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The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
The Department of Applied Social Sciences

Conceptions of Physical Child Abuse in China : Listening to Children
and Their Parents on Parental Child Battering in Beijing

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December, 2007

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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(Signed)

QIAO Dongping (Name of Student)

To my daughter and my younger sister

ABSTRACT

Child abuse is an internationally concerned social problem as well as the focus of child welfare in the West. In mainland China, however, it has received little attention from the academics. There have been very few efforts on examining the applicability of the Western concept of “child abuse” to the context of China. The understanding and definition of child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China, therefore, has remained a blank spot.

Being an explorative study, this study attempts to fill in such a void, which is based on the experiences of the one-child families in urban Beijing. Using the qualitative methods, the author conducted two rounds of in-depth interviews with 20 parent-child pairs and three focus group discussions with another 20 children in 2004 and 2005. The study explores, from a socio-cultural perspective, how Chinese children and their parents understand physical child abuse by focusing on parental child battering, and tries to make sense of the similarities and differences in the views of children and their parents/adults in the socio-cultural context of China.

This study uses an analytical framework of parent-child relationship in the context of Chinese culture, starting with the analysis of affection and power relations between parents and child, and tries to understand the views of children and parents in Beijing on parental child battering and child abuse. The study finds that the informants’ understanding of child abuse differs markedly from the definitions of

child abuse in Europe and America. They tend to regard as child abuse only those violent acts which have obviously malicious intentions, are unreasonable, occur very frequently and cause serious harm on the child either physically or/and psychologically. They generally do not regard child battering by “biological parents” as child abuse. This manifests their “affectional construction” of child abuse and the Chinese cultural characteristics of “family-centeredness” and “relation-orientation”. The finding that children’s views are more similar than different from their parents reflects both a strong cultural identification and an internalization of parents’ values by their children. On the other hand, the different views of children from their parents in the understanding of child abuse manifest an increase in the children’s awareness of their rights and the influence of globalization.

The understanding and definition of child abuse is the basis for intervention in the child abuse problem. Therefore, it affects the protection of children’s rights. It is hoped that the findings of this study can contribute to mutual understanding and dialogue between China and the West on the issues of child abuse and child protection. Although the Western concept of “child abuse” may not be completely relevant to China, its implications on protecting children should not be ignored, and violations of children’s rights to a violence-free life in the family should be taken seriously. In this regard, children’s attitudes and views on these issues should be given due attention. Finally, based on the principle of “the best interests of the children”, this study also discusses the implications of the findings on the protection of children’s rights on the ideological, policy and social work intervention levels,

and advocates that parents/adults respect children's rights and dignity as a person and stop all forms of violence against the children.

PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE THESIS

1. Qiao, D.P., & Chan, Y.C. (2005). Child Abuse in China : A yet-to-be-acknowledged “social problem” in the Chinese Mainland. *Child and Family Social Work*, 10, 21-27.
2. Qiao, D.P., & Chan, Y.C. (2008). Myths of Child Abuse in China: Findings based on a qualitative study in Beijing. *China Journal of Social Work*, 3. (Accepted)

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It has never occurred in my mind that the years of my doctoral studies have been so long and difficult, full of not only the hardworking hours pertaining typically to academic research but also unexpected pains and sufferings. During this period, I lost two close relatives who are the most important people in my life - my only daughter and only younger sister. Since they passed away, I have spent days often buried in tears, and my painful miss of them has run through each line of my dissertation. This is the major reason that I devote this dissertation to them.

In preparing this thesis, I have received the valuable support of many persons. This study could not have been completed without their support. Here, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all of them.

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Chapter One Introduction

A book on child abuse could not have been written one hundred years ago.Before it could be acknowledged as a social ill, changes had to occur in the sensibilities and outlook of our culture. (Kempe & Kempe, 1978, p.3)

Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence...the health, welfare, and rearing of children have been linked in thought and practice to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state. The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual and moral danger, to ensure its 'normal' development, to actively promote certain capacities of attributes such as intelligence, educability and emotional stability. (Rose, 1989, p.121)

(C)hildren have become supremely an issue of our time. Nations are investing in educational and moral futures and public concerns abound with issues of protection, rights and citizenship in relation to the young. (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998, p.197)

Child Abuse: Is It a Problem of China ?

In Mainland China, the people have little awareness of child abuse as it is known in the West and there are likely different conceptions and treatment of the

problem. This led to my concern for the child abuse problem and the abused children.

According to the *UN Convention of the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), “a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Article 1). In many parts of the world, a child’s age impinges very differently on local conceptualizations of children’s physical and social skills, which has alerted researchers to think more reflexively about age as a “social” rather than a “natural” variable among children (James et al., 1998). As a signatory of the *UN Convention of the Rights of the Child* (hereafter refer to as the UNCRC), the Chinese Government accepts the definition of the child specified in the UNCRC, though the public do not have a unified understanding (Hao, 1999). The Chinese academia generally defines the age of the child as below fourteen years (Lu, Ren, & Chang, 2003), an age below which a child cannot bear any legal responsibility for his behavior. Chinese law prescribes a series of legal rights and responsibilities that take effect at different ages.¹

Children as minors are vulnerable and need to be protected specially. The phenomenon of child maltreatment exists throughout the history of mankind; however, it was not until 1960s that child abuse began to emerge as a general social and medical concern in U.S.A. Subsequently, the public and professionals became

¹ According to the General Rules of the Civil Law of the People’s Republic of China, a minor is a person below the age of 18 who cannot bear civil responsibility individually (Article 11 and 12) and who are denied some legal rights such as giving consent. A person below the age of 16 must not be employed. Criminal Law of the People’s Republic of China stipulates that a person who has reached the age of 16 commits a crime shall bear criminal responsibility (Article 17).

interested in the area of child abuse so much so that it was later constructed as a social problem beyond the medical field in 1970s (Pfohl, 1977; Parton, 1977). Today, child abuse/maltreatment has become an international concern and has been discussed extensively in developed countries. A lot of definitions, causative models, and intervention strategies were developed from different theoretical perspectives.

At the same time, many Western researchers (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Kim & Ko, 1990; Mulvaney & Mebert, 2007; Silverman, Reinherz & Gioconia, 1996; Turner & Muller, 2004) have indicated that violence or physical child abuse that children experience not only cause them physical injuries but also interfere with their normal psychological development. There are serious repercussions as the children mature into adulthood. These may be manifest as difficulties with interpersonal relationships, depression, suicide, phobias, alcohol and drug abuse, psychotic state, violence, or criminal behavior. Perhaps it is not exaggerating to say that violence in the family is the leading contributor to most of today's social problems.

Therefore, over the last three decades, the issue of child abuse has always been a focus in child welfare in the Western world (Dingwall, 1989). No matter the public, professionals or the politicians, they are all increasingly concerned about child abuse, or the allegations of it. Influenced by the West, child abuse has almost become a top concern in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the past thirty years or so.

By contrast, the literature on child abuse or violence against children in the family in Mainland China is surprisingly scarce (Zhou & Yao 2000). In the past

decade, it is true that marital violence has been more extensively studied and intervened by the women groups and those working in the legal system, after the Fourth World Women's Conference held in Beijing in 1995, and especially after the amendment of the Marriage Law of People's Republic of China in 2001. Although there are weak voices urging for more attention to violence against children in the family (e.g. Bu, 2003), however, it is still regarded as a matter in the private sphere, not being a cause for concern in the Chinese Mainland. Relatively, corporal punishment in the school catches more public attention, but is not yet regarded as child abuse in China.

In recent years, some studies and literatures on child abuse in the Chinese context began to appear. They were mainly on introducing to China the child abuse problem developed in the West (e.g. Guo, 2000), on the medical consequences of physical abuse and sexual abuse on children (e.g. Jiao, Qiao, Zhou, Li, & Kang, 2000), and on the abused experiences of the students in childhood (e.g. Chen, Dunne, & Han, 2004; Chen & Dunne, 2005). These studies were mostly based on the definitions of child abuse in West, because there lacks an indigenous definition of child abuse or maltreatment in Mainland China.

According to the Chinese Constitution and Laws, maltreatment of old people, women and children is prohibited. However, child abuse/maltreatment is a rarely used expression among the Chinese in the Mainland. For example, the Chinese Government avoided using the term "child abuse" as it responded to *the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2002* in which the US Government mentioned the "abuse of children" as a human rights problem in China. Instead of

using the term “child abuse” or “child maltreatment”, the Chinese Government used the term “domestic violence” when referring to the situation of American children in the report entitled *The Human Rights Record of the United States in 2002* (The Chinese State Council Information Office, 2003). Some non-Chinese scholars tend to believe that the Chinese officialdom remains sensitive to the issue of child abuse (Hesketh & Lynch, 1996; Hesketh, Zhang, & Lynch, 2000). Perhaps, these explain why China, in the words of Gelles and Cornell (1990, p.30), “has frequently been described as a society with little or no child or wife abuse.”

The “non-existence” of child abuse matches with my own personal experience. When I first told my Hong Kong friends that I am going to study child abuse, they doubted if there is the problem of child abuse/maltreatment in China. They believed that the one-child parents tend more to spoil their children than to abuse them under the current only-child policy. In the one-child families in contemporary urban China, parental child battering is often overshadowed by the apparent parental indulgence of their child. In the context where coddling of children is more a social problem, child abuse is easily lost sight of as a cause for concern.

Actually, the phenomenon of child abuse is not rare in Mainland China (Chen & Dunne, 2005). Research studies on the child discipline and parenting find that Chinese parents tend to adopt methods of punishment and scolding compared with their western counterparts (Kelley & Tseng, 1992). Besides, studies also show that parental child battering is prevalent in Chinese families. In a parallel study on primary school students in China and Korea between 1998 and 1999, 70.6% of the Chinese children had experienced violence in the family in the year preceding the

study (Kim, Kim, Park, Zhang, Lu, & Li., 2000). Another survey carried out in eight hospitals in the provinces of *Zhejiang* and *Jiangxi* revealed that 97% of the child health doctors and nurses believed that physical punishment was widely used by Chinese parents (Hesketh, Zhang, & Lynch, 2000). In 2001, a national survey of 3,543 married people conducted by the China Law Society showed that 71.9% of the interviewees reported to have had the experience of being battered by parents in their childhood (Liu & Zhang, 2002).

In recent years, more and more cases of parental child battering were revealed in Mainland China. In 2000, one case (see Case 1 in Appendix 3) which had aroused extensive public concern in Beijing stimulated my reflection on the rights and protection of children in China. If this case occurred in the developed countries of the West, it is likely that public attention would focus on the problem of child abuse or domestic violence. In Mainland China, however, the case was not responded to as a case of child abuse or maltreatment by the government, academic communities and the public. The mother who had battered seriously her son was only seen to be impatient in expecting her son to excel in the society. She was believed and sympathetically pardoned for her excessive corporal punishment to her child who failed to complete the schoolwork because she did it for the good of her child. The centre of public attention and discourse focused more on the problem of the education system, like its examination-oriented nature, and the pressure this had generated in the parent-child relationship. The mainstream media also admitted the prevalence of primary and secondary school students absconding from home

and attempting suicide due to heavy burden at school, and cases of permanent injuries and death due to pressures from parents, punishment by teachers.²

The case quoted above was apparently not regarded as one of child abuse in the socio-cultural context of the Mainland China. In order to understand why the academic community and the public in China do not see the case as one of child abuse as their counterparts in the West do, I have had an initial analysis for this issue based on secondary data (see Qiao & Chan, 2005). The present thesis wants to explore further how Chinese people understand child abuse or maltreatment, and whether the dominant conception of child abuse, embedded in the western cultural tradition, can be applied to the context of China.

Research Questions and Objectives

Due to the paucity of research on child abuse in Mainland China, understanding of child abuse or maltreatment is very limited. Though references can be made to foreign literature, there are two weaknesses in child abuse research conducted in the West. First, the majority of child abuse studies are positivist quantitative research aiming at finding out the prevalence and distribution of different abuse forms, or identifying causative and intervention model for the problem. Relatively lacking are qualitative research studies that generate interpretive understandings of child abuse in different cultural local contexts. Second, Children's voices on the problem of child abuse often have not been

² See commentator article entitled 'Ke Bu Rong Huan De Yi Jian Da Shi (An important thing which handling cannot be delayed)', released by the Xinhua News Agency on 14 February 2000, in *Guang Ming Daily*, 15 February 2000, p. 2.

audible (Gough, 1993; Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Defining, understanding and intervening in child abuse are often based on the perspective of the adults of the middle class background in developed countries, who tacitly regard themselves as spokesmen of children's world and consider children to be incompetent or immature so that they seldom listen attentively to children's voices.

The 1989 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* stipulated that the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, and the adult is required to listen to and give due weight to the views of the child (Article 12). In recognition of children's need to be heard, some studies began to give children a voice (e.g. Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Mullender, et al., 2002). In fact, however, children's voices have not yet been reflected and respected sufficiently, especially on the problem of child abuse. The right to be heard is conditioned by judgments about a child's developmental capacity to understand their situation and to form a meaningful opinion (James, et al., 1998). For this reason, this study will attempt to listen to children on their views concerning child abuse and its management in the Chinese context.

Some research studies on Chinese immigrants in Western countries find that Chinese understanding of physical child abuse is strongly influenced by their culture. Their conception of child abuse is different from those held in the West (Fong, 1997; Kwok & Tam, 2005). So the Western concept of "child abuse" in the British and American context may not be completely applicable to the Chinese context. In embarking on this research, I basically subscribe to the views of

Wilson and James (2002, p.7), that “an understanding of child abuse, and how it is defined and interpreted in its historical and cultural context, is of central importance to all of those who are concerned with child abuse and child protection,...” Without greater clarity about understanding and definition of child abuse, we cannot begin to ask questions about its incidence, distribution, causes and intervention.

Therefore, my research question is that how Chinese children and their parents understand physical child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China. Extant research studies show that the family and the home is most often the site for the physical and sexual abuse of children (Jenks, 1996). I opt to approach the problem of child abuse through an initial exploration of parental child battering in the family. I focus on parental child battering in this research because it is closely connected with physical abuse which is the main form of child abuse. Second, parental child battering was the original concern of the child protection lobby, as physical abuse was the classic type of child abuse. In the public mind, physical abuse was almost synonymous with child abuse until the publicity surrounding intervention into child sexual abuse cases in Cleveland in 1987 (Corby, 2006). Third, in an exploratory research, physical abuse is a good point to start with. Physical abuse is easier to understand, particularly for children. Sexual and psychological abuses are more complex, and they are difficult for children to comprehend. Fourth, in Mainland China, the study of child abuse is still in its embryo. There are so many things about child abuse which are still not known and waiting to be uncovered. Parental child battering is so prevalent and familiar in Chinese families. It is believed that some

cases of parental child battering are serious enough to cause grave harm to the children both physically and psychologically. It is a topic that is closely linked up with child abuse and is worthy of attention of the academic, public and professional communities. In this light, therefore, when mentioning “child abuse” in this research, I often mean “physical abuse”. Where appropriate, I would also analyze the data on emotional abuse and sexual abuse when they were mentioned by the informants.

Specifically, this research study attempts to provide answers to the following questions: How do children and their parents understand the meaning of child abuse? Do they regard parental child battering as abuse? How do they explain the causes of parental child battering and its influences on children and on parent-child relationship? What feelings do children have when they are battered? Do children hope that the society will intervene in the violence they suffer by offering them help? How are children’s views on parental child battering and child abuse different from or similar to those of the parents, and why?

My research objective is to explore the conception of physical child abuse by studying and making sense of the similarities and differences, if any, in the views of children and their parents in Beijing. This study thus aims to fill this knowledge gap by exploring how child abuse is perceived in Mainland China and to arouse the concern of the domestic academia, the professional and the public about the protection of the rights of children. By listening attentively to children’s voices, and comparing theirs with those of their parents, it is hoped to lay bare children’s perspectives and personal experiences of physical child abuse in the adultcentric world on one hand; and to help adults to reflect critically on their knowledge

constructed by adults that affect their attitudes and behaviors to children on the other. Children's voices will be given special attention throughout this study. It is expected that this study will contribute to empirical and theoretical foundation for defining and intervening in cases of physical child abuse or violence against children in family in China. As a result, it is also expected my study is helpful to improve parent-child relationship and the quality of children's life. Suggestions and recommendation on parenting, social work intervention and social policy making will be proposed in the study. All in all, I will call for non-violent behaviors to treat children in Chinese society.

The socio-cultural perspective will be adopted in the study. While each perspective has its own strengths and limitations, and we should not expect one single perspective to be able to explain everything, this study gives more weight to the socio-cultural perspective.

It is important to understand the differences among different cultures in the globalization era, so that problem of cultural insensitivity can be avoided. The problem of cultural insensitivity or even blindness in understanding child abuse is well illustrated in the Chinese film "Gua Sha". In this film, the traditional medical treatment method "Gua Sha" was mistaken as child abuse in the United States, and an unnecessary lawsuit thus began. The globalization of cultures is not mere Westernization or Americanization. It requires constant dialogues among the different cultures so that globalization can be sensibly taken place with due consideration of the different cultures. In the context of this study, this will mean a

more sensitive and sensible understanding of child abuse in the Chinese culture. In the light of this understanding, I neither intend to define or judge the behaviors and perceptions by Chinese people with the Western cultures as the standard, nor treat the Chinese culture as a model without any criticism.

This study attempts to reflect on the existing definitions of physical child abuse in the Western mainstream studies and the definition of “maltreatment” in Chinese Law by having regard to the data collected from the informants. The study also touches on the issue of Chinese education because it is an important cause of parental child battering and a common concern of Chinese children and their parents.

Reflection on the Researcher’s Position

This study chooses qualitative approach and the data-gathering methods of in-depth interview and focus group, because they can answer my research questions well. Justifications of the methodology used and the process of implementing this research study will be detailed in the methodology chapter of this report.

In a qualitative study, the researcher is also an “instrument”. The mutual interaction between the researcher and the researched is important for “interpretive understanding” of meaning construction by the researched. Therefore, qualitative research considers it important to discuss and reflect on the personal features of the researcher. Since my experience has been a reason why I pay close attention to the problem of child abuse, therefore it is necessary to reflect on my own experience, position and subjectivity in this research.

According to Hacking (1999, p.162), “[c]hild abuse is a new kind that has changed the past of many people, and so changed their very sense of who they are and how they have come to be.” If according to the new concept of child abuse in West, without doubt, I was abused by my father in my childhood. In my childhood, I was often frightened, uneasy, hungry and being discriminated. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution between the mid 1960s and mid 1970s, my father lost his job and was sent to the countryside to labor under the surveillance of the farmers due to political purges. He gradually became an alcoholic and sold all valuable things of our family, including grain, so that he could buy wine to drink. Not having had enough to eat, we often had to borrow grain from our neighbours. As a result, we suffered both physically and emotionally. My younger brother had a serious malnutrition. My father often got drunk, broke the things, forbade us to go to school, and forced us to go to bed. We often had to seek refuge in our neighbours’ homes. It is only after very long years that I have at last manage to get rid of the shade of my childhood.

In starting off this research, I initially intend to listen to children’s voices on child abuse standing from the perspective of the child. But during the process of the research, this intention was constantly challenged by both the children and their parents. Most of them held the view that it was difficult for me to understand children because of the generation gap between me and my child informants. When I talked about my research with my deceased child in 2003, who was then an 11-year-old girl, a few words of her caused my attention. She said, “A lot of our moods and feelings are too elusive to be put into words. Even if they can be

expressed with words, they are in the language of children that you adults do not understand. If adults want to understand young children, you should rejuvenate.” I asked, “What if it is impossible to rejuvenate?” She answered, “Then, you will need to stand on the children’s position to think about your own feelings as a child, and play with children.”

Therefore, I began to doubt whether I can really stand on the children’s side and whether I can voice out their views, as well as whether my identity as a mother might predispose me to stand on the parents/adults’ side. I have been confused for a very long time over my position. Should I pretend to stand on the side of the children, but actually I might be not? Or should I quietly pretend to accept my role as a neutral researcher and allow my adult views to cloud those of the children? Could I change my position as needed when interviewing the children and their parents? As I explore the views of children and their parents, my position as a researcher and whether I as a researcher can objectively represent the view points of the researched are questions that seriously troubled me as I implemented this study.

The dispute on the subjectivity and objectivity of the research of social science has been lasting for a very long period. Positivism emphasizes objective and neutral research, requiring researchers to avoid the impacts of their own subjective values as much as possible, and to understand objectively the facts and provide the causal explanation. This dominant view has been challenged by new perspectives such as post-positivism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, and constructionism since the 1960s (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Now the view that researchers are impossible to fulfill impersonality and neutral values has been gradually accepted,

and the personal status of a researcher, including life experiences, gender, age, education background, social class, culture and values, etc, all will definitely affect not only the course of the research study, but also his or her descriptions, understanding and interpretation of the facts.

In this research, I have been continuously alert of own subjectivity. In some sense, qualitative research is a kind of research standing between “objectivism” and “subjectivism” (Chen, 2000, p.312). Qualitative research not only emphasizes on empirical investigation of the social phenomenon, but also attaches more importance to the understanding and interpretations of individual researcher on the social phenomenon being studied. Understanding and interpretation involved in qualitative studies are impossible to be completely objective, but they should not be totally subjective. Therefore, researchers must be alert of the effects of their own experiences, values and knowledge. No matter as a listener or as a researcher, it is impossible for my mind to be empty. My knowledge on the concept of child abuse in the Western world, on the crime of maltreatment in the Chinese laws and the ordinary understanding on child abuse in Chinese all are my “previsions”. On the one hand, these “previsions” equipped me with purposes, knowledge reserves and the ability to judge the unknown during the research process, thus to make understanding become possible; and on the other hand, they may also interfere with my understanding of the views of children and parents. While it is impossible to exclude “previsions” completely, it is important that I should be alert of the possibility of substituting the viewpoints of the children and their parents with my “previsions”, making this research lose its significances. The process of the study is

that the researcher and participants co-construct the meanings of child abuse together. Throughout whole process, as a researcher, my reflection is essential.

