	17	College	Bookkeeper	¥ 900
Xiao (06/h)	49	17	High school	Cadre	¥ 900
Ting (07/w)	47	21	graduated	Researcher	¥ 1500
Wang (07/h)	48	21	Middle school	Factory worker	¥ 1500
Xiu (08/w)	48	27	College	Cadre	¥ 1000
Wu (08/h)	49	27	primary	Factory worker	¥ 800

(continued)

Name	Age	Yrs.of married	Educ.	Occupation	Monthly Income(yuan)**
Jing (09/w)	31	7	under graduated	Lecturer	¥ 800
Hong (09/h)	33	7	under graduated	Policeman	¥ 700
Dai (010/w)	28	3	under graduated	Chief editor	¥ 4000
Liu (010/h)	28	3	under graduated	Joint-venture company officer	¥ 2000
Meng (011/w)	38	2 remarried	High school	Factory worker	¥ 700
Ming (011/h)	37	2 remarried	High school	Factory worker	¥ 700
Bao (012/w)	45	18	Middle school	Factory worker	¥ 500
Tie (012/h)	49	18	Middle school	Retired Factory worker	¥ 400
Zou (013/w)	40	15	High school	Factory worker	¥ 1000
Yao (013/h)	39	15	High school	Factory worker	¥ 1000
Xiao (014/w)	30	7	graduated	Editor	¥ 2000
Jiang (014/h)	33	7	under graduated	Cadre	¥ 1000
Du (015/w)	34	9	High school	Small business manager	¥ 2000
Zhi (015/h)	36	9	High school	Factory worker	¥ 800

* The number before the slash ("/") represents the couple interviewed, whereas the "W" and "H" represent wife and husband respectively.

** (1) Monthly income here means regular income, including salary and living allowances, excluding temporary income. e.g. bonus and contribution fee etc..

(2) Exchange rate is about: US\$ 100 = Chinese ¥823.

Appendix 2 Interview Guide

Part one: Background of participants

1, Personal characteristics

1.1 Name

1.2 Age

1.3 Education

1.4 Occupation and post

1.5 Personal income (approximately)

2, Marriage characteristics

2.1 Could you tell me the year of your marriage?

2.2 How do you know each other?

3, Family characteristics

3.1 Could you tell me how many kids do you have? Their sex and age?

**3.2 Where do you live in *Beijing* ? Type of the residence (*Danwei*
distributed/rented/private/etc.)?**

3.3 Who are living in the household now?

Part two: marital relationship and marital conflicts

- 1, I know you are asking help from the Women's Hotline (Women's federation /friends/NGO/etc.), could you tell me what happened in your family?
- 2, Do your husband / wife know that you asked help from somewhere? (if not) why don't you tell him/her?
- 3, I know that you are asking divorce by mutual consent, Could you tell me who first raised and what is the main reasons?
- 4, Could you tell me an event that you recognized as one of the conflicts between you and your husband/wife recently?
- 5, From when the marital conflict between you and your husband/wife being seriously? Could you tell me the main reason that you think?

Part three: The perception and attitude on gender role

- 1, What do you think is the biggest hinder as a "good wife/husband"?
- 2, Who do you think is an "ideal wife/husband" ? Could you give me an example (any where from film/novel/history/etc.)?
- 3, What do you think "the man must show his manliness, and a woman her womanliness"?

4, What is the main good points of your wife/husband and what is the main weak points of your wife/husband have?

5, Do you think you are very care of your husband/wife? Do you think he/she very care about you? Could you give me an example?

6, What stage do you think is the best in your life after your marring? Why?

7, Do you think something is different compared with your life before married?

Part four: The power differential on gender division of labor and decision making at home

1, Could you give me a daily schedule of your household responsibilities both during weekdays and holidays in your family? And do you know his/hers?

2, Do you think what kind of household responsibilities suits him/her? Do you think how long time is better for you both during the weekdays?

3, What kind of plan did you made before you married (e.g. fix up the residence, buy facilities, wedding, etc.)? How did you make the decision?

4, When do you have the first child after your marring? Did you discuss it before pregnant?

5, Generally speaking, how did you make decision at home, for example,

kids' education/moving residence/change job/ buy facilities etc.), if your views are divergent, what did you do?

6, Do you have a detail plan to arrange the income at home after marring?

7, Do you support your or his/her parents now? How do you and your wife/husband made this decision?

Part five: The perception on women's changing role and the husbands' feeling

1, Do you think your income is important for your family? And how about his/hers?

2, (for wife) Do you still keep your job if your husband has a good salary?

3, (for husband) Do you want her go out to work if you have a good salary?

4, What do you think if a wife earned more than her husband?

5, What do you think, if a wife was called a "tough woman"?

Thank you!

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