Although I am the researcher and the author of this dissertation report, and there are my concerns and my experiences in this research, I am happy to learn from these children and parent informants that I have respected their views in the research process. Based on my interview data, my observation and communication with people outside this research, press coverage, as well as my own experience, I have reasons to believe that many children and parents in contemporary one-child families of Chinese urban cities can find that to some extent this study describes their own situation. Through this research, I also see the hope that parents would change their attitude and behavior to children if more attention is paid to parental child battering and child abuse in China.

Organization of the Thesis

The present thesis consists of eight Chapters. I have in this chapter introduced the background of this study, and explicated the research questions and purpose of this research. I have also revealed my position as a researcher so that readers can make judgment on the credibility of this study and its findings.

Chapter Two is devoted to the review of literature on child abuse and formulation of conceptual framework of this study. Due to the socio-cultural perspective used in this study, this chapter will first trace the origin and development of the concept of child abuse in the western socio-cultural context; and then, it will analyze the cultural issues in the understanding and definition of child abuse,

alongside the exposition of theoretical perspectives in explaining the causes of child abuse. Last and most importantly, this chapter will present an indigenous framework to understand the conception of child abuse among the Chinese in the context of parent-child relationship, and therefore, the conceptual resources relevant to the understanding of child abuse and parent-child relationship in the Chinese context will also be reviewed.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology that has been employed in the study. It will discuss the rationale for choosing the qualitative approach, as well as the reason for using in-depth interview and focus group as data-gathering methods. A lot of issues relating to qualitative research, such as the relationship between the researcher and the researched, ethical and legal issues, creditability and limitations of the study, and so on will also be discussed and elaborated. The entire research process from the preparatory phase to the data analysis phase will be presented in detail.

Chapter Four describes the characteristics of the informants and how their backgrounds may affect the findings of the study.

Chapter Five to Eight are devoted to the presentation and analysis of the data collected in this study. As the basis and introduction for understanding the subsequent chapters, Chapter Five will present findings on the affection, responsibilities, rights and power relationships between parents and child in one-child families of Beijing, and to proceed with a meaningful cultural discussion through deeply describing the life condition, thought and concept of the informants.

The presentation of these findings is necessary for an understanding of physical child abuse in the Chinese context.

Chapter Six and Seven will respectively present and analyze the views of parents and children on whether parental child battering is child abuse. The causes of parental child battering, the construction of child abuse, as well as the influence of parent-child relationship on constructing child abuse for parents and children will be presented in detail.

Chapter Eight draws together the materials from the previous chapters. In this chapter, I will present and analyze the similarities and differences between the views of parents and the views of children, and to present the Chinese conception of child abuse from the data collected. The relation among the concepts of child abuse, discipline, corporal punishment and domestic violence will be summarized, and the Chinese myths on the problem of child abuse will be analyzed.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, a conclusion will be drawn from the previous discussion, and further speculations on the related issues will also be raised. From what children think of “the best interests of the child”, this chapter analyzes the possible influence of conception of child abuse among the Chinese on child protection in China, and summarizes the implications of the study findings on the protection of children’s rights on ideology level, the policy level and the social work intervention level. Last will be the contributions and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Introduction

While incidents of child maltreatment have been in existence throughout history, the idea of “child abuse” as a social problem is relatively new. Since the 1960s, there has been a dramatic increase of interest in the study of child abuse. Most of the studies on children were very likely to touch on the child abuse problem. However, research studies on child abuse were carried mostly out in the West. Little has been done to explore the issues relating to child abuse in Mainland China. Therefore, understanding of child abuse in the Chinese context remains limited. In China, child abuse has not been a research theme. Studies on children concentrate largely on issues of child education, child psychology and juvenile delinquency. Since the 1980s, problems as a result of the one-child policy began to receive more attention in research studies on children. However, the focuses are still more on their educational and psychological needs (Feng, 1998).

Although the concept of child abuse developed in the context of the West, it does not mean that this study could not draw insights from them. Therefore, this chapter will trace the origin and development of child abuse problem in the West, mostly in the context of the United States and the United Kingdom. Based on contemporary Chinese writings and literature, conceptual resources relevant to the study will also be reviewed in order to develop an indigenous framework to

understand the conception of child abuse among the Chinese in the socio-cultural context of China.

Socio-cultural Context of “Child Abuse”

It has been said that “child abuse” is a “social construction” (Gelles, 1975; Janko, 1994). Child abuse is not a new phenomenon, but is a new idea and a new social problem. Often what is new about the problem is the way in which it is being defined or interpreted (Corby, 2006). As Hacking (1999, p.134) indicated, “[m]any instances of what Victorians called cruelty to children we now call child abuse, and vice versa”. Children have been cruelly treated for as long as there has been human society. There is abundant evidence of child maltreatment in the past. Children, throughout history and cross cultures, have been the victims of practices of abandonment, infanticide, sacrifice, mutilation, slavery, excessive discipline and exploitation at work. Yet it is only in recent times, when arguably things are better for children, that there has been an almost obsessive social interest in how much children are abused. Therefore, “the problem of child abuse presents a certain apparent paradox” (Archard, 2004, p.192). However, as indicated by Kempe and Kempe (1978, p.17), “[a] book on child abuse could not have been written one hundred years ago. Before it could be acknowledged as a social ill, changes had to occur in the sensibilities and outlook of our culture.”

Construction of “child abuse” was connected with the development of the American society, the change of understanding of child and childhood, technology

innovations, promotion by researchers and professionals as well as the establishment of policies and laws on protecting children.

Social development and changing understanding of the child

James, Jenks and Prout (1998) suggest that the phenomenon of child abuse emerged as a malign and exponential growth towards the conclusion of the twentieth century not because of any significant alteration in the pattern of our behavior towards children but because of the changing patterns of personal, political and moral control in social life more generally. These have in turn affected our vision of childhood (Jenks, 1994). Whereas an antique vision of the child rendered abuse unseen or unintelligible, modernity has illuminated mistreatment and highlighted the necessity of care.

Before the Middle Ages, children were treated as little adults, engaged in the works of adults, and bearing the responsibilities of adults, and was not believed to be in need of any special cares (Ariès, 1962). As a result of social and economic developments, the progress of industrialization, as well as the rise of the Middle Class in the capitalism society, children have been gradually separated from the adult world. Children were believed to be vulnerable, in need of special cares and protection and, safe from damages by unfortunate incidents. As the understanding of child and childhood has changed, the behaviors acceptable for how parents treat children in the past can now be problematic. The emotional, physical and psychological needs of children have continuously been a focus of concern.

Michael Robin (1982) has traced the roots of child protection. He found that the Renaissance was the beginning of a new morality regarding children. Children were seen as a dependent class in need of the protection of society. This was also a time when the family was looked to for teaching children the proper rules of behavior. The Enlightenment in the eighteenth century brought children increased attention and services (Gelles & Cornell, 1990). Due to the rapid growth of population, child care issues in poor families have drawn attention since the 19th century. Some NGOs and charity groups were very dedicated in providing child care services and protecting children from the cruel treatment and neglect which, if not unattended to, could probably become the causes of juvenile delinquency.

Technological developments

Technology paved the way for the rediscovery of child abuse (Gelles & Cornell, 1990). Following the invention of X-rays, radiologists have reported a number of cases of children who had multiple long bone fractures and subdural hematomas in 1946. In the 1950s, some radiologists speculated that such injuries were inflicted by parents or caretakers. By 1962, the pediatrician C. Henry Kempe and his colleagues were quite certain that many of the injuries they saw on children and the healed fractures that appeared on X-rays were intentionally inflicted by parents rather than the outcome of accident or disease. Kempe argued that the abuse of children was far more widespread than anyone had considered previously. Their article named 'The Battered-Child Syndrome' (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegmuller & Silver, 1962) has created considerable public and professional interest in the area of child abuse.

The impacts of research and social movements

Since 1962, after the publication of Kempe's article, there has been a tenfold increase in popular articles that discussed child abuse and thousands of professional articles that were published annually in medical, sociology, psychology, social work, and other scholarly journals (Gelles & Cornell, 1990). Both in scholarly research and journalistic outcry, the last years of the fifties showed dramatically increased concern for the beaten child (Pfohl, 1977).

In the 1960s, however, research studies on issues related to child abuse were only explored from the perspective of clinical and medical science. The majority of people still believed that cases of child abuse were rare, and they also constructed it as a medical issue. From 1970s onwards, sociologists gradually had been more concerned with the topics of domestic violence and women abuse. As more and more sociologists conducted research studies on family violence, studies on the causes of child abuse have no longer been confined to the viewpoints of mental medicine, but they also covered the social aspects as well. Child abuse was constructed as a social problem beyond the medical field in the 1970s (Pfohl, 1977; Parton, 1979). Until then, there was virtually no scientific data to crack the myths of abuse. It was impossible to convince the public and legislators that family violence was a legitimate problem deserving a place on the national agenda.

The 1960s was also a period of violent social protest, and race riots, again focusing public concern on violence. The women movements have impelled the society to pay attention to the seriousness of family violence, and to focus on the

protection of the women and children. The women movements in the early years mostly emphasized on promoting the social status of women, but after the mid 1970s, public attention had increasingly turned to the topic of sexual abuse of children (Parton, 1990), which have subsequently fueled and given impetus to the children's rights movement. A variety of social movements and social concerns combined in the late 1960s to create a climate where people were ready and willing to listen to those concerned with the victimization of women and children.

The politics of the family and the state

According to Parton (1979, 1985), the growth of public interest on the child abuse problem is closely linked to the professional aspirations and to the politics of the family and the state. The rights and positions of parents in relation to their children is a social construction under the influence of culture. There are different views in different eras and societies. One view is that children are the property of their parents who can dispose of their children as they see fit. Another view is that children are in trust, in which parents are best placed to bring up their children and to enable them to carry out their responsibilities. The third view, proposed by Barton and Douglas (1995), is that of characterizing parents as a combination of ownership and trusteeship.

Before 1874, the family had always been a sacred private sphere that the society had no right to invade. At that time, America had neither the awareness nor the laws to protect children suffering from cruel treatment. The handling of the case of Mary Ellen Wilson treated viciously by foster parents was only possible by

resorting to a statute outlawing cruelty to animals. The foster parents were prosecuted by Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The case of Mary Ellen Wilson is almost always singled out as the turning point in the development of child welfare. Public concern for child protection was raised.

Afterwards, pushed by NGOs, news media, legal professionals, and the researchers, the governments in countries like the USA and the UK successively released a series of laws to protect children from suffering damage by their parents at home. For example, the 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act was passed in the UK. In the U.S.A, child abuse reporting law was passed in each of the 50 states between 1963 and 1967. Governmental entities in each state have begun to establish the official information on child abuse and neglect. In 1974, the American Congress enacted the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act which defined child abuse and neglect, established the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, set forth a budget for research and demonstration projects, and called for a national survey of the incidence of child abuse and neglect. In the UK, the social workers have begun to attach importance to the investigation on child abuse, to develop the order for protecting child, and to implement the practices for protecting child since the 1970s (Parton, 1985, 1991). These imply that the state has begun to intervene to the private sphere of family. Therefore, by the late 1980s/early 1990s we can see a distinct shift in the dominant discourse concerning child abuse, away from the 'socio-medical' to the 'socio-legal' (Parton, 2002).

Originated in the USA during the 1960s and spread quickly to developed European countries in the 1970s, the development of child abuse as a social problem

has its socio-historical and practical bases. Before that, a lot of work to protect children had been done, though not as responses to child abuse problem. The human-right consciousness in the Western world has undoubtedly provided the cultural soil for construction of child abuse. Being developed in the socio-cultural context in the Western world, the conception of “child abuse” will definitely have the characteristics of that particular society and culture.

Conceptual Resources in Defining Child Abuse

Defining child abuse is not easy because it is different in different socio-cultural contexts, the persons involved in the action, and the social responses to it. Thus, there are bound to be different definitions of child abuse in different places. The definitional boundaries of child abuse are not fixed and are by no means permanent. They change according to changes in the dominant ideologies/attitude regarding the rights and responsibilities of the children, parents, families and the government (Chan, 2003).

In the Western context

An early definition of child abuse was the one used by C. Henry Kempe and his colleagues in their article “The Battered Child Syndrome” (Kempe, et al., 1962). Kempe, a pediatrician, defined child abuse as a clinical condition (i.e., with diagnosable medical and physical symptoms) having to do with those who have been deliberately injured by a physical assault. This definition restricts abuse to only those acts of physical violence that produce a diagnosable or serious injury. This definition has been broadened over time (Corby, 2006). By 1980s, the term ‘child

abuse' had replaced 'baby battering' and the subsequent term 'non-accidental injury'. The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, an agency the American government established in 1974, expanded the definition of child abuse to include nonphysical acts as follow (Gelles & Cornell, 1990).

The physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby (Public Law [93-237]).

By now, child abuse is generally taken to include inflicting physical pain, suffering, capable injuries and actual injuries. For instance, the *Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention* published by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) defines it as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development of dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Terminology used has been an issue in the definition of child abuse. "Child abuse", "child maltreatment" and "violence against children in family" are often used interchangeably in child abuse literature. Kemp (1998) points out that the terms "family maltreatment", "family abuse" and "family violence" have all been used more or less synonymously. Gelles and Cornell (1990) interchangeably used "violence" and "abuse", and "child abuse" was a form of "family violence" in their

studies. Malley-Morrison and Hines (2004) prefer using the term “maltreatment”, because they think the term “abuse” is so emotionally loaded in its negative connotations that for many, it calls up images of the most extreme forms of violence. However, the differentiation and connection among these different terminologies are not discussed fully in the academia. These concepts are not necessarily equal. For instance, child abuse is not limited to a child-parent/guardian situation within the family but includes anyone who is entrusted with the care and control of a child e.g. child-minders, relatives, teachers, etc., whereas violence against children in the family is limited to the domestic context. Obviously, the relationship in which abuse is taken place often necessitates different analysis and understanding.

Physical abuse was the original concern of the child protection lobby, and in the public mind it was almost synonymous with child abuse until the publicity surrounding intervention into child sexual abuse cases in Cleveland in England in 1987 (Corby, 2006). In general, physical abuse is physical injury or suffering to a child, or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child (non-accidental injury) (WHO, 1999). In England, for instance, physical abuse is defined as involving

...hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes ill-health to a child. (Department of Health, 2000, p.5)

Wiehe (1998) indicates that “physical abuse generally involves *willful* acts by adults resulting in injury to the child; however, this type of abuse may also result from parental actions where the intent was not to injure or harm the child” (p.17).

A major criticism of the aforementioned definitions is that they are based on the condition of the developed countries and disregard socio-cultural consideration. A study carried out by Jeanne Giovannoni and Rosina Becerra (1979) found that the definitions of abuse vary by social class, race, and ethnicity. Some actions, such as caning, genital mutilation and so on, which are considered abusive in one society and culture, may be perfectly acceptable in another (Chan, Elliott, Chow, & Thomas, 2002). Therefore, many researchers caution to take culture into account when defining child abuse, because cultural beliefs and practices vary considerably around the world (Kemp, 1998; Malley-Morrison & Hines, 2004).

Some researchers try to define child abuse in a way that makes it applicable across cultures and national boundaries. According to Finkelhor and Korbin (1988), not all harm that befalls children is child abuse, which is the portion of harm that results from human action that is proscribed, proximate, and preventable. They consider that physical abuse is “violence and other non-accidental, prohibited human actions that inflict pain on a child and are capable of causing injury or permanent impairment to development or functioning” (p.8). Parental child battering is made one of three focuses for concerted international action and attention. Parental child battering is “the phenomenon of parents who non-accidentally inflict injuries on their children, most often through beatings with hands and objects. One common

context for this type of abuse is in overzealous punishment”(p.9). Yet, the boundary between physical child abuse and corporal punishment is never clear.

There are a lot of studies on the relationship between corporal punishment and child abuse. One of the biggest debates in the field is whether corporal punishment should be considered inherently abusive. “Corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury, for purposes of correction or control of the child’s behavior” (Straus, Larzelere & Rosemond, 1994, p.197). The most frequent forms are spanking, slapping, grabbing or shoving a child roughly, and hitting with certain traditionally acceptable objects such as a hairbrush, belt, ruler, or paddle. Straus and Gelles (1990) defined corporal punishment as a legally permissible violent act, including what they call “severe violence”, carried out as part of the parenting role. While physical discipline may be viewed as a positive aspect of parenting, corporal punishment involves inflicting pain partly for retribution, and teaches a child that those in power can force others to obey. Some researchers consider that the use of corporal punishment by parents that may result in injuries or risks of injury to be a form of physical child abuse (Tang, 2006); other regard corporal punishments for purposes of child discipline is a kind of ‘subabusive violence’ against children (Graziano, 1994; Graziano & Namaste, 1990); still other researchers argue that not all corporal punishments by parents should be considered abusive and some corporal punishment, such as spanking, is a lousy form of discipline (Straus, Larzelere & Rosemond, 1994). However, physical abuse often occurs within the context of a physical discipline episode (Whipple & Richey, 1997), so that it is difficult to draw the line

between permissible forms of physical punishment and actual abuse. As pointed out by Simons, Whitbeck, Conger and Chyi-In (1991), since “harsh parenting” overlaps with, but is not the same as abuse, we need to focus our attention more on the continuous rather than dichotomous nature of these constructs of physical discipline, corporal punishment and physical child abuse.

In the Chinese context

According to Taiwan academics Ning Yingbin (1999), the Western concept of “child abuse” is more than just corporal punishment. It also includes improper parenting and sub-optimal environment for the growth and development of the children, namely environment and mode of upbringing that may have a negative effect on the psychology or physiology of children. This may be a very broad definition, and it may result in a large number of sub-standard parents falling into the purview of child abuse. In what is going to follow, discussion will be focused on whether the concept of “child physical abuse” in the Western world is also applicable to China.

So far, there is no official definition of child abuse in Mainland China. The Constitution in China has made provision for prohibition of maltreatment of elders, women and children (Article 49). The new Marriage Law 2001 prohibits both domestic violence and maltreatment of family members (Article 3)¹. Juxtaposing domestic violence and maltreatment of family members in the same clause conveys the message that domestic violence is different from maltreatment of family

¹ “Domestic violence” is a Western concept introduced only after the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, and the term first appeared in the legislation in China in 2001.

members. Perhaps the issuance of the juridical interpretation named *The Application of the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* by the Supreme Court of China on Dec 25, 2001 clarifies the meanings of domestic violence and maltreatment. According to *The Application of the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*,

Domestic violence indicates an act of hitting, tying up, injuring cruelly and confining personal freedom by force, etc that result in a given consequential damage physically and mentally to the doer's family members. Continuous and frequent domestic violence constitutes maltreatment. (Article 1)

This, in effect, says that domestic violence and maltreatment of family members are essentially not the same in China (Qiao & Chan, 2005). Accordingly, a one-off violent incident is not maltreatment. Rather, it is domestic violence. For maltreatment to stand, the violent act must have lasted for some time in terms of continuity and frequency. Based on the legal definition, maltreatment of family member is seemingly more serious than domestic violence to the Chinese.

While the Marriage Law 2001 prohibits domestic violence, there is not an offence of domestic violence in China. By defining maltreatment of family members as an offence (Article 260, the Criminal Law), China seems to have circumscribed the child maltreatment/abuse problem in the realm of legal matters. If strictly adopting the current legal definition of "maltreatment" in China, parents will be charged with "maltreatment" only when children are beaten very seriously for a long period of time. This will mostly happen in reported cases where the children are

badly injured. The legal definition of “maltreatment” will affect the understanding of Chinese children and their parents on child abuse. Believably, this narrow legal definition of maltreatment will neglect a lot of cases which, though now acceptable in the culture, are actually harmful to the children in terms of consequences.

Though not being an offence, violence in the home is still a shame to the Chinese. Considering the language habits and the negative connotation of the term in the Chinese context, Tian and He (2003) avoided using the concept of “domestic violence”. They instead used the more neutral concept of “physical punishment” to replace “violence” in their survey. According to their definition, physical punishment usually refers to the behaviors that parents and other family members cause certain physical and mental harm consequences for their children or offspring by adopting the violent means, i.e. using their bodies or tools, beating or forcefully restricting the personal freedom or otherwise, thus leading the person being punished to obey the will of the punisher. Chinese parents tended to adopt physical punishment, which is still largely regarded as child discipline and not seen in the context of child abuse and protection. Extant research studies on the issue mainly focus on physical punishment by the teachers; physical punishment by parents rarely catches the attention of the academia and the society. Whether physical punishment of children is child abuse has never been discussed in China.

Some researchers (Chao, 1994; Chiu, 1987; Lin & Fu, 1990; Steinberg, Dornbusch & Brown, 1992; Tobin, Wu & Davidson, 1989; Wu, 1985) have used the concepts of “controlling”, “authoritarian”, “restrictive”, “training” and “*guan*” in their studies on Chinese childrearing. These terminologies may have a negative

connotation in the West. They are not so in the context of Chinese culture. Wu and Tseng (1985) point out that Chinese parents pay special attention to training children to adhere to socially desirable and culturally approved behavior. One way to measure the success of parental intervention is the ability of children to perform well in school. Children who fail to live up to adults' standards are often viewed as abnormal and deviant. Tobin et al. (1989) regard that *guan* (literally, meaning "to control") has a very positive connotation in China, because it can mean "to care for" or even "to love" as well as "to govern". It is also regarded as the responsibility of parents over the children.

In fact, *guan* is often associated with *jiao* (literally, meaning "to teach") in Chinese. *Guanjiao* combines "controlling", "training" and "teaching", and is practiced by the parents to achieve the purpose of teaching/educating their children through controlling, training or discipline. If children refuse to submit to the discipline of their parents, they are regarded to be ill-piety and may get corporal punished as a result. Therefore, in Chinese societies, children's need for *guanjiao* overshadows their need for protection from maltreatment. Because corporal punishment of the children by their parents is often positively seen in the light of *guanjiao*, it clouds the vision that certain harsh corporal punishment may constitute child maltreatment or abuse. As will be shown later in this dissertation, *guanjiao* in the form of child discipline and corporal punishment has now been a very prevalent means by parents to bring up their children, to foster filial piety in them, and to make them academically excellent. Since *guanjiao* involves parents exercising their authority and power in their effort to subject children to some behavior pattern

preferred by the adults, issues like child discipline and corporal punishment may mean different things to adults and children. This study attempts to explore the views of the parents and children on these issues.

Cultural Issues in the Understanding and Definition of Child Abuse

There have been a lot of debates on what constitutes child abuse. There is yet lack of a commonly agreed definition in the globe. Based on medical perspective, legal perspective and social or cultural perspective, different definitions have been developed. As far as the understanding and definition of child abuse is concerned, the biggest controversy is over whether there should be a universal or a culturally relative definition. This hinges on the understanding of the place of value in relation to both child abuse and child protection. Definition of child abuse matters because it guides not only the way child abuse studies are conducted, but also steers direction and scope of child protection work to be undertaken. A review of the literatures shows that “child abuse” as a social problem is a product of a particular culture and context.

The definition of culture by Tylor, a famous British anthropologist, is commonly accepted by the anthropologists and sociologists. According to Tylor (1871, p.1), “culture...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Phillips (2002) considers that culture represents the shared behaviors, attitudes and traditions of a group of people which are characterized by

similar language, symbols, food, dress, history, etc. Culture is something that is passed down from one generation to another.

Some researchers have discussed the influence of culture on the definition, causation and treatment of child abuse (e.g. Finkelhor & Korbin, 1988; Kemp, 1998; Korbin, 1981, 1997). There are significant differences in the understanding of child abuse and corporal punishment from culture to culture. Obviously, culture is an important factor to be taken into account when labeling certain acts as abusive, but this does not mean that there can be no common standards at all (Corby, 2006). Korbin (1981) stresses that the sort of abuse described by Kempe et al. (1962) as the “battered child syndrome” would not be sanctioned by any society.

At the same time, increasingly more researchers are acknowledging the cultural variations in child-rearing practices (Chao, 1994; Chao & Tseng, 2002; Gopaul-McNicol, 1999; Lin & Fu, 1990; Welbourne, 2002). They conclude that there is no universal standard for optimal child rearing or for child abuse. “Cultural conflict in defining child maltreatment generally arises as a result of disagreement concerning cultural differences in child care.” (Korbin, 1997, p.30) As Korbin (1981) points out,

This presents us with a dilemma. If we do not include a cultural perspective, we will be entangled in the ethnocentric position of considering our own set of cultural values and practices preferable, and indeed superior, to any other. At the same time, a stance of extreme cultural relativism, in which all judgments of human treatment of children are suspended in the name of cultural

sensitivity, would be counterproductive to promoting the well-being of the world's children. (p.3)

It is believed that a certain degree of cultural sensitivity, rather than extreme cultural relativism, is needed in this study. How do we balance the view that children's rights must be protected with a respect for cultural difference on the issue of child abuse? Chan et al. (2002) propose that it is necessary to set a flexible standard in identifying child abuse within and across cultures such that two apparently contradictory goals are met. Albeit difficult, it is not mission impossible.

The Issues of “Harm” or “Injury” and Intention

Decisions on child abuse are often affected by two important considerations. The first one is the intention or motivation of the abuser, and the second being the consequences of the abusive actions on the children. As indicated by Maitra (1996, p.287), “(t)he attribution of meaning, whether of abusive intention in the perpetrator, or of ‘harm’ experienced by the supposed victim, is central to this.” Though these two considerations are basically non-competing, their relative importance in deciding whether a case is one of child abuse is often debatable.

Definition of physical child abuse relates to the injuries on the bodies of children (Browne, 2002; Corby, 2006; Finkelhor & korbin, 1988; Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Kemp, 1998; Straus & Runyan, 1997; Whipple & Richey, 1997). The seriousness of the injury plays a part in deciding whether to define a situation as abusive. However, there is not a consensus on what constitutes “injuries” or

“harm” in the field of child abuse and protection. As Welbourne (2002) said, the understanding of “harm” is inevitably culturally conditioned. For instance, ritual clitoridectomy of young girls in Sub-Saharan Africa is a culturally approved practice, but that is seen as “harm” or abuse in other cultures. Therefore, “(t)here are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes significant harm”(Department of Health, 1999, p.18). While in medical science “harm” is defined according to the clinical symptoms, the meanings of “harm” in other contexts are often blurry. There are different opinions on whether it should include pain and affliction. This research explores the understanding of “harm” among the Chinese children and their parents, and the kinds of harm that constitute child abuse.

Physical child abuse in a narrow sense attaches importance to the harm results. Physical child abuse in a broader sense does not focus on whether there has been obvious harm, but more on the presence of violent behaviors which are potentially harmful or injurious to the children. Irrespective of whether there is any bad intent, any harmful action or harm caused to a child can be considered as child abuse. Another viewpoint is that intent itself is enough to decide the nature of a case as child abuse. Whether or not the abusive behavior actually produces any injury is unimportant. For example, a father shoots a gun at his child and misses. Though he does not hurt his child, his bad intent and behavior is obviously abusive. Maitra (1996) argues that the difficulty of making reliable predictions about the outcomes of certain actions makes it hard to provide a definitive definition of abuse.

Discussion about the intention of the abuser is few. For the majority of child protection workers, intentionality is seen as an influential factor. For the hospital doctors, however, if a child suffers a serious injury even accidentally, the person caring for that child at the time should accept responsibility for the outcome and can be judged to be abusive (Dingwall, Eekelaar, & Murray, 1983). Differently, some researchers (e.g., Malley-Morrison & Hines, 2004) believe that many physical acts, such as hitting (except when that is the only possible way to defend oneself from attack), are inherently forms of maltreatment, regardless of chronicity, motivation, apparent injury, and perspectives of the victim.

Judging from these considerations, child abuse is a very complicated phenomenon. It is often very difficult to arrive at a clear judgment by only considering the abuser's intent, or the consequences of the act, or the act itself. Mere reference to the intent of the abusers will possibly ignore the harmful consequences of their well-meant behaviors. On the other hand, if we only consider the harm done to a child, we often miss those ill-intent behaviors which temporarily do not produce harmful outcome to a child. It seems that there negligence of either consideration will miss the need of the child for protection in some cases. A comprehensive assessment is required to decide on the nature of any potential child abuse case.

Theoretical Perspectives on Child Abuse

There are three main models or perspectives on defining child abuse to date. The dominant discourse concerning child abuse shifted away from the medical model in the 1960s towards the socio-legal model in the late 1980s/early 1990s

(Parton, 2002). The medical model defines child abuse as a clinical condition with diagnosable medical and physical symptoms. The legal model emphasizes the forensic investigation and the assessment of evidence. As mentioned previously, the legal definitions of child abuse are also the product of the society and culture. This study adopts a socio-cultural perspective which emphasizes socio-cultural consideration in definition of child abuse. The strength of the socio-cultural perspective is that it helps to understand how societal influences, such as social development, social and family structure, social policy, cultural tradition and value concept contribute to the understanding of child abuse.

The socio-cultural perspective is chosen because it can answer my research question well and give an adequate frame of interpretation. This study tries to explore the understanding of child abuse in the Chinese context, and to identify the socio-cultural factors affecting the understanding. Geertz (1973) states that culture “consists of socially established structures of meaning” in terms of which people act, perceive, and interpret their own behavior and that of others. In other words, culture is the “context” within which events and actions make sense. The purpose of engaging in cultural analysis, therefore, is to identify these “structures of significance” and “frames of interpretation” and to indicate the ways in which they render behavior intelligible (Geertz, 1973, p.9). These “frames of interpretation” will in turn influence the conceptions of child abuse. Different culture is different “context” where there is likely a different understanding of child abuse.

Understandably, there are other theoretical perspectives that explain the causes of child abuse. These have provided the theoretical basis to account for the

causes of parental child battering in this study. The theoretical perspectives not only differ in their explanation on the causes of child abuse, they are divergent in their attribution of blame to the problem as well as in the level of intervention required to deal with the child battering problem. Over the last four decades, theories have shifted from single cause models to complex lists of alternative possible causes, to more integrated perspectives (Azar, 2002). Browne (2002) summarizes four theoretical models (including nine perspectives) in seeking to understand the many factors involved in child abuse and neglect. These four models are:

- Social and environmental focused models (Social stress perspective; Environmental and cultural perspective).
- Individually focused models (The psychopathic perspective; The social learning perspective; The special victim perspective).
- Interaction focused models (The interpersonal interactive perspective; The person-environment interactive perspective).
- Integrated models (Psychosocial perspective; Multifactor perspective).

Prior to the 1970s, most of the theoretical models focused on one-dimensional and linear constructs, beginning with psychopathology and then broadening to other social factors (Garbarino, 1977). The first model explains child abuse from the psychopathic perspective which focuses on the abuser's personality characteristics as the chief determinants of violence and abuse. A psychiatric model links factors such as mental illness, personality defects, psychopathology, sociopathology, alcohol and drug misuse, or other intra-individual abnormalities to family violence. Kempe's original thinking stressed the psychological aspects of

child abuse. Corby (2006) pointed that Kempe's ideas were in tune with the times in that the notion of parents abusing their children as a result of a psychological problem was more acceptable than attributing such cruelty to poverty or ignorance. By giving child abuse a medical label and seeing it as a treatable condition, the new forms of intervention into family life were not seen as a threat to the independence of families in general because they were aimed only at the families that had "the illness".

The oft-quoted model that explains the causes and the complex nature of child abuse is ecological perspective proposed by the psychologist James Garbarino (1977). What separates the ecological model from other theoretical models is its deviation from single-focused processes to a transactional and multilevel explanation. This perspective emphasizes the complex interrelationships between individuals, families, communities, and the society at large all play a role in child abuse. In short, the ecological model proposes that abuse arises out of a mismatch of parent to child and family to neighborhood and community. Garbarino extracts two key elements that help explain the existence of child abuse. The first is cultural support for using physical force against children. The second is the level of family support in the environment. As Belsky (1980, 1988) and Browne (1989) suggest, child maltreatment is multiply determined by forces at work in the individual, the family, as well as in the community and the culture in which both the individual and the family are embedded. So the ecological approach will also take into account of the cultural aspects that may contribute to child maltreatment.

However, the “psychopathic perspective” and the “ecological perspective” are useful in analyzing the causes of child abuse, but not appropriate in analyzing the definition of child abuse. “Mental illness” and “the mismatch of parent to child and family to neighborhood and community” cannot explain the definition issue well. On the other hand, the “socio-cultural perspective” is not only able to analyze causes, but also able to explain the understanding and definition of child abuse in different contexts. Therefore, the “socio-cultural perspective” is considered to be more adequate in constructing the conception of child abuse among the Chinese children and parents in China, particularly its difference from the West. Hopefully, this will contribute not only to theoretical understanding of the topic, but also to more effective child protection policies and practices in the Chinese Mainland.

Chinese Construction of Child Abuse and Parent-child Relationship

The conception of child abuse is not only shaped by cultures. It also reflects the level of social development of a particular society. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, their relatively high modernization level and the impacts of the Western culture have led the Western conception of “child abuse” to be widely accepted by public and professionals. It seems that very few people doubt whether the Western conception of “child abuse” suits the local situations. Ning Yingbin (1999), a scholar in Taiwan, points out that this conception bears relation with the social culture (“national situation”), and disciplinary actions treated as normal in Taiwan can be examples of child abuse in the West. Nevertheless, as the West is a symbol of “civilization” and “modernization”, Taiwan has opted for the Western discourse. At present, there is a wide range of discourses of child abuse around the world. This study is an attempt to

explore the discourses of child battering in the socio-cultural context of China, and to explore the understanding of child abuse among children and their parents in Beijing.

Human beings exist in cultural contexts. They are constantly being shaped and influenced by cultural values and traditions of the societies concerned. It is therefore necessary to consider the cultural dimension in the study of child abuse. Based on a review of the literatures and my research data, I will explore how Chinese people understand and construct “child abuse”. Parent-child relationship is an important area to consider in my study, as it clearly reflects the characteristics of the socio-culture of the Chinese.

In contrast to the emphasis on human rights, personal value, freedom and dignity in the West, Chinese culture emphasizes the centrality of family and interpersonal harmony. Chinese culture attaches more importance to collectivism and *guanxi* (relationship) as opposed to individualism in the West. As Levinger (1983) put it, relationship exists when there is mutuality in the actions, affection, and thoughts between two people. According to Qiao (1990), the idea of *guanxi* is especially developed among the Chinese people and has become a very important cultural characteristic in the Chinese society. King (1985), Yang (1986), He, Chen and Zhao (1991) name this cultural characteristic that the Chinese people rely on relationship for anything in the society as “relation-orientation”. Therefore, *guanxi* has also become a basis and a starting point for Chinese people to understand any issue.

The ethical principles of the Chinese people lay particular stress on family relations, such as father and son, brotherhood, and husband and wife. The “*chaxugeju*” or “the differential mode of association” proposed by Fei (1985) summarizes the *guanxi* among the Chinese people very well. He believes that the social structure in China is a network of family relationships with “self” in the center. The relationships become thinner as the network extends outwards, like ripples spreading out as a stone is thrown into the water. The most primary and intimate social relations of a person is the parent-child relationship. There are corresponding affection, rights and responsibilities in every social position in any network of relations, within which the behaviors of an individual can be easily understood. The life context in Chinese people is clearly an example of “relation context”.

The affection and power relation between parents and their children

The core of the family relations comprises of the relations among father, mother and child. The centrality of the family structure is different for different cultures. Pan (2002) believes, according to the Chinese family tradition, that the parent-child relationship takes precedence over the spouse relation because of the importance of family lineage. To this effect, even the spousal relationship is often maintained and supported by the parent-child relationship. Chinese parents like to pin their hopes on the next generation.

Li Meizhi (1998), another scholar from Taiwan, points out that parent-child relationship in the Chinese families can be boiled down to affection and power between them. The affection of filial generation for the parental generation can be

divided into the “favor sentiment” caused by the positive appreciation of the parents’ characters and abilities, and the “proximity sentiment” due to the blood ties between them. She believes that affection is the core component in all the important interpersonal relations. By summarizing the social psychological researches in the West, she points out affection includes at least two kinds of forms: Love and favor. The essence of love is the feelings of being together. It is reflected in the concern for the others, altruism, help, tolerance, acceptance and forgiveness. Favor includes the components of appreciation, admiration, and mutual commitment. The former starts from spontaneous induction, and the later is mainly derived from that the positive characteristics of the other possessed and valued by the self. Therefore, it is possible that you do not like somebody (because he or she has the qualities that you do not appreciate), but you still care about him, cherish him and make efforts for him with complaints. This is relatively possible for the family members with blood ties to have this kind of affection between them.

According to Li, Chinese people consider not only the psychological proximity (affection) between two complementary positions in a relationship; they also take account of their relative status. The relative status depends on their relative amount of the power resources owned, which is the origin of power owned by an individual to influence other people. Affection and power in the parent-child relation as recognized and understood by the children will then make it possible for the parents to impose influence on their offspring (Li, 1998).

Parent-child relationship is firstly the affective bond based on blood ties. Chinese people attach great importance to this affection. On the basis of this

affective bond, children should show filial respect to their parents who, as a matter of responsibility, should raise their children. The mutual responsibilities between parents and children in Chinese families are very clear and are in fact binding on the parent-child relationship. “Kind father and filial child” is a portrayal of the ideal parent-child relationship in Confucius ethics. As pointed out by Yang (1988), the relations between Chinese family members are bilateral and life-long. Filial practices by the Chinese children in fact are a result of their parents’ meticulous cares and concerns for them. Chao’s (1995) research on childrearing beliefs provided a good illustration of the differences in parenting practices between Chinese parents and their Western counterparts. While Chinese and Euro-American mothers stressed the importance of loving the child, the former is for fostering a close and enduring parent-child relationship, and the later is for fostering the child’s self-esteem.

Secondly, the parent-child relationship also involves power and domination. In China, juniors should obey the elders, and children should also follow what their parents teach them; otherwise they may be punished by parents. There are two theoretical models of power in mainstream studies (Fraser, 2003): the possessive model and the relational model. Giddens (1995, p.54) defines power as “the ability of individuals or groups to make their own concerns count, even when others resist. Power sometimes involves the direct use of force, but is almost always accompanied by the development of ideas (ideologies) which justify the actions of the powerful.” On the other hand, Foucault (1980) does not consider power as a possession of

individuals or groups. Rather, it is a relational and social construction. Power is always related to knowledge which justifies power; power produces knowledge.

It seems that Foucault is more concerned with power relation and the change of power relation. Parent-child relationship is affected by a host of factors, especially by cultural factors. It will change alongside changes in social development.

Parent-child relationship in traditional Chinese families

In traditional Chinese families, the power and authority of parents was emphasized. As the private property of their parents, children did not have any right at all. The concepts of *wulun* (the five ethical principles)², *sangang* (the three outlines or the three bonds)³, *jiazhang* (the family head) and *xiao* (filial piety), etc in Confucianism all have illuminated that corporal punishment was an unassailable power of parents, and this power has its theoretical and ethical bases.

China is a country with a long history. Confucianism has been the dominant if not controlling ideology in China's traditional culture. It has a profound influence on the Chinese. As a social theory that tends to mold the Chinese into group-oriented, relation-oriented and socially interdependent beings. Confucianism emphasizes *wulun* and *sangang* in human relationships. It does not regard that humans are equal. Instead, it holds that people live in an order of Five Ethical Principles, which is the basis for social harmony. Traditional parent-child relationship is the one of the "Five

² "The Five Ethical Principles" covers the five kinds of social relations most regarded by the traditional Chinese people, which are monarch and minister, father and son, husband and wife, brotherhood, and friendship, and they have their different role statuses and behavior requirements, like monarch is kind, and minister is loyal, father is kind and son is filial, husband is gentle and wife is mild, elder brother is friendly and younger brother is respectful, and friends have credit, etc.

³ "Three outlines" are monarch is superior to minister, father is superior to son, and husband is superior to wife.

Ethical Principles”, which has led to the practice of the patriarchal family system and the notions of *jiazhang* and filial piety that have prevailed in China for many centuries.

Literally, *jiazhang* means an elder member in the family. In essence, in traditional Chinese societies, the term *jiazhang* carries with it the connotations of a household head, and therefore one who decides the fate of the children. Generally, parents as *jiazhang* are implicitly bestowed with the power and authority, through such means as “domestic discipline” and “clan rules”, to take whatever punitive actions needed to correct their children. As a matter of fact, “domestic discipline” and “clan rules” have a very long history in Chinese societies (Fei, 2003).

The *jiazhang* in traditional Chinese society is basically an autocrat. According to Wang Yubo (1988), the autocracy of the *jiazhang* is mainly represented in four aspects. First is economic control. The *jiazhang* has the ownership, distribution, and disposal power over the family property. Second is ideological control. The will of the *jiazhang* is the will of the family. The *jiazhang* dictates over the moral standard of his family members, and he expects absolute obedience of them. Third is family rules and domestic discipline. In order to enforce the wills of the *jiazhang* and maintain order in the family, many families have a set of rules to enforce. Family members must strictly abide by these rules. It is common for *jiazhang* to rely on punishment (especially the corporal punishment) to enforce the family rules. In feudal Chinese societies, the *jiazhang* even had the power to kill his child. Fourth is the relative status in the family structure. *jiazhang* is over and above his children who must therefore submit to him.

According to Lin and Wang (1995), the Confucian tradition in Chinese family education is better described as “domestic discipline tradition.” Although a lot of these traditions are said to have a Confucian origin, many of them are not entirely consistent with orthodox Confucianism. In their research on Chinese writings about “domestic discipline” or “family rules” coming down from the intellectuals in the Chinese history, Lin and Wang discover that strict familial education is the core in the domestic discipline tradition. Ancient Chinese were not really punishment-oriented. They did not believe in the effects of beating and scolding so much. Rather, they taught their children in accordance of their aptitudes, through a combination of means that include both advice and punishment. Domestic discipline does not only depend on beating or scolding, but also on the superior status of the *jiazhang* over their children in accordance with Confucianism. Actually, children in traditional Chinese society do not have a lot of opportunities, nor do they have the wills, to express their own opinions since their childhood. They usually listen to the instructions from their parents.

The status dignity of *jiazhang* is, to a great extent, based on the power inherent in *jiazhang*. As pointed out by Li Meizhi (1998), behaviors of the parents and child for each other are regularized by their respective roles which are both formalized and mandatory in the Chinese culture. In this sense, the main influence of the parents over their children is back up by power that renders submission of the children to their parents.

Therefore, in traditional Chinese families, filial piety of Confucianism is the most important ethical principle guiding the moral behaviors of the children for their

parents. Filial respect or *xiaojing* to parents not only includes supporting and taking care of parents, but also includes all the aspects of respecting and obeying parents. Wu (1981) and Tang (1998) have argued that the emphasis on the Chinese moral code of filial piety lays the ground for physical child abuse to take place. Corporal punishment in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore is similar because these places are under the same cultural influence of Confucianism (Lin & Wang, 1995).

In sum, harmony and order are important familial values in Chinese cultural tradition. In this context, Chinese attach special importance to the parent-child bond which is sustained, if not enforced by a set of moral-ethical principles dictating the roles and responsibilities of the children for their parents. Children in traditional Chinese families do not have an independent identity. This is best epitomized by the view of Hao (1999) that children are often understood in the context of “the nation” or “the family”. Children are private property of the family. They are therefore dependent on their parents at home. Children are also future laborers. They therefore need to be well prepared for making a living. In the adult world, children are rarely seen as an independent individual who enjoys certain rights in both the family and the society. This traditional understanding of children is still prevalent and will certainly influence the attitudes of the Chinese towards children and the way they educate them.

Parent-child relationship in the one-child families in contemporary China

Contemporary China is undergoing a lot of changes in its familial and socio-cultural contexts. The most notable ones include the one-child policy and

impacts of the Western culture. In this light, this research study will also explore the changes in the affection relation and power relation between parents and child in one-child families in the contemporary China, as well as how these changes affect the understanding of children and their parents on child abuse.

Up till now, the one-child policy has been implemented for over two decades in the Chinese Mainland. As a result of this policy, changes in parent-child relationship are eye-catching. It has been said that the one-child family in China is right transforming from parents as the center to the child as center (Zhou & Chen, 2004). In other words, the child becomes the center of attention in nowadays Chinese families. Compared with traditional parent-child relationship which emphasized more the hierarchical order between parents and children, modern parent-child relationship is relatively more concerned with the affection between them.

As pointed out by Pan (2002), the one-child family has changed not only the parent-child relationship, but also the means and methods of parenting. Compared with the multi-child family, parents in one-child family have more energy to care, to teach, and to help their child. Alongside these changes, cases of caring too much, protecting too much, offering too much help and even coddling and spoiling have also appeared. On the one hand, parent-child relationship nowadays is closer. Parents have more time to get along with their children, so much to the extent that parents-child relationship is now enmeshed. In a lot of the families, children attach themselves too much to their parents. There is also over-reliance of the children on

their parents. On the other hand, due to improper parenting methods, cases of stressful parent-child relationship also frequently appear.

What first catches public attention as a result of the emergence of one-child population is the problem of spoiled child among the one-child families. Feng Xiaotian (1998) pointed out that the problem of “spoiled child” is manifest in four aspects, namely, negligence of the parents to foster their child’s independent living abilities, parents’ lack of attention to develop their child’s abilities to do household chores, over-indulgence of parents in their child and, satisfaction of the kid’s material needs to the best of parents’ abilities. Feng’s survey has refuted the assumption that one-child parents are spoiling their child more than the multi-child parents, pointing out features believed to be possessed by the only child are, in fact, characteristics of this generation of children.

According to Cai (2001), the phenomenon of “spoiled child” in China is multi-causal. Firstly, a lot of families in contemporary Chinese society are now manifesting the so-called “four-two-one” syndrome⁴. Six adults indulging in one child thus easily spoil the only-child in the family. Secondly, many parents are much more concerned with the development of their child’s intelligence, to the negligence of the importance of the kid’s personality and morality. Thirdly, parents generally lack the know-how to teach their children. Cai observed two polarities in parenting among the adults, spoiling and indulgence in the child on one end, and maltreatment in forms like cruel beating and uncontrolled scolding that damage the physical and psychological health of the child on the other. Both child spoiling and child

⁴ The “four-two-one” syndrome refers to four grandparents, two parents, and one child.

maltreatment are twin phenomena of improper parenting. Spoilt child problem is now catching a lot of public attention in China, whereas child maltreatment is still relatively neglected.

Another common problem among one-child families in China is the high expectation of the parents on their child. Parents generally believe that kids need to work and study hard in order to have bright future. High parental expectation generates great pressures in parent-child relationship as parents push their children for academic excellence. This in fact has been a characteristic of the Chinese societies throughout the history. “Every parent hopes that his son will become a dragon (symbolizing social and moral attainment)”, as the Chinese proverb goes. Chinese parents would do anything in order for their children to receive good education. Perhaps this explains why, as Hesketh and Lynch (1996) noted, the damaging effect on children resulting from pressures for good academic performance is one of the most frequently reported issues in the Chinese newspapers. Feng Xiaoxia (1996) further explains the parental expectation problem in the context of traditional Chinese culture and contemporary Chinese society. She regarded that Chinese culture is family-centered. Children are extension of the family, and their values lie in their contribution to the family. Family protection does not aim to protect children, but to ensure the prosperity of the family (clan) through children. As a result, children’s rights in living, development and education have become an obligation to the family; and to enact this obligation, family protection means more to supervise the child to make sure s/he fulfills the expectations of the family. Once

a child cannot measure up to this expectation, family protection may well become harm to him/her.

The relationship between parental expectation and physical child abuse has been explored in the Western societies. A lot of these studies supported a strong relationship between parental expectation of their children and corporal punishment or physical child abuse (e.g. Gelles & Cornell, 1990). What is special in the context of contemporary urban China is that the one-child policy and the highly competitive nature of the society have increased the pressures of the parents to push their children to excel, not least academically, but in all spheres of their development, so that they will have a better chance of survival. This is an important context in which any study on corporal punishment, child battering, and physical child abuse cannot ignore.

Construction of child abuse: Children's voices vs those of their parents

Corporal punishment, child battering, and physical child abuse involve perpetrators and victims. An important context in which they take place is the parent-child relationship. Why children are punished and battered, and what is child abuse are commonly heard from the side of the adults. The voices of the children are often ignored. This is often due to an unfounded assumption about children in our society. This is well epitomized by the views of Thomas (2002),

Children are silent or muted. They are seen as incompetent, as unable to judge what is best for them. Their interests are identified with those of their parents, or are seen in terms of a future and not a present orientation. Finally, they are identified as a separate kind of

being from adults, with their own distinct, and disabling, status.
(p.50)

Despite that Article 12 of *the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* 1989 emphasizes that the child has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, and the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child, children's voices are often lost in the adultcentric world. Decisions on children are mostly made by the adults; the laws on the protection of children are made by giving audience to suggestions of experts and scholars instead of that of children. As James et al. (1998) point out, children are either not taken into account at all or views are given on their behalf by adults who claim the right to know what is in children's interests. Sometimes this is because it is assumed that, having once been children, all adults know what it is like to be a child. This is of course highly questionable. Different adult groups claim that they represent the benefits of the child, but they overlook the views of children themselves. Intervention in child abuse cases, for example, often revolve round competing claims by different professionals to have a special understanding of the situation (Taylor, 1989). Legal and welfare frameworks often construct the child in different ways while they each make claims to speak in the interest of the child. The results can be that children will slip between the spaces of these competing claims to knowledge.

Based on this consideration, therefore, this study will also explore the views, standpoint, and perspective of the children on physical child abuse alongside those of their parents. In this study, children are regarded as a subject

and they have their own thinking, experiences and capabilities. While parents' views on child battering, corporal punishment and child abuse are explored, children's voices on the same subject are considered to be important in their own right. Convergence and divergence in the views and attitudes between the adults and the children are examined in the socio-cultural context of contemporary China and in the context of the theories. Hopefully, this study will draw the attention of the parents, policy makers and service providers to listen to and take account of the voices of children.

Chapter Summary

Extant research and literature on the understanding of corporal punishment, child battering and physical child abuse among the Chinese is very limited. The views of the children in these areas are particularly for want of exploration. A study on the conception of child abuse among the Chinese children and parents will therefore fill a significant gap in research in the Chinese Mainland. This chapter reviews the literatures needed for developing a theoretical framework to guide this research. This being a study implemented in the Chinese context, special care has been given to include both Western and Chinese literatures in formulating the conceptual framework of this study. It is hoped that the study and its findings are both sensible and relevant to the Chinese in their special socio-cultural context.

The concept of child abuse is originated in the Western socio-cultural context in the 1960s. It soon became a social problem in the 1970s. In this chapter, the socio-cultural context for constructing the child abuse problem, including the changes in the understanding of child and childhood brought by the social

development, technology innovations, promotion by social movements and professionals, as well as the establishments of policies and laws on protecting children brought by the changes of the family and state relation was reviewed. These will hopefully serve to provide the background for a contextual understanding of child abuse in West. Beside, it is expected to provide the backdrop against which conception of child abuse among the Chinese in the socio-cultural context of China can be compared.

The socio-cultural perspective will be used to explore the understanding of physical child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China. Based on the literature review and findings of this study, I propose to understand child abuse in the context of Chinese parent-child relationship which, on one hand, is heavily shaped by traditional Chinese cultures and, on the other, subjected to changes alongside implementation of the one-child policy and penetration of the Western values. The affection and power relation between parents and their child will be important factors to consider as Chinese construct their understanding of child abuse.

Chapter Three Research Methodology

Introduction

The research focuses on how Chinese children and their parents understand physical child abuse and why they understand so in the socio-cultural context of China. There are three characteristics in this study. First, it addresses Chinese understanding of child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China. Secondly, different from the mainstream studies on child abuse, qualitative rather than quantitative research approach is employed to capture the richness of the contextual factors relevant to the understanding of the topic. In-depth interview and focus group discussion are used to gather data as abundant as possible. Third, children are included not only as informants alongside their parents, but as partners in this study. For the children participants, great importance is attached to listening to and respecting their voices on parental child battering and child abuse. This chapter delineates the rationale of the methodology used in this study, the methods of data collection, and the process of implementing this research study. Reflections on the researcher's relationship with the informants, as well as legal and ethical issues involved in this research will also be discussed.

Rationales for Choosing Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research and quantitative research both have their own merits

and limitations. The researchers will have different positions, perspectives and findings if they adhere to different methodologies. The choice of a particular research strategy depends on the conditions under which a specific study is to be conducted (Babbie, 1992; Marshall, 1995). The conditions of a study are usually determined by its questions and purposes, the knowledge over the phenomena to be studied and the theoretical framework provided by the literature review, as well as the types of settings in which the research is to be conducted. The choice of qualitative research in this study, therefore, is based on the recognition that the conditions of the study match more appropriately with the features of the qualitative research than the quantitative research.

There are at least three advantages of qualitative strategies over quantitative ones in conducting this research. The first advantage is that, qualitative research is frequently associated with exploratory studies, and is characterized by in-depth investigation and the use of words instead of numbers in presenting the findings (Hakim, 1987; Marshall, 1995). One condition under which an exploratory study frequently is carried out is to investigate a social phenomenon of which knowledge is little, and therefore relevant variables have yet to be identified or discovered (Marshall, 1995). This research is to explore the understanding of child abuse in the context of Mainland China; the literature in this field is surprisingly scarce. By using the qualitative methods such as in-depth interview and focus group discussion, the researcher is able to be engaged in research where relevant knowledge has not been discovered. This is

because qualitative methods assume a basically interpretive orientation towards social reality, and their primary aim of investigation is to generate understanding or theories instead of verifying prior theories as is the case with quantitative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1987). Therefore, by using the qualitative approach, the informants will not be bound by the response categories as in the case of quantitative study and the complexities in the understanding of the phenomenon of child abuse in China is better addressed.

Second, “cultural context” is an important focus of the research. The main purpose of this research is to explore how child abuse is understood in the socio-cultural context of Mainland China. Parental child battering is a highly contextualized behavior, and many factors, such as culture, law, stress, individual circumstances and relationship, come into play in the understanding and treatment of the problem. This necessitates the need to investigate why and how parents batter their children, as well as how and why the children and their parents understand the behavior. More attention is paid to the socio-cultural dimension in this research process because it is likely that the Chinese conceptions of child abuse will be strongly influenced by their culture. Under these conditions, while the strength of the quantitative research lies in their ability to indicate the prevalence or distribution of a phenomenon which is deliberately separated from its context, they are disadvantaged when this investigation is likely to encounter too many interrelated and contextualized variables. In contrast, as the strength of the qualitative research lies in their

ability to examine a social phenomenon both in depth and in breadth by deliberate inclusion of the special context into the phenomenon under investigation, and combined with the flexibility of using words instead of numbers. Qualitative methods can more effectively handle many contextual factors, gather rich and descriptive data from the informants, and do meticulous deep studies that are more interested in understanding specific cases (Becker, 1996) and not devaluing them as ‘unrepresentative’.

Third, an important purpose of this study is to listen to children’s views on parental child battering and child abuse, and to compare these voices with those of their parents. Quantitative methods are not quite in line with this research purpose, since a questionnaire survey designed by adults will confine children’s voices. There are also some practical limitations of using questionnaire to elicit information from children in this research, because children may find it difficult to understand and respond to the questionnaire. In quantitative research, children will necessarily fit their responses to the categories set by the adult researchers. In this sense, quantitative methods lead to further power imbalance between children and adults.

Therefore, qualitative research approach is more appropriate in a study that focuses on the conception of physical child abuse among the Chinese in the socio-cultural context of China. However, qualitative research can be conducted in a variety of ways. In one way or another, the goal and the methods of my research approach is similar to the Grounded Theory developed by Glaser and

Strauss (1967), which is a “methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.273). The crucial difference between the Grounded Theory method and other approaches to qualitative research is its emphasis on theory development rather than the mere description and interpretation of phenomena. As mentioned previously, theories relating to child abuse in mainland China have not been developed. For this reason, I am more interested in the generation of an indigenous understanding on the concept of child abuse rather than on the verification of theories already developed. On account of these considerations, the Grounded Theory is more suitable for my study.

The Research Site and Research Process

The research site of this study is Beijing city. Beijing was chosen because on one hand, it is the city in which I have lived for more than twenty years, and have more background knowledge about families there as well as a stronger network to support my fieldwork. On the other hand, Beijing is the capital city of China. It has rich historical and cultural traditions and a lot of immigrant families from other parts of the country, such as Ningning and his mother, Tiantian and his mother, Lanlan and her father, as well as Fangfang and her father (fictitious names are used throughout the dissertation). These advantages can help me collect more abundant data with greater diversity in the socio-cultural context of China. The participants in this research live in six districts of the Beijing city:

DongCheng, XiCheng, XuanWu, ChaoYang, HaiDian and FengTai District where children below the age of 18 generally live in the only-child families.

As mentioned in the Chapter two, research on child abuse in Mainland China is very few, and relevant literature is scarce. This made the data collection process in this research both difficult and important. Preparation for data collection for this study started in February 2004. The first round of fieldwork was conducted between August and October 2004; the second round was made between January and February 2005; and the third round was completed between August and October 2005.

I returned to Beijing from Hong Kong in February 2004, and began to try locating settings in which participants could be recruited for this research. At that time, I had not yet a clear and well-developed theoretical framework for the research, but had in mind some concepts such as “child abuse”, “physical punishment”, “child discipline”, “parental child battering”, “family violence”, and “children’s rights”. I first tried to find participants through organizations working with children and families because potential informants may have more trust in them, and that people who come to seek help from these organizations may also be easier to accept an interview. Therefore, the Beijing Minor Protection Committee and “Child Hotline” were firstly chosen to reach the potential informants.

The office of the Beijing Minor Protection Committee is located inside the Section of Rights and Benefits of the Beijing Youth League. The Committee

has a Law Section, which also deals with cases involving the maltreatment crime towards children and provides legal support for children. The head of the Law Section told me that for the sake of protecting the concerned parties from further harm, they could not refer the completed cases to me. On the other hand, he suggested that I may help them answer calls and participate in collecting evidences for new cases. After discussing this approach with her dissertation supervisor, I felt that court cases were inappropriate for my research questions. This is because cases known to the court were usually very serious ones, and most of them had been already ruled by the court as “maltreatment”. There is usually less disagreement that such serious cases are child maltreatment, and therefore less room for discussion on what is child discipline and what constitute child abuse. Moreover, collecting evidences using the legal procedures is not a morally right thing to do in this study because the confidentiality of the participants cannot be assured. Therefore, the plan was given up.

The Child Hotline was set up and operated by the Beijing Women’s Federation in June 2003, which serves the minor below 18 years old and their parents. The name of the organization seems to suggest that it serves mainly children and aims to protect the rights of children. Unfortunately, however, the Hotline ceased operating shortly after it had started its service. It was merged with a “Family Education Hotline” operated by the Family Education Guidance Center. I wondered whether this suggested that education, rather than rights, is still regarded as the main issue for children. Subsequently, I contacted the Family

Education Guidance Center and its head officer said to me, “Neither parents nor children are aware of the rights of children. They are concerned only with how children can get good results in the college entrance examination. Neither are they concerned with the ability of children to take care of themselves. Children protection is still lacking in the mind of the people. Parents discipline their children and beat them, but they soon make up after beating.” The head officer welcomed me to work as a volunteer in the center.

In August 2004, I reported to the center and found that it had moved away. Its new office was located at a more remote place, and few people know the new number of the Hotline. The head officer of the center said to me with some worry, “Our work is a neglected field. We got fewer people using the hotline after we moved here. Consultation on family education has almost stopped. I’m trying to make it work again. Now, our center is facing difficulties, and I want to find new ways for development.” He hoped that I might give them some suggestions, or write articles for their newspaper, or join their research projects. He requested me to handle an incoming call and answered some enquiries on childcare. He seemed to have a very high expectation on me and wished me to take up many tasks. Considering the time constraint of this study, I felt that the volunteer work in this organization may seriously affect the progress of the research, and, more importantly, the role as a researcher and that of service provider may be confused as the requirements for the two roles are different. Therefore, it is not practical to undertake the research work through this organization. As a result, the plan to use

this organization as a contact point for informants in this research was given up.

Finding research participants through the community should be a better method because all families live in communities. In recent years, both the organization and function of the urban community residential committees have changed a lot. Workers in the committees are selected through examination and election. Most of them are younger and more knowledgeable than their predecessors. Residents assess their performance annually, and if they fail to perform up to residents' satisfaction, they would lose their job in the next election. For this reason, the residential committees' administrative power has been reduced, and they have become an organization serving the residents. As residents tend to have few things to ask for the help of the committees, it is often a difficult process if the committee workers want the residents to do things for them. What is worse is that, as the communities in Beijing consist mostly of separate tall buildings, residents may not know each other even if they live in the same building or on the same floor. Therefore, a 36-year-old committee worker who helped me to find families participating in the research met with great problems. She could only find a family on welfare for my interview, mainly because this family needs help from the committee. Other families she contacted all declined the interview for reasons of "having no time", "not interested in interview", "having nothing to say on this issue", "child having too much homework", "don't like my child to be interfered", "worrying that the interview may affect children's emotions", "child unable to express them adequately", and

so on. Finally, she volunteered to become an informant in this study, and also introduced three colleagues of hers to participate in the interviews. Of course, the relationship between committee workers and residents is also important. Another committee worker who had lived and worked in a flat-house community for over 50 years had much less difficulties in finding participants. That is, the residents gave more “face” to her. After all, China is a society of *renqing guanxi* (interpersonal affectionate relationship) in which *guanxi* is a key factor. *guanxi* refers to a personal connection between two people in which one is able to prevail upon another to perform a favor or service, or be prevailed upon, or a network of contacts, which an individual can call upon when something needs to be done, and through which he or she can exert influence on behalf of another.

I started my field research with a set of criteria for choosing informants and these include the following: that the child informants should be 9 years old or above, attending Grade Four in primary schools or above, and they must be able to express their views more clearly; that they should be single-child living with parents in urban Beijing; that they and their parents should be non-overseas returnees, to make sure that they are indigenous Chinese not systematically exposed to the Western views on child abuse; that parent interviewees should come from different backgrounds in terms of occupation, education, and economic statuses; that the child interviewees and the parent interviewees should be parent-child pairs. The boys and girls above Grade 4 and over 9-year-old were chosen because they should have the ability to form and express opinions on

matters relating to them.

Many researchers point that it is difficult to find the participants for child abuse research and to complete interviews successfully (Kinard, 2001). This study had faced certain difficulties in the process of recruiting informants. Firstly, the phenomenon of parental child battering takes place inside the family which is still a private sphere to many Chinese. Family shames should be kept within the confines of the family, as the Chinese proverb says. So most Chinese are not ready to share their views and experience with the outsiders. Secondly, it involved interviewing child informants whose consent to participate in this study must also be endorsed by their parents. Many parents are unwilling to let their child participate in the interview because of the reasons mentioned above. Thirdly, the study of “child abuse” is a sensitive and unfamiliar topic for a lot of people in China. In fact, in the process of data collection, it was found that the informants easily went off the track to share things outside the family, such as their school life and dissatisfaction with the education system. Last but not the least, because this study intends to compare the views of the children and those of their parents on child discipline, child battering and child abuse, the participants of the interviews were therefore parent-child pairs, which make the recruitment of participants for this study even more difficult.

Because of all these difficulties in finding participants, it was realized that, if I wanted to interview both children and their parents, first, I need to have their trust so that they are not worried about being interviewed. Second, it may be

easier to find participants through my own personal network. But in this case, there is a higher possibility for acquaintance than strangers to participate in research (Chen, 2000). Acquaintance may accept an invitation for interview not because they have a genuine interest in the research, but because of other reasons such as giving “*mianzi*” (face), kindness, or courtesy. Besides, acquaintances may not wish me to know too much about their own family and children, particularly with regard to those things that negative impacted on their “*mianzi*” (face). Therefore, though some of my friends expressed that they could accept my interview, I only chose one acquaintance to interview because she was rather open-minded.

Based on the above considerations, I decided to interview “strangers” through the assistance of my acquaintances. According to Goldstein (1964), this has the advantage of strangers. Because the researcher is a stranger, informants tend to be more willing to speak out their more private messages. Strangers come and go and would not produce much impact on informants’ lives. Therefore, I first approached my acquaintances, explained to them about the research, and asked them to help finding the informants needed. After some days, they told me the phone numbers of the parents who were willing to be interviewed, and then I called these parents, introduced to them my research, and invited them to my interview. Through the parents, invitation was then extended to their children. I emphasized that children’s agreement should be sought. The need for inviting children through parents is because I usually did not have the chance to talk

children directly into accepting the interviews.

Of course, there were cases that declined my acquaintances or my invitation. The reasons for declining interviews varied from case to case, but a common reason for not participating is that they worried about their children being interviewed. This is not because children did not like to be interviewed. It is because their parents did not give consent for their participation. As far as I know, many children were positive about this research. They liked to air out their views and be listened to. However, in an adult-centered world, children have little power, if any. Though some parents expressed to respect their children's decisions on whether they accepted the interviews or not, some parents simply decided for their children, even without children's knowledge, not to participate in a research study that concerns them so much. It is true that many children have much homework to do, and many of them go to extracurricular classes on weekends. Apart from these reasons, there is the unspoken worry of the parents that their children may disclose some family matters which they would not want other people to know. Therefore, many parents did not like their children's involvement in the research; this made finding child participants more difficult than finding adult ones.

Through the help of my acquaintances, I interviewed 16 parent-child pairs between September and October 2004. Because children and their parents were interviewed separately, altogether 32 in-depth interviews were conducted. Among the child informants, there were 9 boys and 7 girls aged between 9-15

years, and all were single-child born in the first half of the 1990s. Among the parent interviewees, there were 10 mothers and 6 fathers. Due to difficulties in finding participants in this research, at the beginning of fieldwork, all parents and children who were willing to participate in this study were interviewed, without regard to the parents' occupation, education, economic statuses and sex. Because of the fact that in Beijing mothers are more likely to be caregivers to their children, it was easier to find female parent informants, and fathers usually did not like to participate. After I had interviewed 8 mothers, it was realized that participation of the fathers is necessary. Therefore, I began to consciously include fathers in the interviews and to assure the participation of parents of different background in occupation, education and socio-economic statuses, as well as ensure that my data are coming from a very wider source.

These interviews were started with a few initial research questions centered on the phenomenon of parental child battering and child abuse in the Chinese context. Because the objective of the study was to explore the indigenous conceptions of child abuse through a qualitative research, it is understood that the researcher need theoretical sensitivity more than a predetermined and well-developed theoretical framework as a study is conducted. Based on this understanding, the research process is more a "process of exploration" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1987, p.12), whereby I could gradually gain more and deeper insights of and understanding on the research questions through the data collection process. This process was developmental and the

research direction was guided by the concepts and insights emerged from the data collected. During the research process, I had to constantly adjust and modify interview guidelines in accordance with the new research direction.

After the first round of data-gathering, I came back Hong Kong to continue with the literature review and transcribe verbatim the data collected. It was found that information on the perceptions of child abuse was inadequate. Therefore, a second round of data-gathering was carried out in Beijing between January and February 2005. Ten of the 16 parent-child pairs interviewed in the first round were interviewed for a second time. So another 20 interviews were carried out, focusing more on their understanding of child abuse. More information on their perspectives on parental child battering and child abuse in the second round interviews was collected.

As this study emphasizes understanding child abuse in the broad context of Chinese culture, there is a need to find a point to start with. Based on the analysis of the data collected in the first two rounds of fieldwork, gradually, I was aware that the understanding of child abuse by the parent and child informants was largely embedded in the context of parent-child relationship, which was then therefore taken as an appropriate point to start with. Parent-child relationship affects children and their parents' understanding of child abuse and its management. With this conceptual framework, the interview guide was readjusted by combining the questions in the first two rounds of interviews, and by adding some questions relating to parent-child relationship and Chinese

culture. On this basis, the third round of data-gathering was carried out between August and October 2005.

The third round of data collection consists of a number of tasks. Firstly, of the 16 parent-child pairs which were interviewed in the first round, 6 pairs could not attend a second round interview because of different reasons. Therefore, these 6 families were contacted so that a supplementary interview with them was conducted. In the end, I successfully interviewed 4 child-parent pairs of them. The other two were not interviewed because Lulu's father refused to participate further with the excuse that he was busy with his work and Mingming and his mother were not in Beijing.

Secondly, it was noticed that the 16 pairs of informants interviewed so far were all living in high-rise flats as most people in Beijing do. Not included are families living in the flat houses, typical and traditional residence of Beijing where neighborhood relations are known to be closer. Subsequently, I interviewed another 3 child-parent pairs living in the flat houses community and to see whether they have different behaviors and views. Finally, I interviewed another girl-father pair living in the high-rise flat to make my research cases more balanced in term of the sexes of the children and their parents. The information that the last few cases added to the total understanding of the research questions seems to be fairly little, suggesting that the data gathered had come to a stage of "theoretical saturation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.61) which meant that it was difficult to find any additional insights from the new data

gathered. Therefore, the individual interviews were stopped at the 20th parent-child pair. The criteria for determining the sampling size of this study was “theoretical saturation”. This saturation is theoretical and relative.

Thirdly, for the purpose of triangulating the data collected from the interviews and to give more emphasis to the views of the children, 3 focus groups were conducted with another 20 children. Choosing school students to participate in focus groups was easier than choosing child interviewees. First, through the teachers I know, I contacted a primary school in the south of urban Beijing and a junior middle school in the north of the city. I went to the schools to introduce my study to the teachers, and expressed my request to find students who are ready to share their views on my research topic in a focus group, which should be with more or less equal in numbers between male and female students. Then the teachers talked to the students about my study, and selected from among the students willing to participate in the focus group and from those who best fit my criteria for inclusion. The heated discussion among the girls and boys participating in the focus groups will be elaborated in more details later in this chapter.

In a word, this research process was basically dynamic and interactional in nature. After transcribing and analyzing all the field data carefully and in detail, I further revised the conceptual framework and started to draft the dissertation report.

Primary Methods of Data-gathering

In-depth interview and focus group discussion are used as data collection methods. While child and parent informants are interviewed individually for the views on the issues concerned, children will also be arranged to discuss and give their views in the focus groups. Hence, for the child informants, they were interviewed both individually and in groups.

The first important question posed to me is whether research with children is the same or different from research with adults (Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellett, & Robinson, 2004; Punch, 2002). In a lot of debates on this question, I do not approve of either extreme that research with children are just the same or entirely different from those of adults. I more agree with the perspective that perceives child to be similar to adults but to possess different competencies (James et al., 1998:189). Children have their views and have competencies to express their views. They lack the chance to voice themselves in an adult-centered society rather than lacking the competencies to give a voice. Boyden and Ennew (1997) pointed that children may have a limited and different use of vocabulary and understanding of words, relatively less experience of the world and may have a shorter attention span. But age is a relative but not an absolute factor influencing the understanding of words and further interview. A 12-year-old child's knowledge and expression may be better than an adult. Therefore adults must strive to abandon the assumption that adults' knowledge is superior to that of children (Alderson & Goodey, 1996).

Some researchers (e.g. Thomas & O’Kane, 2000; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell & Britten, 2002) find that the preferred activities of children may be more effective in bringing out the complexities of their experience than methods and techniques used by/with adults. Nevertheless, Punch (2002) illustrated that some innovative or adapted research methods/techniques such as drawing, photographs often thought to be suitable for use with children can be problematic as well as beneficial. As preferences and competencies vary from child to child in the same way as they do from adult to adult, it is impossible to find the ideal methods for research with children. Since all research methods have advantages and disadvantages, many researchers generally find it best to use some combination or mixture of methods and techniques (Douglas, 1976; Punch, 2002). Hence, I used a combination of data collection methods including in-depth interviews and focus groups to gather qualitative data from the children participants.

“The choice of methods not only depends on the age, competence, experience, preference and social status of the research subjects but also on the cultural environment and the physical setting, as well as the research questions and the competencies of the researcher” (Punch, 2002, p.338). Since one of my research questions is to explore the understanding of children and their parents on child abuse, I therefore need to listen to their views and to select the most effective and feasible method for answering my research questions. In this regard, in-depth interview and focus group methods are more effective than the activity

methods such as drawing or games in answering my research questions. Therefore, in-depth interview is the main method while focus group is the complement employed in this study. Of course, interviews with children were some-what different from interviews with adults.

In-depth interview

Qualitative in-depth interview, sometimes termed as unstructured or informal interviews in contrast to structured interviews that are typical of surveys, is often described by researchers as conversations with a purpose but without predetermined response categories (Marshall, 1995). According to Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1990), in-depth interview is “conversation with a specific purpose – a conversation between researcher and informants focusing on the informant’s perception of self, life and experience, and expressed in his or her own words. It is the means by which the research can gain access to, and subsequently understand, the private interpretations of social reality that individuals hold.” (p.87) Qualitative in-depth interview is regarded as beneficial for rapport enhancement and for the greater understanding that may follow the increased social interaction. As the conversation is flexible and subject to the influence of the context in which it is taking place, the role of the researcher in such an interview is to provide guidance for the general direction of the conversation by establishing a broad focus for the interview.

The interview is often employed effectively in the research with adults. Many scholars also agree that the interview is an especially important means of

obtaining information from children on a wide range of topics (Faux, Walsh & Deatruck, 1988). Children, even as young as three years old, can give graphic descriptions and have excellent recall of experiences related to adverse events, such as illness and disaster and violence (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). Talking is a simple and natural method to use with people who can speak because we talk everyday. “Younger children may have a more limited vocabulary, but equally they may use different language which adults do not understand. Thus the language dilemma is mutual” (Punch, 2002). Furthermore, discussing more abstract questions is difficult for younger children. Thus I have chosen older children (aged 9-15) who have a higher level of language competence than younger children to participate in this research in order to avoid or minimize ‘the language dilemma’.

I had conducted face-to-face semi-structured depth interviews with 20 child-parent pairs in three rounds of data collection. Fourteen pairs from 20 families attended the second interviews. I was aware of the possible influence of the parents on the children’s interviews, and I had taken measures to avoid or minimize this influence. For each parent-child pair, I interviewed child first and then the parent. I also asked the parents to be absent from the child interviews. So the children and their parents were interviewed separately. Every time, the interviews with parents lasted from one to one-and-half hours; the interviews with children lasted from half to one hour considering that children may have a shorter attention span (Boyden & Ennew, 1997).

The time and the places of all interviews were chosen freely by the informants, this made the research open to their own agenda. In the two round interviews of child-parent pairs, 16 were conducted in the informants' home; 8 were in parent-informants' offices, and 5 were in the home of their friends who introduced them to me. The other 5 were carried out in the child's school, the office of a community residents committee and a park respectively. There are different reasons that the informants chose not to be interviewed at their home. Firstly, there were other family-members at home and so it was not convenient. Secondly, some informants said they would feel losing "*mianzi*" (face) if I see their small flat or bad living condition. Thirdly, some informants' residences were far from the center of the city.

Before the interview started, I explained and introduced to each informant my background, my research objectives and methods, the need for their consent to take part in my interview on a voluntary basis, their consent for me to record the interview process, my responsibility to keep all information confidential, and their rights as informants, including their right to refuse to participate in the interview and to withdraw their participation at any point they felt uncomfortable about being interviewed. For all informants, parents as well as children, I obtained their verbal consent for the interview and recording.

I used different interview guides with children and parents, which comprised of a list of topics developed around the research questions, but without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions (see Appendix 2). Moreover,

the actual interviewing process allowed for a great degree of flexibility and openness. In each interview, I tried to elicit spontaneous and free-flowing responses from the informants, and would follow up on their questions according to what they expressed in the interviews. The purpose of doing so is to avoid restricting the informants in expressing their views. It is important to have an open-minded commitment to listen to what children and their parents say about parental child battering and child abuse, and in the ways that they want to talk about it using their own terminologies and language, as pointed out by Yang and Sun (2005), the researchers should put their knowledge aside for the moment in the interviews.

I used “progressive focusing” method (Arksey & Knight, 1999) to conduct interviews. In the beginning of every interview in the first round of data collection, the probing questions were very broad and were around the life experiences of children and their parents related to this research. Gradually, the focus of the interviews was moved on to the specific research questions. Child abuse or maltreatment is a rarely discussed topic among the Chinese in the Mainland China. Therefore, I only brought up the topic for discussion in appropriate timing. Discussing child abuse too early in the interviews may bring informants nervous and uncomfortable feelings, so I usually began to talk about children’s rights and child abuse with the informants in the second half of the interviews.

Interviews with children focused mainly on the following seven topics :

(1) Experiences of growing up; (2) The causes and impact of parental child battering; (3) Parent-child relationship and power relation in the family; (4) Perceptions and attitudes to some Chinese proverb; (5) Understanding of childhood and the child's rights; (6) Understanding on child abuse; (7) Expectation on social intervention in child abuse. In addition to these topics, interviews with parents include two more questions. One is on their background, experience of growing up and parenting practices. The other is on how they compare parent-child relationship today with that of the past.

I have been living in Beijing for more than 20 years. I am about the same age as most parent-informants, have experienced similar social changes, and share similar experience of bringing up children. Similarities in personal and family background are believed to be beneficial for me to understand the backgrounds, life experience, feeling and opinions of the informants. In fact, the interviews and communication with parent informants were rather smooth, sometimes with a lot of laughter and happiness. I also talked with the older children smoothly because I communicated with them in much the same way as I did with my own 12-year-old daughter. Admittedly, however, there had been some difficulties in interviewing two 9-year-old boys. They two often answered like this: "I don't know", "I have never thought about it", "I can not remember" or they just kept silent. The reasons will be analyzed later.

Many researchers point out that the interviewees are usually interested in biographic narrative (Wengraf, 2001; Yang & Sun, 2005). Self-story-telling can

help understand better the life experiences of the informants, reaching “the depth” of in-depth interview. And it is good to lead the interview into a natural condition and relax the informants by starting from their own life stories. In this way, they can start their natural narration. In this light, I tried to use the individual life experiences of children and their parents as a starting point of the interviews. Different life stories may help me to understand the relationship between parents and children in different eras, especially the different attitudes parents hold about their children and the different parenting practices. I found that this method was very suitable for the adults. Usually, the parent-informants talked a lot about their life experiences. Sometimes, I had to stop them because they went off the theme of this research.

This method may be not suitable for children because children often think that there is nothing interesting in telling their growing experiences. The interviews were usually carried out on the holidays, so I usually asked children what they did on Saturdays and Sundays. Afterwards, I started by asking, “*Can you tell me something about your experience of growing up?*” The intention of raising this open question was to give them more space to enter their own world. When they shared their experiences of growing up, I expected that they would inevitably touch on issues such as the way their parents taught them and discipline them. However, children’s responses were not always the same as expected. Perhaps their life experiences were quite limited, very simple, so they felt there was not much they could look back to. Perhaps this question was so

general and abstract that they felt somewhat puzzled and did not know where to start and what to tell. Perhaps this is adult language beyond the comprehension of the children. So it was often necessary to ask further questions like, *“Telling your experience of growing up is to tell me stories about yourself. How did you grow up?”* Most children would respond in two or three sentences. What they usually told was a very specific thing. Still, some young children did not know what to say, so they just said they could not remember. The most interesting answer was, *“I do not care about this and growing up is just good.”* I had to further specify the questions like, *“Are there any happy things since you were born?”* *“Are there any things that you feel unhappy?”* It is only then that the children informants started to dig into their memories.

Only after starting data collection did I realized that interviewing children, especially the younger children, is a difficult work. I believe children do have their own opinions and they have capabilities to express themselves, so long as adults are willing to listen to them. However, interviewing children is different from interviewing adults. In the course of interviewing children, the following difficulties were encountered. Firstly, too general or abstract questions are not suitable for children. Thus there is a need to specify such questions in order to make children understand. For example, the question *“Tell your life experience”* is a very general question. Besides, some concepts like *“child abuse”*, *“the rights of children”*, *“equality”* and so on are too abstract for younger children to understand. Two 9-year-old children said they did not know what *“child abuse”*

meant. Secondly, many children lack the experience of talking with strange adults and they might feel uneasy. They are used to the passive one-question-one-answer response in much the same way as they answer teachers' questions in the school in the Chinese context. For this reason, it was difficult to go deeper into some of the questions. The results of interviews will be better if the researcher can first be familiar with children. Thirdly, younger children were often difficult to concentrate on the questions towards the later part of the interview. Due to their short attention span, it is necessary to raise the major questions as soon as they were ready. A 10-year-old boy informant especially likes ghost stories. He told me many mysterious things that happened in the world as well as his interesting stories. In this case, trust was quickly developing. However, when discussing questions relating to this research, he already got tired and impatient. He stood up, moved around, and asked me, "*How long will you continue to talk with me?*" Fourthly, children might not feel interested in my questions, and I might not understand what they were interested in. A father informant told me, "*If you ask my son about the games, he will have a lot to say.*" Thus, researchers had better know children informants' interests and hobbies and make some preparations beforehand in order to communicate better with them. Fifthly, it is better to raise one short question at one time. If two questions were asked, it is highly probable that they only answer one.

Therefore, even some children who were outgoing and talkative might be taciturn in the interview or they just answered passively. Of course, there is the

possibility that their parents have given them special instructions like they may be told to answer me what they are asked and not to speak too much at their own will. Probably because of school education, children have formed the habits of caring about whether their answers are “right” or “wrong”. Thus researchers should state at the beginning that there is no right or wrong answer in the interview. Moreover, they should pay attention to their tones and eye contacts, and give children more encouragement to make them talk more confidently.

The second round interviews focused more on the informants’ understanding of *guanjiao* (discipline), corporal punishment and child abuse. Three cases of parental child battering that had been widely reported in the Mainland newspapers were chosen for discussion to elicit the responses of the children and their parents. This is helpful especially to children who are in need of some concrete cases to project their opinions. This method is also useful in helping the informants to express their views, which maybe different from those in the first round interviews, because these cases did not involve themselves. It was found that the informants were much more open in the second interviews and they were easier to express their views on corporal punishment and child abuse in cases not involving themselves. On this basis, it is then possible to compare and analyze the differences, if any, in the perspectives and views of the children and their parents in the two round interviews.

The performance of informants in the whole interview process is the object that researchers should observe. I had been careful in not only listening to

what the informants said, but also paying attention to their non-verbal presentation such as actions, facial expressions, tones, moods and so on. Many parents laughed when talking about their child-battering behaviors or their being battered by their parents in childhood. Some children kept silent, sometimes cried in the interviews. The meanings that were expressed need analysis and interpretation. James et al. (1998) point out that non-verbal communication can be a response to lack of power, and that 'for children the body is clearly an important resource of non-verbal communication'. Thus, special attention was given to the messages which children's body language expressed, in addition to their words. For example, a 9-year-old boy gazed around, frowned and sniffed a lot in the interview. Later, I knew that he was sensitive to the bad smell in the room and so he hoped to finish the interview as soon as possible. As a result, this interview was the shortest one. Therefore, the places of interviews must be ones such that children would feel comfortable; otherwise children would be difficult to concentrate on your questions for a long time.

The first round interviews were audio-taped with the verbal consent of the participants. Because the questions in the second round interviews focused on the theme of child abuse, I used the note-taking method to record the interviewing process. This was welcomed by the informants widely. They thought this method was better and freer than audio-recording because, as I jotted down the notes, informants had more time to think about the questions and give more thoughtful answers.

Focus groups

Among the most widely used research tools in the social sciences are group depth interviews, or focus groups (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The use of focus groups as a research method was often to supplement the individual in-depth interviews and participant observation. Focus groups are typically composed of seven to ten people, but the size can range from as few as four to as many as twelve (Krueger, 1988). The participants discuss one or two particular topics under the direction of a facilitator in order to throw light on the differences of their attitudes, perceptions, and opinions. According to Morgan et al. (2002) who conducted focus groups with children aged 7-11 years, “a key task for the facilitator is to maintain an appropriate balance of power in terms of directing and controlling the group, and creating an atmosphere in which participants feel free to discuss (p.8).” The main advantage that the focus groups could offer was the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic within a limited period of time. At the same time, because of the participant-defined nature of group interaction, the focus group setting was less controlled than individual interview (Morgan, 1988).

After two rounds of individual interviews, I felt that the data collected from child informants might be not enough to address the research questions. Therefore, while I proceed with individual interviews, the focus group method was used to gain more understanding of children’s experiences and views on parental child battering and child abuse. Focus groups may be one of the few

research tools available for obtaining data from children (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). In the discussion process, children were the subjects, while I was a listener and moderator who assured the discussion flowing along naturally and remaining on the topic of research interest.

On the 15th, 19th and 23rd of September 2005, I conducted three focus groups involving a total of 20 new children participants (see the Appendix 1). All children and their parents had given their verbal consent for the children to participate in group discussions of the study. These 20 children include 8 boys and 12 girls whose ages are between 10-14 years. Of these three focus groups, the first discussion session was held with 6 pupils in Grades 5 and 6 in a primary school. The second discussion session was held with 6 first year students in a junior middle school; the last one was held with 8 second year students in the same middle school. Each session lasted from one to one-and-half hours. Data collected via focus groups were used to supplement the information gathered in the individual interviews with children for the purpose of enriching the children's conceptions of child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China.

Before each focus group started, I would give them a simple self-introduction and presented them with some gifts (pens and mark pens of different colors). The children were asked to choose the ones they liked and each of them could choose 2 or 3 items. More pens were available to make a greater variety of choices. Children were orderly and happy when selecting gifts. To facilitate the group discussion and to create a more active atmosphere, I first

played a game with them. I asked them to randomly pick up a piece of paper with a number written on it, and write down their names, date of birth, grade in school and a nickname, as well as the occupation of their parents. They just needed to say their numbers when they wanted to speak in discussion and did not need to say their real names. I assured them that their real names would not appear in the research report, and that what they shared would not be revealed to their teachers or parents. I emphasized to them this way, “Today, you are the main characters and please just directly speak out your real opinions. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers and you needn’t worry whether teachers, classmates, parents or I will agree with you or not, so long as the opinions are truly yours. I am your sincere listener, giving no objection, no criticism, perhaps raising questions sometimes.” Hearing this, children generally felt more relaxed in the discussion. At last, they were informed of the necessity of recording and they all agreed to give their consent. Once they were ready, I would lead them to give their views on the topics of discussion.

The topics discussed in the focus groups were around parent-child relationship and their understanding on the problem of child abuse. The questions that I asked them are like, “*Do you think parental child battering is nuedai ertong (child maltreatment/abuse)?*” “*Do you feel parental child battering affects your parent-child relationship?*” I found that children participating in the focus groups were excited and absorbed when adults carefully listened to them. Especially, the Junior One students of the junior middle school had a strong

desire to express themselves. Their discussion was really heated, as they tried to grasp every opportunity to speak. They asked to continue the discussion when the time was up for class. Some students proposed that they could go on with the discussion after school but it was only a suggestion without their parents' consent.

The school environment is a place for children to learn, but is organized and controlled by adult teachers. In arranging the focus groups with the students in the schools, the permission of the teachers had to be sought first. The teachers commonly asked me, "What do you study?" Knowing that the context of the study was in families and not in the school, they felt more relieved in this study. Perhaps, it is not easy to get the support of the teachers if the topic of the discussion was related to the school or the teachers.

Based on the experience in this study, focus groups easily enable the children to take an active role in the research process. Comparing with the individual depth interviews, an important advantage of focus groups is that it is able to reduce the inherent power imbalance between adult researchers and children. Children can support each other in the focus group so that there is a better power balance with an adult researcher. The experience in this study also suggests that five or six participants aged 10-14 years are probably ideal within a limited duration of one or one-and-half hours. This numbers is small enough for everyone to have opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions.

Reflection on Researcher's Relationship with Informants

Reflexivity should be a central part of the qualitative research process, especially research with children. "Method" and "Methodology" indicate different levels of analysis (Bryman, 1984). Methodology encompasses more than simple data gathering technique or method. It refers to an epistemological position. Qualitative research pays special attention to the relations between the researcher and the researched. "The freedom to communicate will depend not only on the availability of appropriate communication mechanisms and sensitive interpretation, but also on the power relations in the exchange and attitudes established over time" (Detheridge, 2000, p.114). Power is present throughout the research process, including the process of representing the data and findings in the write-up of dissertation report.

Therefore, I try my best to reduce the power imbalance existing between me and the informants as I strived to build up an equal, cooperative and mutually respecting relationship with the children and parents participating in this study. From identifying informants to finishing the work of data collection, I had given informants great respect. They not only have rights to accept or refuse the interview, they could also choose the time and place of the interview. This can strengthen their confidence and control in the research. Half of the interviews were conducted in the informants' home where they were relatively more in control. They showed me around their houses and showed their children's photos, and even asked me to stay and eat together.

Although it is the researcher that led the interviews, “power draw” sometimes emerged between parent-informants and me in the interview process. Parents tended to talk about the topics that they are concerned, such as school education, their brilliant past, the relationship between relatives and so on. On one hand, I was sensitive to if these were valuable clues in their talks; on the other, I had to pull them back aptly when they went too far away from this research. It is common that they would return to the topics they liked and I had to pull them back again. This draw of power manifested itself in different ways in different interviews.

Qualitative research emphasizes on the dynamics between the researcher and the researched and the joint construction of meaning (Mishler, 1986), so that mutual understanding through communication may be reached. There had been very good interaction between me and the participants in this research. Without being imposing, I sometimes shared my own experiences of living with family violence in my childhood and my parenting style. This proves to be useful. The informants would then offer their valuable information and views on the research questions. Actually, this empathic communication gave encouragement to the informants, especially those who did not like talking more about themselves.

I had tried to establish a relation of trust with the parent-informants, as well as with the child-informants, which sometimes put me in an embarrassing position. I need carefully to deal with the relation of trust between us. Once, I interviewed a 14-year-old boy and his mother was waiting outside. As soon as

the interview was completed and the boy went out of the room, his mother asked him in seemingly a joking manner, *“Did you only say that your mother is rude?”* The boy answered hurriedly: *“No!”* I also said *“no”* and praised the boy. They happily went home hugging each other. In another interview with a father, he was very dissatisfied with his son. He continued to talk about the problems of his son when he saw me off. His son said unhappily, *“Please stop that! The teacher has her own business to mind.”* In this case, I was not able to continue talking with this father.

Children participating in this research are considered as a person with rights, dignity and agency. However, as an adult, I am aware that there is generation gap between me and the child participants. In this light, the views of children could only be found out through learning from them and listening attentively to their voices. In the first meeting, these children called me “teacher” or “auntie”. I introduced that, *“I am a research student and you may call my name.”* Friendly self-introduction often makes children feel closer and more relaxed. I often consulted my daughter about the children world, as well as also took her with me to the interviews for twice. She played with the children informants before I started the interview. This had added to children’s trust and acceptance of me. I tried my best to listen attentively to what the children were talking and this made them feel my respect for them and experience a sense of equality with me. Some children shared with me their secrets and asked me not to tell their parents or other people. A mother once said, *“My son was very*

excited and delighted after chatting with you. Hope you can talk to him more.”

I felt the happiness of being trusted.

“*Renqing guanxi*” (interpersonal affectionate relationship) is an important facilitating factor in this research. Any research is conducted in a certain social cultural context. Therefore, research methods should be used by considering the cultural conditions. Interview is a troublesome thing to a lot of Chinese people who commonly hold the cultural wisdom “*duo yi shi bu ru shao yi shi*” (the less trouble, the better), and they are not prepared to expose their family life, not to say revealing family shame to the public. Therefore, many of them do not want to accept the research interviews which they consider a waste of their time. However, Chinese care a lot about “*Renqing guanxi*”. Accepting a research interview is more likely if there is the presence of “*Renqing guanxi*” between the person who extends an invitation for interview and the one who are invited. A parent-informant clearly said, “*I accepted the interview because of giving mianzi (face) to my friend (who introduced me to you), otherwise why I do so?*” Informants’ trust of their introducers laid the foundation for the completion of data collection in this research. Without the help of the introducers, it would be very difficult for me to find so many parent-child pair informants and win their trust in a relatively short duration. It appears that the first round of interviews had given them a good impression and this is the reason for them to agree to take part in the second round interviews.

Upon careful reflection, “*renqing guanxi*” might have negative effect on

this research. A “stranger” who was introduced by an acquaintance to me might worry that I may leak his/her secret to the introducer. If this is the case, he/she might not be ready to disclose too many family things to me. If my relationships with introducers become bad, this would affect the relationship between informants and me, and vice versa. All that can be said is that the prerequisite of a successful interview is the informants’ trust of the researcher. The researcher must keep her promise of keeping the content of the interviews confidential. Besides, some informants had more extraneous expectations on me, because of “*Renqing guanxi*” and my revealed identity as a “professor”. From this experience, I learned that researchers must be alert of their roles in relation to the informants because it will affect the interactions and relations between both sides. Therefore, I needed to consider carefully in dealing with such complicated relations.

Although researchers inevitably have more power in leading knowledge production, I have made great efforts to build up a relative equal relation with the informants in the research process.

Ethical and Legal Issues

What power do I have to understand someone else's life? Will the research cause new harms to children? What can I do for the informants in this study? Must I obtain consent from both the parents and the children? These are all important ethical and legal issues to consider in this research study. It would

be unethical to complete my dissertation at the expense of the needs, feelings, rights and interests of the informants. Therefore, whether in the process of research or afterwards, great care had been exercised to prevent causing harms to the children and their families. If there are any signs that they were uncomfortable with the interviews and that they felt hurt as a result of being interviewed, I would consider the need to refer informants for counseling services. Since no such signs were observed in my research interviews, no referrals were ever made during the research process. For all cases, I had left my phone number and email address to the informants in case they need help after the interview. Again, I had not received any request from my informants for help.

The principle of voluntary participation was strictly adhered to in this study. Only those parents and children who both were willing to participate in this study were interviewed. I obtained the verbal consents of all parent and child participants. The recording of the interviews and focus groups were known and were agreed by the informants. The confidentiality of information obtained was also strictly observed. Specially, all the names of informants used in the dissertation were not the real names to safeguard their privacy.

Research on child abuse is notoriously difficult to conduct because the sensitivity of the topic reduces the likelihood of subject participation (Kinard, 2001). “*Nuedai ertong*” (Child maltreatment/abuse) is a word which is not familiar and rarely used among the Chinese in the Mainland. If the parents were given to know that child abuse was a central concern of this study, their antipathy

to the study would be provoked. They would probably say that they had never abused their child or they did not understand “*nuedai ertong*” and so would refuse to be interviewed. Therefore, the informants were informed that it is a study on parenting and *guanjiao*. Despite this tactful introduction of this research, no damage had been caused to the informants.

As I sought the consents of the informants to take part in this study, I promised them five things. Firstly, the names of all interviewees will be changed and the information collected for the purpose of this study will be kept confidential. Secondly, the interviews would not actively touch on your family privacy. If the informants think it is privacy, they have the rights not to respond. Thirdly, the contents of the interviews would only be used for the purpose of academic research. Fourthly, If informants so request, all the recording can be destroyed after this research is completed. Fifthly, the informants have the rights to quit this research any time they want at no cost. I had adhered to these promises in the whole research process. A father informant telephoned me when the interview was finished. He requested me to destroy the audio record of the interview because he had mentioned something about his friends. Actually, what he said was nothing sensitive. He did so probably because of other considerations. The researcher in the end entertained his request.

Some informants hoped I could help them. A mother informant hoped I could give her child some psychological help. However, after the interview, I did not find her child had any psychological problems. Some parents hoped I could

offer them some advice and guidance on how to educate children. I had tried to respond to their request so long as it would not affect the interviews. What really constituted a problem was a father informant asking help to find his son a job in three years later. Understandably, it is not easy to find a job in the fiercely competitively Chinese labor market. Therefore, I could not give the father a definite promise and only could tell him to guide his son to acquire essential skills so as to make good preparations for the future. Deep down my heart, I do not hope that they need my help to find a job. However, I would try my best to help if they really turned to me for help. Researchers should not only collect data from the informants, they also should help the informants, especially when they have difficulties.

This research seems to have influenced the participants in two main aspects, first is to empower children; second is to make parents/adults reflect upon their attitudes and behaviors to children. At the same time, the research may have affected the parent-child relationship because it also pays attention to the rights of children. A father informant said, "*My daughter talked about the child's rights with her mother after being interviewed. She wants her rights.*" It can be said that children have been more conscious and aware of their rights. In the second round interviews, some children told me that their parents' attitudes to them became better and that the parents had battered them less than before. Maybe, many parent informants had begun to reflect on themselves. So, there is the hope of change as a result of this study.

Creditability and Limitations

How to judge the trustworthiness of the research is a topic with dispute. Qualitative research attempts to capture people's meanings, definitions and descriptions of events, and seeks to uncover the thoughts, understandings and feelings experienced by informants. Therefore, different from quantitative researchers, the qualitative researchers prefer to judge the trustworthiness of their research by the "credibility" criterion (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.307-315). Credibility refers to the extent to which credible findings and interpretations will be produced.

My own life experiences and my background knowledge had helped to reduce possible distortions in interpreting the data collected. Through unceasingly reflecting on the process of data collection and data analysis, I have tried my best to avoid imposing my own desire, understanding and views on the informants. For example, one of the concerns of this study is how children explain parental child battering, and how they understand child abuse. I originally expected that children's views were different from parents'. In fact, however, it is found that some children's views were similar to and were the same as those held by their parents.

What the qualitative researcher cares about is not whether the informants have told a lie or not, but why they said so and what the subjective intention and meanings are behind this. Therefore, I had intentionally looked for the conflicting contents in the data and analyzed the reasons. Some interviewed children forgot

the things that their parents have mentioned to me. It was not sure if some children had intentionally forgotten unpleasant things or they only were not willing to say such things further. It may be their survival skill to forget unpleasant things because forgetting can make powerless and puny children much happier. For example, I once asked a boy who was often beaten by his father what unpleasant things he had since his childhood. After long silence, he replied, “*A lot, but I cannot remember.*” In addition, in the interviews and focus groups, what the children shared might not be their own views, but probably the views of their parents/adults. Theoretically, it is possible that children have internalized the views of the adults. Besides, it is also possible that adult informants concealed the fact that they had beaten their children and said something very general in response to the probes of the researcher in order to leave me a good impression. They may also have answered questions in a way they think the researcher might expect. Because of these possibilities, different methods of data collection were built in this study to assure the credibility of the data obtained. In analyzing the data, I had been cautious of all these issues that could possibly affect the data quality.

I had so focused the second round interviews that they could provide the opportunity to check on the credibility of the information obtained in the first round interviews. The focus groups have also served the purpose of “triangulation”, allowing an additional source of information to enhance the credibility of the data collected through individual interviews. Observation in the

natural context had also played an important role in discovering other valuable information. The researcher was generally unable to participate in the family to observe the occurrence and process of parental child battering. However, since some interviews were conducted in the homes of the informants, it is possible to observe their living environment and the interaction among their family members. In addition, I intentionally observed the parent-child interaction in those places which mustered many children and parents, such as outside the gates of primary schools when parents send and pick up children, learning classes after school, children activity centers and so on. The observation helps me further understand contemporary parent-child relationship in the only child families of Beijing. Field notes jotted down these observations in detail.

Besides interviewing the child-parent pairs, I had informally talked with some additional children and adults (not pairs), in order to get added information on child abuse in the Beijing city. Major media reports about parental child battering and child abuse were also referred to because the viewpoints on newspapers and TV are also a reflection of the adult's perception in the local socio-cultural context. These had provided me with new information to further check on the credibility of the data collected from the in-depth interviews and focus groups.

In a word, to a qualitative researcher, what are important is not only whether you have obtained the enough data but also how you obtained these data and whether your data are reliable. The process which data collection were

planned and implemented in this study has been rigorous. The trustful relationship between the informants and me for each other made it easier to obtain reliable data. It is fair to say that many methods have been built into this research process as well as the research findings to ensure its credibility as far as possible.

Surely, there are also limitations in this research. The use of qualitative research precludes the possibility of generalizing the research findings of this study, though a set of criteria for inclusion of informants had been specified to mitigate the possible effect of “non-randomized” choice of interviewees. In addition, due to my lack of experience on studying children and my insufficient understanding on the children's interests and hobbies, these might have affected the data collected from the child informants. So there is a need to invest more time to understand and learn from children, this is helpful to form a trustful relationship with the children at the beginning of the research.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis in qualitative research is often an ongoing and iterative process of data collection, interpretation and formulation of theoretical propositions (Babbie, 1992). Throughout this process, theory plays an important role because the researcher has to constantly rely on theoretical propositions to guide description, understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore in this study, the presentation of the data will follow a

descriptive framework derived from the theoretical framework.

The data analysis method of this study is similar to the Grounded Theory method. One central feature of the Grounded Theory is the method of “constant comparative analysis.” According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.105-113), “the constant comparative method” of data analysis involves basically four stages. The first stage is coding and comparing incidents applicable to each category. The researcher starts by coding each incident in the data into as many categories of analysis as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerge that fit an existing category. The second stage is to integrate the diverse categories and their properties. The third stage is the delimiting stage in which the researcher reduces the properties which are considered as not relevant to the emerging theory and concentrates on developing those properties which are central to the theory. The fourth stage is the writing of the theory. The researcher turns the coded data and memos into major themes and develops a theory.

Data analysis in this study is a continuous and lengthy process. First, I myself transcribed all the tape recordings into written Chinese texts about four hundred thousand words. This process should be seen as “a key phase of data analysis within interpretive qualitative methodology” (Bird, 2005, p.227), and recognized as an *interpretive act*, where meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical act of putting spoken sounds on paper (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). In my process of transcribing the data collected, I noted, identified (similar to coding) a lot of indigenous concepts such as “*guan*” (discipline), “*jiazhang*”

(the family head), “*bu jichou*” (not bear grudges), “*zhang jixing*” (remembering the lesson), “*bu da bu cheng cai*” (spare the rod and spoil the child), and “*wang zi cheng long*” (expecting one’s son to be a dragon). I tried to make sense of these indigenous concepts to understand the informants’ perspectives on parental child battering and child abuse in the broader context of Chinese culture.

Second, I constantly read the transcribed data so as to further keep track of the emerging concepts and their meaning. The raw data relevant to my research questions was transformed into meaningful concepts, such as affection, responsibility, power, right, *guan* (discipline), corporal punishment, maltreatment, and so on.

Third, after repeatedly reading the data and comparing these concepts, I then attempted to identify the relation between the concepts and re-focused data analysis at the broader level of themes. These different concepts were re-organized into the potential themes, for each of them related field data are presented and described. The identified themes are then interpreted at both theoretical and empirical levels. In this research study, I had concluded four major themes as a result of the abovementioned data analysis process, namely, parent-child relationship, child battering, child abuse, as well as the differences between children’s views and parents’ views. Then, data are presented with respective to these four identified themes and their sub-themes. Through the process of vigorously analyzing the data, the conceptions of physical child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China was evolved.

The major difficulty in the data analysis and presentation is how to connect the specific data with the theoretical framework, which generated the framework for analyzing the data. Bearing in mind the affective relationship and the power relation between parents and child in one-child family, I attempt to analyze the views and attitudes of children and parents on parental child battering, as well as their understanding of child abuse, to compare the similarities and differences in the viewpoints of children and parents, and to construct the conception of child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China. Therefore, the four chapters of data presentation will be devoted to the parent-child relationship, views of the parents, views of the children, and a comparison of views between parents and children.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the rationales for choosing the qualitative research methodology as well as the reasons for employing the data collection methods of in-depth interview and focus group. As an exploratory study on the understanding of child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China, the nature and requirements of the study match more appropriately with the features of the qualitative research than the quantitative research. The research approach is similar to the Grounded Theory. The methods of in-depth interview and focus group are more appropriate and effective in answering my research questions. The question whether doing research with children is the same or different from doing research with adults was also discussed.

I have presented in detail the research process, including the difficulties to find research sites and research informants, especially the child informants, as well as the situation of three rounds of data collection. Twenty parent-child pairs were interviewed and 14 pairs of them attended the second interviews. The progressive focusing method and biographic narrative method were used in the interviews. Three focus groups with 20 new children participants were conducted to supplement the data of individual interviews.

Importantly, this chapter discussed the relationship between the researcher and the informants and the related research ethics involved. On one hand, I as the researcher made great efforts to build up an equal and respectful relationship of trust with the informants. On the other, the power relation throughout the process of data collection, data analysis and presentation was reflected on. The set of issues relating to the credibility and limitations of the research data have been discussed.

I am happy to see that the research process has also been a process through which the researcher empowers children and makes parents/adults reflect upon their own values and parenting practices.

Chapter Four Profile of the Informants

Introduction

China has implemented the one-child family policy since 1979. This policy has been strictly enforced particularly in the urban area. Since this research study was conducted in urban Beijing, therefore, the participants in this research are the only-child and their parents. Most of them live in nuclear families. These only-children were born in the early 1990's when China experienced the fastest economic development which has brought great improvements in material life. Advanced information technology allows this generation to receive information from every corner of the world. While various innovations and developments bring hopes, they also widen the gap between the rich and the poor and intensify social competition. On the other hand, the parents of these children were born in the 1950's and 60's and experienced the Great Cultural Revolution. They lived through their childhood in stark poverty materially and spiritually. There was then no wealth gap and not much competition, which is entirely different from the environment in which their children grow up. This chapter describes the characteristics of the informants and how their backgrounds may affect the findings of the study.

Family Economic Situation

The informants come from families of different economic backgrounds. Most of the children and parents participating in the interviews and focus groups are from the ordinary wage-earning families which consist mostly of dual-wage families with a

monthly income of 1500 to 10000 Yuan in 2004. Their financial background and life situation is similar to the economic and life situation of most ordinary citizens in Beijing. In addition, the participants of this research study include the poor families which depend on the “Minimum Living Standard Guarantee” from government (welfare recipients), as well as the rich businessman family.

The families with the poorest economic situations are Xiaogang family, Xiaoqiang family and Ningning family. The parents of these three families all got financial assistance from their parents, brothers and sisters, so as to meet the expenses of their children. Xiaogang’s father is a laid-off worker whose wife died of illness some years ago. Xiaogang and his father lived on the government’s Minimum Living Standard Guarantee (300 Yuan/person/month), and had to depend on Xiaogang’s grandmother and grandfather to support their living expenses. With the financial assistance of the extended family, Xiaogang still had to give up his extra-curricular classes because of the financial difficulty of his family. Xiaoqiang’s father is an ordinary worker whose wage fell again and again as the unit he worked for faced depression. After being laid off, his wife found another job and is still on probation. So they sometimes had to depend on his mother and sister. For Ningning, he lived with his mother after the divorce of his parents. He and his mother moved from Shandong to Beijing and got the economic assistance from his uncle and grandparents. From these three families, we can see that the parents’ relationships with their families of origin are very close. As long as their parents, brothers and sisters are capable, they will financially help parents of Xiaogang, Xiaoqiang, and Ningning to tide over their financial difficulty if necessary.

The most well off family in this study is Dongdong’s. His father is a businessman.

The family not only has a house in the downtown, but also a villa in the suburb area. Dondong' needs in life and study can be met entirely. However, he is still often battered by his parents due to his study problem, disobedience and naughtiness.

Most families are living on a salary or wage income. Therefore, the results of this research at best reflect the perspective of the Beijing ordinary wage-earning class. At the same time, the findings of this research do not seem to support the views that economic conditions of a family influence parental child battering. They neither do not have any effect on the parents and children's views on child abuse problem.

Occupations of the Parent Informants

As can be seen from Table 1, the parent informants come from different background of occupations, with the exception of Dongdong's mother who was a housewife and Xiaogang's father who was unemployed at the time of the interview. The occupational background of the parent informants include worker, teacher, editor, journalist, policemen, civil servant, accountant, retired doctor, nurse, as well as employees in social organizations and Community Residents' Committees. KK's mother, Tingting's father, Jingjing's mother and Jiajia's mother are working in the community residents' committees. They are all ordinary workers before they joined the community residents' committees. They took up their present job because of the redundancy of their original work units or the convenience of taking caring their child. These parents do not have a social work qualification, because mainland China did not conduct the certification of "social worker" occupation qualification until the summer of 2008. The parents of the child informants in the focus groups are mainly company employees, workers, managers, drivers, civil servants, accountants and employees in service

industries.

Table 1: Occupations of the parent-informants

	Name	Occupation		Name	Occupation
1	Huanhuan's mother	Financial planner	11	Mingming's mother	Doctor
2	Xiaojun's mother	Accountant	12	Lanlan's father	Police
3	Yuanyuan's mother	Civil servant	13	Xiaogang's father	Unemployed
4	Ningning's mother	Immigrant worker	14	Tingting's father	Community Worker
5	KK's mother	Community worker	15	Maomao's father	Civil Servant
6	Jingjing's mother	Community worker	16	Qingqing's mother	Primary Teacher
7	Dongdong's mother	Housewife	17	Jiajia's mother	Community worker
8	Tiantian's mother	Journalist	18	Xiaoqiang's father	Worker
9	Hanghang's father	Editor	19	Chenchen's mother	Nurse
10	Lulu's father	NGO employee	20	Fangfang's father	University Teacher

Policeman, teacher, doctor, nurse, civil servant, journalist and social worker are considered to be professional class in the West. In many Western countries, these professionals bear special responsibilities for prevention and treatment of child abuse. For this reason, they are expected to hold a more positive attitude and perception of the child abuse problem compared to the non-professionals. However, in nowadays Chinese mainland, child abuse has not been publicly recognized as a social problem. Thus, the awareness of the professionals and their duty to child abuse in Mainland China are different from those of their Western counterparts. There are not significant differences in their attitude and perspectives between these so-called professionals and non-

professionals about the issues of parental child battering and child abuse. This study does not find the understanding of physical child abuse being affected by the occupations of the interviewed parents.

Therefore, although I interviewed more parents who are professionals, this does not affect the credibility of my research findings. Needless to say, this research cannot include parents with all kinds of occupations due to the small sample sizes. Even if it has included parents from a wide spectrum of occupational background, this does not mean that the results of this research represent the perspectives of all parents. Generalization of findings to the population is not aim of this exploratory study.

Educational background of the parent informants

The educational level of the parent informants ranges from junior high school to doctorate degrees as showed in Table 2. The educational attainment of most of the parent informants reaches senior high school (including special/technical secondary school), junior college and university bachelor degree. Most of the parent informants were born in the 1960s, with the exception of Mingming's mother, Xiaoqiang's father, Jiajia's mother and Tingting's father who were born in 1950s. Their age ranges between 36 and 52. Generally, they are all graduates from the senior high schools in Beijing downtown. The parents born in 1960s left their high school at a time when the college entrance examination resumed after the Great Cultural Revolution, when everyone was craving for better and more qualifications, a phenomenon which is now referred to as "qualification fever". Many parents who could not, or did not, go to study in the colleges at that time later chose to study further to earn an adult junior college diploma to increase their

competitive edge in the labour market.

Table 2: Educational level of the parent-informants

	Name	Education		Name	Education
1	Huanhuan's mother	Diploma	11	Mingming's mother	Diploma
2	Xiaojun's mother	Degree	12	Lanlan's father	Special Secondary School + Diploma
3	Yuanyuan's mother	Degree	13	Xiaogang's father	Senior High School
4	Ningning's mother	Junior High school	14	Tingting's father	Senior High School
5	KK's mother	Senior High School	15	Maomao's father	Degree
6	Jingjing's mother	Senior High School + Diploma	16	Qingqing's mother	Diploma
7	Dongdong's mother	Degree	17	Jiajia's mother	Special Secondary School
8	Tiantian's mother	Master	18	Xiaoqiang's father	High School
9	Hanghang's father	Master	19	Chenchen's mother	Special Secondary School + Diploma
10	Lulu's father	Junior High school + Diploma	20	Fangfang's father	Doctor

Compared with the educational level of Beijing citizens, the parent informants have higher educational qualifications, parents with degree above college accounting for one third of all parent informants. On the one hand, this is a result of the characteristics my interpersonal relationship network. I had not refused these parents and their children because it is not easy to find child informants for my study; on the other hand, this is partly related to my research question. I did not avoid consciously to exclude the middle class and professional groups because child abuse has not aroused public concern in China. Most of the people are not familiar to Chinese people. Though their participation in my study, I hope that the people with high educational degree can have more and

deeper understanding of child abuse when they discuss the issue with me.

Because the parent informants who have generally more education, this research may not reflect the opinions of parents who are less educated. In addition, this research did not support that the attitudes of the parents to child battering and their understanding of child abuse are in any way related to their educational levels, though parents with less education have a more simplistic understanding of physical child abuse, and the understanding of the better educated parents is more thoughtful and sophisticated. Being a qualitative study, this research project considers that the “depth” and “width” of the data are more important. This is unlike quantitative research, which usually put the representation of the sample to the population as paramount.

Marital Status and Family Type

Ningning’s mother, Tiantian’s mother and Xiaogang’s father are single-parent and the others are married. The marital status may affect child discipline and parenting. Ningning’s parents and Tiantian’ parents have divorced for many years. At the time of this study, Ningning can meet his father regularly. On the other hand, Tianian has not seen his father since he was 1 year old. Xiaogang’ mother died of disease when he was 6 years old, and his father loved him all the more so as to compensate for his lack of maternal love. Huanhaun’s father, Dongdong’s father and Mingming’ father are always absent from home due to work. Their mothers are more like single-parents. They feel enormous pressure in child discipline and education. In most of these families, mothers always bear the main responsibility to take care of their kids, even if their husbands share this responsibility at times. In a small number of families, like those of Hanghang,

Yuanyuan, and Maomao, the fathers may assume more responsibility in child discipline. However, this is uncommon in Beijing.

Most of the interviewees live in the nuclear families, generally the three-person families comprising of the parents and the single child. Huanhuan's family, Jingjing's family, Dongdong' family and Mingming's family have their grandmothers and grandfathers together. The grandparents had helped to take care of the children when the kids were young. In these families, the grannies and grandpas may intervene in parental child battering.

With the exception of Jiajia, Xiaoqiang and Chenchen's families who live in the traditional old flat house communities with relatively poor living conditions, most of the informants live in the private self-contained flats in the apartment communities. Those who live in the apartment community have little communication with each other. However, unlike residents in the apartment communities, the neighborhood relationships are closer in the traditional old flat house communities.

The marital status, family types and living types of the informants in this study are diverse. These reflect the general condition of Beijing downtown residents currently.

Features of the Child Informants

The 40 children participated in this research are between the fourth grade in primary schools (9-10 years old) and the third grade in junior high schools (14—15 years old). Roughly, more or less the numbers of children of both sexes are included in this study (see the Table 3).

Table 3: Personal particulars of 40 child informants

Child-interviewees				Child participants in focus groups					
	Name	Age	Sex	Grade		Name	Age	Sex	Grade
1.	Huanhuan	12	F	Form 1	1.	Xingyue	11	F	Primary 6
2.	Xiaojun	12	M	Form 1	2.	Leilei	10	F	Primary 5
3.	Yuanyuan	12	F	Form 1	3.	Xiaoxiao	11	F	Primary 6
4.	Ningning	10	M	Primary 5	4.	Dagu	10	M	Primary 5
5.	KK	11	F	Primary 6	5.	Xiaoyu	11	M	Primary 6
6.	Jingjing	9	M	Primary 4	6.	Xuenan	10	F	Primary 5
7.	Dongdong	10	M	Primary 5	7.	Dajie	12	M	Form 1
8.	Tiantian	12	M	Form 1	8.	Mingren	12	M	Form 1
9.	Hanghang	9	M	Primary 4	9.	Shanshan	12	F	Form 1
10.	Lulu	12	M	Form 1	10.	Honghai	12	M	Form 1
11.	Mingming	13	M	Form 2	11.	Meimei	12	F	Form 1
12.	Lanlan	10	M	Primary 5	12.	Zhuzhu	12	F	Form 1
13.	Xiaogang	14	M	Form 3	13.	Xiaolong	13	M	Form 2
14.	Tingting	12	F	Form 1	14.	Yulu	13	F	Form 2
15.	Maomao	10	F	Primary 5	15.	Xiaoyan	13	F	Form 2
16.	Qingqing	11	F	Primary 6	16.	Xiaotang	13	M	Form 2
17.	Jiajia	15	F	Form 3	17.	Yiyi	13	F	Form 2
18.	Xiaoqiang	15	M	Form 3	18.	Juanjuan	13	F	Form 2
19.	Chenchen	11	M	Primary 6	19.	Zhenzhen	13	F	Form 2
20.	Fangfang	12	F	Form 1	20.	Wutong	13	F	Form 2

Children below 8 years old and the third grade in primary school were not included in the study, because, firstly, I worry that it is not easy for them to understand the child abuse issue, to form their views and express them clearly in the research process; secondly, researching younger children needs special methods and techniques, such as painting and playing games; however, I have not received any training in doing research with small children.

Senior high school students were not included in this study because firstly, many of them do not consider themselves as children. The Chinese academics neither define them as children because of their age. The definitions of “the child” and “the minor” are different in China. Senior high school students are minors, but not children. Secondly, senior high school students are faced with very heavy study pressure as they are preparing for the college entrance examination. They normally do not have time to be interviewed. I also do not want to interrupt them.

Most child informants were Form 1 students in the junior high schools. They were about 12 years old. Some of them consider themselves as children, and some do not. This is an age with a fast-developing mind. This is a time when they are so longing to express their ideas. Thus, Form 1 students in the junior high school behave very actively in individual interviews and focus groups. When I asked their teachers why these students behave in such a way, the teachers explained like this: “Elementary students have not yet had a good ability of expression. Junior One students think they have grown up. They want very much to express their views and opinions. As they grow older and older, they will become more and more reluctant to talk to adults. If the participants are Junior Three students, they will be not as talkative as the Junior One students do in discussion.”

I have chosen older children aged between 9 and 15 to participate in this research. Therefore, the findings of this study reflect more the views of this group of young people on parental child battering and physical child abuse. In this connection, this research would inevitably neglect the voices of younger children and senior high school students on these issues.

Chapter Summary

Qualitative research does not seek representativeness as quantitative studies often do. Its results cannot be generalized to the population. Therefore, this study is not expected to represent the views of the “the general public”. They are only relevant to the informants or people with similar background at best. For this reason, I usually mentioned in this thesis that “the child informants”, “the parent informants”, or “parents and children participating in this study”, instead of the Chinese children and the Chinese parents. I hope this chapter has set the scene for the presentation of findings in the next four chapters.

Chapter Five Affection and Power Relation between Parents and Children in One-child Families in Beijing

Introduction

As indicated in the literature, emphasis on relationship is one of the key characteristics of Chinese culture, the Chinese often put themselves into the interpersonal relationship context when attempting to understand and explain their behaviors. As parental child battering and other kinds of child abuse concern the relationship between parents and children, and the latter in turn affect both parties' understanding of the former, without a good understanding of the parent-child relationship, it is difficult to understand the Chinese conceptions of parental child battering and child abuse. In the present China where economy, politics, ideas and conceptions change rapidly, the parent-child relationship in the Chinese one-child family has also undergone a subtle change.

Affection and power are both elements of parent-child relationship (Li, 1998), albeit they are not all. This chapter will present parent-child relationship by referring to the concepts of "*affection*" and "*power*" therein. By presenting the affection, responsibilities, rights and power relationships between parents and children through description in depth of the informants' living conditions, views and understanding of parent-child relationship, it is hoped that the cultural embodiment of the parent-child relationship of the Chinese can be revealed. Believably, this will provide the necessary background for understanding the meaning and construction of child

abuse by parents and children in Chapters Six, Seven and eight. As the first chapter on data presentation, this forms the basis for understanding the subsequent chapters.

Parent-child Affection (1) : Responsibility between Parents and Children

As indicated in the literature, Chinese culture has a “*family-centered*” character. Parent-child affection in the Chinese family is close and enduring, and mutual care between parents and children is lifelong. Affection is often exhibited in the sense and acts of responsibility. Taiwanese scholar Yang Guoshu (2004) once pointed out that the principle of treating family members is the principle of undertaking responsibility. In the family, each member should stress responsibility, do what they should do, and take responsibility which they should take for one another, and not expect equal payback. Responsibility is different from obligation. Obligation and rights are reciprocal and are based on social exchange, and obligation is discharged to obtain rights. However, responsibility is not an apparent condition for exchange. Since the responsibility between Chinese parents and their children is mutual and the interest of the children is, to a certain degree, also the interest of the parents and the family, “*doing what is good for the child*” partly means “*doing what is good for the parent*”, though parents do not expect their children to reciprocate them equally. Affection, responsibility and interest put together make the Chinese parent a touching passion and sense of responsibility in bringing up their children. My research data will present the sense of responsibility involved in the parent-child relationship in the one-child family in present-day Beijing.

Responsibility for parents: “Not only consider children’s present well-being, but also their future well-being”

The parents I interviewed planned the present life as well as the future life of their children, and the latter was what they cared more about. When I asked them whether parents should consider for your children their future well-being, they all gave a positive answer without hesitation. The interviewed parents regard considering their children’s future as their obligatory responsibility, which is a trait of the Chinese family and a Chinese tradition. Fangfang’s father, a university associate professor who has the highest academic qualification among the interviewed parents, said,

We must consider our children’s future, and everyone does so in China, planning for the future of our children and caring about their future are traits of the Chinese family. Every family does so, which gives the idioms “wang zi cheng long” and “wang nü cheng feng”¹. We all have such ideas.

Xiaogang’s father is a laid-off worker whose wife died of illness. His parents are helping him to look after his only child. Agreeing that parents should consider their children’s future, he said, *“This kind of Chinese tradition is hard to change, and the blood relationship is too close. In China, different from foreign countries, one generation ‘guan’ the next, so the Chinese lead exhausting lives.”*

Here “*guan*” contains various meanings such as raising, looking after, teaching and helping, and this kind of “*guan*” is lifelong. Parents not only need to

¹ The two Chinese idioms mean “*expecting one’s son to be a dragon and one’s daughter a phoenix*”, meaning hoping that one’s child will be a high-flier.

look after, raise and educate their children when they are still minors but also look after and help them if they have difficulties in the future. No one knows how many Chinese parents have helped to look after their grandchildren at home and abroad. My research data show that blood relationship in the Chinese family is still very close and the sense of responsibility of parents towards their children in particular is increasing. Besides traditional factors, the following two reasons cannot be neglected.

One is that the only children have no siblings to help them, so parents worry about their future and do their best to bring them up. As Chenchen's mother said,

He has no one, no sisters or brothers, but himself to depend on. Nowadays social competition is so keen that if he has no real ability, survival will be a big problem. You can't tell if he will still depend on parents when he is in his thirties. By then we will be in our sixties, and how can we take care of him? ...We only expect him to enter a good school and we just do our best.

Another reason is that the keen social competition and limited survival space aggravate parents' anxiety about their children's future. Such worry often arises from the present performance of their children in their study. Xiaoqiang's father was an ordinary worker. For a secure future for his child, he had bought old-age insurance and critical illness insurance for him. He was burdened with worries as Xiaoqiang in grade three of junior school showed little interest in studying and scored low marks at school. Talking about the present situation and future of his son, he appeared agitated and even spoke incoherently. He talked loudly and fast as if he wanted Xiaoqiang in another room to hear what he said,

I worry so much about my child! I say present competition is so serious. If you can't enter university which now won't assign jobs for graduates, what can you do in the future? You must perform well before you can have choice. If you are not a university graduate, nobody will pick you! The present competition is so serious. ... If you don't perform well at school, how can you survive in the future? It's market economy now; [the government] won't care about you..... Nowadays, good students study even on Sundays. Normal students study hard too, but he [Xiaoqiang] simply doesn't. Don't blame us when you are old and face the consequences. I can care about you even when you become a beggar, but what if I am dead? Who will look after you? I can get the money for you at any moment as long as you want to study. I can ask my sister or my mother....If you don't consider your child's future now and lay a good foundation for him, he will "chikui" (suffer losses) in the future! Children from the countryside can bear hardships, but you can't. If you don't study well, you are like a disabled person! Aren't you? We hope you will have knowledge. It's a society of knowledge and competition, and you will be weeded out if you have no knowledge.

"What can you do in the future?", "How can you survive in the future?", "Who will look after you?" are questions that reflect the worries of Xiaoqiang's father about the future life of his child and his sense of responsibility towards him. *"Suffering losses in the future"* refers to being disadvantaged and failing in future competition. In order for the child to compete successfully, a sound foundation must be laid now for him, otherwise there will be problems for the child's survival and parents will blame themselves for not fulfilling their responsibility as parents.

In the second interview, Yuanyuan's mother, a civil servant summed up the difference of attitude between Chinese and Western parents:

Chinese parents are different from foreign parents. Space for children to grow up is small and the university entrance exam directs and controls with its baton. Foreign parents don't care so much about child's future, but Chinese parents have expectations concerning their children's future development. If we don't consider for children their future, big pressure and intense competition will make child chikui (suffer losses) which cannot be made up. Parents are all for the good of their children, but other people in society may be not so. Chinese parents care about their children's education, living habits, behavior and conduct, and savoir-vivre because survival space is small. Chinese parents are on the whole conscientious parents though their method may be a bit harsh and rude. They think more for their children, especially those parents who are less privileged themselves. We want our children to realize our own dreams and stand out in life...Sometimes we wonder why some foreigners want to be a cabman as a career while we Chinese never encourage our children to be a cabman but to "chu ren tou di"². Maybe there's something wrong with this way of education. Perhaps it's best to let the child do what she likes...But Chinese parents all educate their children like this. They don't respect their children's right to choose, I gradually feel that it's enough to bring up a good child. We also reflect on what she will do in the future.

Yuanyuan's mother thought that *"parents are all for the good of their children"*. Compared with Western parents, Chinese parents show greater concern and consider more for their children and expect them to stand out in life. She admitted that Chinese parents *"don't respect their children's right to choose"* and began to reflect on the traditional concept of *"wang zi cheng long"* (expecting

² *"chu ren tou di" means stand above others in life or stand out among one's fellows.*

one's son to be a dragon). Though Chinese families have changed tremendously, the family tradition and values still remain to a great degree. To this day, people still lay stress on the next generation. "*Expecting one's son to be a dragon*" is still a general psychological disposition in society.

As Dongdong was doing poorly in his studies, his mother, a graduate of a famous university gave up her job to take care of her son's studies at home. She not only held high hopes for Dongdong but also did not want him to be a late-bloomer. When asked whether she thought she understood her child, she said positively,

I understand him, and I understand him very much, but I think if I let him grow up totally according to his own wishes, it may be difficult for him to stand in society and his future will be tortuous. He will understand this one day. Oh! I must give up many things to strive for the one I want most. No loss [pain], no gain. Actually, it's okay to let him go his own way, but it will take him more time to succeed, and then he will be "da qi wan cheng" (late-bloomer) because he'll stumble many times before. There is a problem for "da qi wan cheng". If you are healthy and live long, you can make achievements in your forties or fifties, or else, you need to succeed before thirty or forty, or nothing will be achieved before life ends. Certainly I need to think for him, and surely I don't want him to be "da qi wan cheng". I hope he can reach his target when he is still young. Isn't this what all parents are looking forward to?

So it is not true that parents do not understand their children's wishes totally. They only worry that something will go wrong in the future life of their children if they are allowed to act according to their own wishes. What children are more concerned about are present enjoyment and interests while what parents are

concerned more about is their children's ability to make a living in the future. Chinese parents prefer to consider and make plans for their children according to their own life experiences. They demand that their children give up present enjoyment in exchange for early achievement in the future, and hence many children are not happy. One year later, when Dongdong's mother accepted my second interview, she admitted,

The present attitude of parents is rather utilitarian, which does not represent their children's standpoint. They do not consider their children's expectations, so their children are unhappy. Actually, even if you care nothing, the child can still find his direction. What is so-called considering for children their future well-being? It's parents helping them find the direction and realize the goal. I hope Dongdong will find his own direction and know what he wants to do and what is suitable for him to do.

Compared with her attitude in the first interview, she seemed to have given her child more freedom to choose his direction of development when she found that her child was not happy.

Since the late 1990s, universities in China have expanded their enrollment and charged fees for admission. Entering university is becoming easier, especially in a big metropolis like Beijing. Therefore, parents all think that their children should enter university and that sending children to university is their responsibility. As the level of expectation rises with rising standards, some parents and children expect to enter a “good university” and subsequently get a “good job”, which means a job with good pay in the future, and then live a “good life”. Recently there have often been reports saying that the top students having passed the entrance examination are

ready to repeat a year's study in order to be admitted into top universities like Qsinghua University and Peking University. "*Good university—good job—good life*" forms a link in the minds of parents and teachers and this "logic" is instilled in children or students as a goal for their efforts. As a result, I heard parents and children explain this logic to me constantly. KK's mother working in a community residents' committee said this:

You see, living in these days, we are just like this. What do we work and earn money for? Just for our children. We create a favourable condition for educating them so that they can enter a good university and have a good future and life, and be healthy and find a good job. Isn't that what we common people are thinking of? What else should we consider?

"*Just for our children*" is what many Chinese parents, especially those not in good living conditions themselves, often express as the goal and driving force of their labor. They work for their children's development and good future lives. So what is a "*good life*" in the eyes of present parents? Tiantian's mother, a journalist of a big newspaper explained it as "life above average". She said,

Parents all have expectations of their children. Actually they are not great expectations but just a hope that their children will lead a life above average. Nowadays, it's difficult to find a job without studying university, and even graduation from an average university doesn't make it easy to find a job. So parents will at least be very angry if their children don't perform well.

"*Future*", "*competition*", "*pressure*" and "*survival*" are the words most often mentioned by the parents in the interviews. "*Future competition is very keen*"

and “the living environment is getting worse” are the consensus among parents. How to survive and how to adapt to society are the problems for children that parents worry about most. Therefore, many parents emphasized training children in the skills and ability to survive, as well as to live independently. The responsibility of the present Chinese parents is not only to bring up their children to be adults but also talents.

Maomao’s father is a leading cadre. At home, he mainly took charge of his daughter’s studies. A section of his words can be taken as a summary of the situation.

The present employment pressure is high. One generation raising the next is a Chinese tradition. Parents worry too much about their children, as the Chinese saying goes: ‘Ke lian tian xia fu mu xin’³. They worry not only about the present, but also the future. Children will not understand you if you are always thinking for them in terms of the future perspective. Others’ children are like this. Can you do otherwise?

In China, parents often make the sympathetic remark that “*ke lian tian xia fu mu xin*”. They say this because they feel that children do not understand all the pains they have taken for the well-being of their children. Only “*yang er fang zhi fu mu en*”⁴. After we have become parents ourselves, we start to understand our parents and consider the future of our own children. The former generations always shoulder the burden of considering the future well-being of the next generation and this point becomes more prominent among the one-child families interviewed.

³ This means parents in the world always worry about the well-being of their children.

⁴ This means only when you have a baby do you start to realize how difficult it is for your parents to take care of you.

Then, what do the children think? In my interviews those children in elementary school want to have more time for fun and do not think about future competition and prospects. Middle school students have to start to thinking about the future and feel the pressure of competition under long-term inculcation from parents and teachers. Jiajia who just became a third-year student in junior school knew well about the logic of the steps of advancement of “*good university—good job—good life*” and showed his agreement.

Who doesn't want to live a good life? If you want to live a good life, you need to study well, and if you want to study well, you need to enter a good senior high school and a good university, then make great efforts in university and find a good job. If you don't keep going upwards, you will fall behind others!

Linlin aged 12 just became a first-year student in junior school. He pictured his future like this: “*Study well to earn a lot of money and provide for my parents. If I perform poorly in my studies, I'll have nothing to do, idling at home every day, and I can't even support myself.*” Obviously, child and parents reach consensus on this point that study well now and will have a good life and future.

The weakening of “filial piety” and “raising child to provide for old age” concepts

Chinese culture stresses the concept of “kind father and filial son”. The loving kindness of parents comprises raising, caring for, looking after and educating children while the filial piety of children includes providing for, taking care of and respecting parents. There are mutual responsibility and affection between the two generations. Many researches (e.g. Yuen-Tsang, 1997) point out that such traditional concepts as filial piety, reciprocation and mutual reliance are fading among the

young generation in China. My research shows that the weakening of such concepts is mainly seen among the parents interviewed.

Xiao or filial piety is not only a moral responsibility but also a legal obligation of the Chinese. According to the laws of China, adult offspring have the obligation to provide for their parents (Article 49 of the Constitution and Article 11 of the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly). In traditional understanding, the purpose of parents' raising children and considering their future is to provide for old age. Through the centuries, "*yang er fang lao*" (*raising child to provide for old age*) has always been an objective fact in Chinese society (Feng, 1998). On the other hand, this idea of raising children to provide for old age can be a kind of child abuse in the modern American conception (Sun, 2004) as it reflects the selfishness of parents. However in this research, except for Jingjing's mother who wished her son would somehow support her, other parents all expressed that they did not expect to be supported. All they wanted is children supporting themselves and living a "*good life*". This is because the "four-two-one" structure of one-child family makes it impractical for a couple to support four elders as the pressure of living is too high.

Parents having stable pensions think they need no financial support from their children. Hanghang's father expressed that it was a parental responsibility to bring up children and parents did not expect any benefits from their children. He said,

Now giving birth to a child is to make contribution to society. As for myself, if I had been able to make a choice without the intervention

of my family, I wouldn't have had a child. Children of nowadays won't be able to pay their parents back in future. It's difficult for them to make a living themselves. With so many elderly people, in the future, old age support will be a social undertaking..... How should I describe the present-day children? It's just like keeping a pet (laughing).

To Hanghang's father, raising a child is like keeping a pet. By this, he actually means he cannot expect his child to pay him back, just like a pet is not able to pay back its keeper.

Parents not in a good financial position also show that they “*bu zhi wang*” (don't expect to rely on) their children to support them, not because they do not really expect it, but because they think their children will not have the means. Occasionally instilling the concept of “supporting parents” to children is often meant to urge them to study well so that they will live a “*good life*” in the future without being a burden to parents. Xiaogang's father said,

Speaking of filial piety, “yang er fang lao” is a thing of our generation. The past idea of xiao isn't easy to fulfill for the ordinary people. The present idea of filial piety is different. It means showing love and care to parents, being concerned about them, sending them regards by phone. You needn't spend money to show filial love. Sometimes children even need parents' financial support. I will go to a nursing home and won't count on him. Competition is too intense....It's enough for him to support himself, I don't expect him to support me, and it's impractical in this society to expect children to support parents. They are single children. How can they [a couple] support the parents of two families?

Although parents' concept of "raising child to provide for old age" is fading, the children interviewed still have consciousness of the *xiao* concept. Maybe they do not understand the true meaning of *xiao*. Their understanding of it is often limited to supporting parents when they have grown up, which is a thing of the future after all, and they do not have such pressure now and are not conscious of the difficulty of doing it. These children all expressed that they wanted to support their parents when they were grownups, but showed few acts of filial piety in current life. China is a country of ceremony and propriety that stresses filial piety, but it's not spoken of at present home. Xiaoyu in grade six of elementary school told me,

My parents don't require filial piety, but I think of supporting them. By the time they have raised me for eighteen years, I should pay back and support them. My mother said that they would only raise me for 18 years.

That is what Taiwanese scholar Yu Dehui (1995) called "grateful response to favor (*En*) received." "*En*" (favor) necessarily implies a debt children owe their parents. The thought of "paying back because my parents have raised me" is an idea of payment of debts. For any Chinese, this proposition is accepted without a moment's thought, and this is the only ground for insisting on filial piety today. Xiaoyu's mother's remark that she would only raise Xiaoyu for 18 years does not conform to the Chinese parents' care for children. It is obviously influenced by Western culture. Why she said that might be because she wanted to put pressure on her child so that she would prepare for her future independent life. Eighteen is an age for entering the university, and Xiaoyu's parents are not likely to leave her on her own. To Chinese parents of this generation, helping children in the future is still

regarded as a kind of their responsibility.

Xiaoqiang in third year of junior school regarded saving parents' "*mianzi*" (face) as filial piety. He said, "*When required, showing filial respect is absolute. In public and on ceremonial occasions, say, you can't strike back even if your parents slap you in the face. You must consider their face.*" In his view, the face of elders is more important than his own, so he tolerates parental violent acts on him. This confirms the view of Wu (1981) and Tang (1998) who argued that the emphasis on the Chinese moral code of filial piety lays the ground for physical child abuse to take place.

This research found that children often have filial feelings which can emerge naturally, but parents seldom teach them filial knowledge and filial practice. Actually, all parents expect their children to have "filial heart" or a heart for filial practice. But considering children's own good, they will not count on their financial support. Children are no longer regarded as a future source of financial security of parents, but more as a source of spiritual support. The content and form of filial piety are changing. Parents do not expect material and monetary provision or actual caring, but spiritual concern and support such as sending regards by phone and visiting them at home, thus the popularity of the Chinese song "Go Home Often".

Theoretically, in a one-child family, parents' pressure and responsibility should decrease while children's responsibility will increase. However the reality shows the contrary. My research shows that the more concern and plans are put on the future of the only child, the more responsibilities and pressures the parents will face. On the contrary, children's sense of responsibility weakens partly because they

know their parents do not expect them to support them and partly because of a lack of education on responsibility from their parents.

Parent-child Affection (2): The “All-round Concern” Parents for Their Child

With an eye to the future, children’s development should be concerned of the present. Facing the challenge of “one hundred percent success or a hundred percent failure” with only one child, no parent wants to be left behind. They spare no effort, energy, time and money to raise their children with all their heart and expect their only children will excel in every way. According to Yu (1995), Chinese parents’ support of and control over their children are two sides of the same coin. Parents control and discipline children strictly while giving them unconditional support. All-round concern and expectations come with all-round control and discipline and a great deal of educational investment, which makes the parents interviewed feel unprecedented pressure and weariness. All are for a good prospect of the child: this is a full expression of parents’ readiness to fulfill their responsibility.

“All-round concern”, expectations and control

In the childhood of the interviewed parents, almost every family had several children, and parents who were busy with making a living had less time and energy to care for their children. Nowadays competition is keen but the living condition is improving. The only child of each family becomes the center of attention in the family. Just as what Hanghang's father said, “*The present parents have only one child, so they focus all their attention on him or her.*”

I found from my research data that the concerns of parents for their children are multi-faceted, ranging from dining, sleeping, doing sports, physical health to amusement, making friends and looking after themselves in their daily life; from academic results, special talents to conducts, habits and ways of treating people; from character to attire, body figure and even appearances. Various expectations are embodied in these concerns. Parents generally expect their children to be satisfying in every respect and regard the expectations as "normal requirements" of the children. The following words of Maomao's father reflect such kinds of expectation.

To me, I always expect my child to perform well in every way, but not really want her to excel in every aspect. At least she has to be good at study, lead an orderly life, and have a healthy body. My requirement of her is a normal one. However sometimes you will be irritated by her in some way. She does average grade in her studies and she's not stupid. She just doesn't have a good study habit. I have to push her to study, to do homework, to do everything. She doesn't have a good habit or awareness of the need for some order in daily life, like washing and bathing on time. I have to push her... (I) like children who have more merits than my child. For example, I don't have to be worried about her studies too much. I don't have too high demands as long as she can do well in school, better than average, and maintain such a result and doesn't let her parents worry too much. It's good enough if she won't let me worry about her daily life and have orderly daily habits under my guidance... have a stable character, neither too quick and rash nor foot-dragging, nor temperamental.

The ideal child in the eyes of Maomao's father is one who performs well in every way without giving parents worries, one who scores better-than-average

grades, leads an orderly life, has a healthy body, good habits, good manners and a stable character. Jingjing's mother also expressed a similar wish, "*I prefer a child who has all-round development, good academic performance, good conduct, good health and good appearance.*" Children like this will become a pride of parents and be admired, followed and emulated by others.

I found in the accounts of the Yuanyuan's mothers that the primary focus of present parents is their children's schoolwork. In their own childhood, the interviewed parents' studies carried no weight and many parents gave up their studies and did not enter university under the influence of "the Cultural Revolution" which repealed university entrance examinations. They realize more and more the importance of academic qualifications from their own experience. So they hope their children can enter university on the one hand and many of them go for advanced studies themselves on the other hand. Parents who entered university after university admissions resumed are "*tian zhi jiao zi*"⁵ with outstanding grades. They expect their children to be excellent in school work as they themselves were. Parents in the past were mainly concerned about the living conditions of their children while the present parents are mainly concerned about the academic development of their children. Though some parents say that good conduct and health are more important than getting good academic performance, actually they spend most time, energy and money on their children's studies, including education on special interests and skills as chess, music, calligraphy, painting and foreign languages. Though different parents show different degrees of concern, the family operates around the children's

⁵ Literally, "*tian zhi jiao zi*" means the proud son of the sky, meaning the favored ones.

studies. Studying, examination, homework are what parents talk about most to their children. Supervising and instructing their children on their studies have become the responsibilities of parents. The study problem has become "*a matter of principle*" in every family and has a prominent place in the family affairs.

Some parents even specified clear school grade requirements and objectives of study for their children. Jingjing was in grade four of elementary school, his mother told me this:

[I required] he scored "shuang bai"⁶ when he was young. His marks were required by me lower and lower after grade two. Now he was required to get over 90 marks. But I'm still not satisfied with his results since he is just in the fifteenth position in class, with two full marks and one 92.5 in the final exam. I think his scores are okay, but he shouldn't be just in the fifteenth place. He also thinks so and strives for a position in the top ten step by step. You should have been within the first ten, with your IQ and what I have spent. If we don't make great efforts, it's another matter.

What Jingjing's mother meant by "*making great efforts*" was to accompany her child at his study every day. She gave up her hobby of watching TV for fear of affecting the child's study or his psychological balance. She thought that "*parents should sacrifice something*", but expect her child's results to improve proportionally.

It is children's common nature to love playing. But many interviewed parents wish their children could give up playing and spend their time on studying. Even if they want to play, they should play some "serious" games. Therefore, almost all

⁶ "*Shuang bai*" is *double hundreds*, meaning full marks in the two major subjects of language and math.

interviewed parents restrict the time their children spend on television and the internet and their respective contents for fear that their studies will be hindered and their eyesight affected, as well as that they will receive the negative influence of television and the internet. Huanhuan's mother was very worried and unhappy that Huanhuan loved watching TV and surfing the Internet. She often watched her child study and forced her to join extra classes on Saturdays and Sundays. The purpose was to have teachers to supervise her child's studies. She laughed and said to me, *"Just play something serious, such as making a model, exploring or inventing something if you must play."* It is obvious that the kind of amusement parents expect is something which is purposeful and utilitarian. Parents always expect their children to do something they think is meaningful, but the latter may not like it, and therefore a parent-child conflict may occur.

As children's studies take central position in the family, though the interviewed parents were generally dissatisfied with the self-dependent ability of their only children and wished to train them in such ability, actually most of them had done and arranged everything for their children. They only wanted their children to concentrate on studying. As what 15-year-old Jiajia told me,

Sometimes things like making the bed, which I can do myself, my parents always say, "you needn't do that, just go to study!" Then they will do everything for me. But I think I should do them myself and train myself to do so...I feel that sometimes I'm really "niai" (spoiled), but sometimes I'm not.

Opinions of "not spoiled" and "seldom spoiled" are dominant among the children participating in the study. Most children confessed that while their parents tried their

best to meet their material needs, they do not necessarily comply with everything. Instead they have many requirements and restrictions. The hardships from study also lessen the feeling of being spoiled.

“Niai” (Spoiling) once a social problem of major concern seems no longer a concern now. The epithet “*little emperor*”, which prevailed in the mid-1980’s is seldom heard now. Maybe the present-day only child is more like the “little emperor” in just one aspect: the lack of freedom and independence. The information from my interviews and focus groups shows that the problem of spoiling exists to a certain extent, but many people attribute it to the improvement of material life and not to the problem of child rearing. Few interviewed parents confessed that they spoiled their children. Dongdong’s mother, the only one Yuanyuan’s mother being herself the only child in her family, pointed out in comparison with her own experience that “*too much concern for single children nowadays is not necessarily spoiling. I have only one child and I worry about him more, and it’s not a kind of spoiling.*”

On the one hand, since the one-child family policy has been carried out for more than twenty years in China, society and parents begin to reflect on the “spoiling” problem and realize the harms involved. They begin to “try to refrain” from spoiling children and be strict with them. On the other hand, parents and children may be so accustomed to spoiling that they do not realize it. However they believe that the grandparents still spoil their grandchildren very much.

My research reveals that the only children in this age bear too many hopes and requirements of perfection of their parents. The educational policy of “all-round

development” in new China has been carried further by present-day parents. Parents hope that their children will not only have good grades, good conduct and good bodies, but also various accomplishments and good habits and self-care ability. It is best if they also have good appearances and figures. However, children can seldom reach these *"normal requirements"* of parents and so parents are generally dissatisfied. Parents' expectation for their child to be a high-flier surely will bring great pressure on children and become a cause of parental child battering, which will become clearer later in this research report.

“Generosity in child investment” and “Comparing and competing in it”

High expectations of parents come with high investments in children, which in turn lead to even higher expectations for their children. The present-day family is not only the support system but also the pressure system of children.

In the childhood of the interviewed parents, there was no concept of investing in children and there was no condition and ability to invest. With the development of the Chinese society and economy, intensifying competition and the appearance of the single children, a race in “investment in children” has appeared since the late 1990’s with the focus on education. No parent would let his/her only child *“shu zai qi pao xian shang”* (loses at the starting line). So they sign up for various extracurricular classes for their children for fear that they might lag behind others at present and could not exceed others in the future competition. Therefore, parents are determined to exert themselves as much as possible, and even pinch and scrape to invest in children, which is the most important undertaking in the family. Hanghang’s father who got a master’s degree admitted, *“The family pays great*

attention to the life plans of children and lavishes investments on them, which is different from the past.” He attached great importance to the education of his son and employed a foreign tutor together with four other parents to give English classes to five children twice a week. The tuition fee of a child amounted to RMB640 yuan a month. In addition, his son had “*aoshu*” (International Mathematics Olympiads class) once a week. Where there's a will, there's a way. When Hanghang was in grade four of elementary school, he already passed the PET1 which is equivalent to the English level of grade three of junior school.

While she believed “*single-child must be successful*”, Dongdong’s mother expressed resignation about the competition among children and comparison among parents. She said,

Each family holds high hope for the only one child and compares him/her with other children. I feel that the comparison is getting more and more intense as years go by...Because in the past, when parents had no time to care about all the children at home, one child in three could be successful after all. This is a natural process. But now, you [single-child] must strive to be successful.

Xiaoqiang’s father also thought his expectation of his child and investments in him are definitely related to the single child phenomenon. “*I wouldn’t put all my attention on him if I had two children. I would pay attention to the one who was better. But I have only one and I have to train even if he is stupid. He isn’t stupid, that’s a matter of mentality.*” He borrowed money from his mother and sister to employ family tutors for his child at RMB50 Yuan per hour. His brothers and sisters’ children were all undergraduates. So he wished his son could “*zheng kou qi*” (put up

a good show). Chinese parents like to compare their children with others' children, both for the sake of encouraging their children and for upholding their own "face" and the family's "face".

The forty children participating in the interview and focus groups came from families of different economic backgrounds. Most of them were from ordinary families of salaried employees. They all had attended or were attending various paid extracurricular classes or had family tutors. Among them, a few joined the classes because of their own interest. Most were required or even compelled to attend by their parents or teachers for utilitarian reasons. At kindergarten and elementary school stages, various specialty classes on art and sports, and English and Maths are most highly valued by parents. After entering middle school, as the regular school curriculum is heavier, children mainly go for supplementary lessons on cultural studies after school and specialty classes fall to second place or are given up. We can see how parents attach great importance to "investing in children" from the following "ke wai ban" (extracurricular classes) attended by twenty children interviewed:

Huanhuan: Maths class; two English classes

Xiaojun: English class; Maths, Chinese and English synchronous class; learned painting for three years

Yuanyuan: Flute class; attended singing, dancing, painting and English classes

Ningning: Go chess class; model ship class; English class

KK: English class; Chinese and Maths synchronous class; roller-skating class; learned accordion and dancing for two years

Jingjing: International Mathematics Olympiads class; composition class; English class; learned painting and go chess

Dongdong: Trombone class; International Mathematics Olympiad tuition at home; learned piano

Tiantian: Maths class; ready to learn piano

Hanghang: English class taught by foreign teacher; International Mathematics Olympiads class

Linlin: Maths, Chinese and English synchronous class; learned painting

Mingming: Maths, Chinese, English and Physics synchronous class; Maths tuition at home; learned football

Lanlan: Flute class; dancing class; English class; International Mathematics Olympiads class

Xiaogang: Attended Maths, Chinese and English synchronous class but quitted for financial reason.

Tingting: Learned dancing, electronic piano and painting; Maths, Chinese and English synchronous class; English class; Maths tuition at home

Maomao: Attended English class; International Mathematics Olympiads class; learned electronic piano for five years

Xiaoyu: International Mathematics Olympiads class; composition class; choir; passed Grade 9 (top grade) electronic piano playing

Jiajia: Maths, Chinese, English, Physics and Chemistry synchronous class; learned painting, accordion and calligraphy.

Xiaoqiang: Maths tuition at home; learned Taekwondo and electronic piano

Chenchen: International Mathematics Olympiads class; English class; trumpet class

*Fangfang: English class; passed PET 2; learned dancing and violin;
attended International Mathematics Olympiads class*

Still, many interviewed parents regretted that they did not pay enough attention to the early education of their children. Hanghang's father said with regret, *"The present competition is so serious. It's not enough to have a good body and be happy. A good foundation should be laid at pre-school stage, then it will be easy going to school later. Otherwise it'll tire out at school."* The analysis of data shows that parents did not seem willing to compete in their investment in children, but the harsh reality of competition forces them to do so. Parents are also victims of social competition. Maomao's father said worriedly, *"Which child doesn't go to a specialty class? This kind of pressure comes from both school and society."*

Jingjing's mother felt deeply about the pressure and contradiction from school education. She agreed and remarked, *"The present pressure on parents and children is too big.... Professedly the country carries out quality education but actually it's still an exam-oriented education."* She told me that the school lessons are not the most important any more. Children have to go to classes after school and hold certificates of special knowledge and skills to enter a good middle school. Much of the subject matter of entrance examinations is not covered in school lessons, such as the International Mathematics Olympiads. Though the junior school seats in Beijing quotas are allocated by computer according to the residence registration, because the present Chinese educational resources are limited and unevenly distributed, parents are not willing to let their child be allocated to a bad school by computer. Making a great deal of educational investments in children is meant to

enable them to enter a good middle school in order to realize the goal of “*good university—good job—good life*”.

As my research data show, the greatest expenditure of the present-day family is the educational investment on children. Many parents expressed that it was impossible to calculate the amount of extra educational investments spent on their children. To most parents living on a salary or wage income, sending children to various extracurricular classes is a heavy burden. The economic pressure which parents bear may affect on the attitude to children, as well as bring unrealistic expectation of their children; it may also be a cause of parental child battering or even child abuse.

Parents are tired and children are more tired

Parents’ “all-round concern” and ardent expectation of their only children drive themselves and their children like machines operating at full speed. Many children and parents have no off day at all and are always busy with going to various extracurricular classes in every corner of Beijing. Sending children to the classes and collecting them is an extra job for parents. Besides, parents do not only look after their children’s daily life but also supervise and instruct them in their homework. Parents even do homework for their children when there is too much homework or when the homework is too difficult. For the good of their children, the interviewed parents expressed that they would not mind taking such trouble. The present-day parents who have only one child seem to be much more tired than the parents who had many children in the past because they have to undergo all sorts of pressure with

their children. Parents of the past just adopted a “let it be” attitude towards children’s development while the present-day parents spoil things by their excessive enthusiasm.

In the interviews and focus group discussions, many children expressed clearly that the study burdens made them unhappy, tied down and very tired. Their common dissatisfaction was that “*the study time is too long and there’s no time for play*”. Doing homework and attending classes were the main things they did every day. They often had to complete homework given by parents after finishing their school homework. Many parents do not feel easy if they see that their children have nothing to do. They will worry that their children are not studying hard enough and will fall behind. Talking about the contradiction between study and relaxation of her child, Dongdong’s mother felt helpless and admitted,

Of course [I know] he was very exhausted..... Besides the textbook exercises, the teachers give a lot of extra homework. If you can’t finish, you’ll be punished. I seldom see him happy..... He is unhappy even he has holidays. He says “do I have any rest during holidays?”..... I have to remind him to do homework every day and employ a maths tutor to give him tuition. He is so angry at this and complains that he has to study for two hours every day and has no good relaxation. The contradiction always exists and you can do nothing about it. You’ll worry about the future if you don’t face the reality, and you can’t entirely divorce yourself from the reality.

In Beijing, competition in the high school entrance examination is even more intense than in the university entrance examination. Study is everything in the life of a student in grade three of junior school in preparation for the high school entrance

examination. Jiajia who just entered grade three of junior school went home at 6:20 p.m. and did homework after dinner until ten every day. Her home was close to school, but her classmate who lived farthest from school did homework till midnight. Jiajia was talkative and described her present condition and her classmate's vividly and expressed her strong dissatisfaction with her childhood being full of school burdens. She said,

I feel the present-day children are too tired. There's only one childhood in one's life. I don't think it is right to fill one's childhood with school burdens. I think children should have more play. I also think childhood should be a happy period. As for myself, I had such a pile of homework, so many classes, so many exercises in my childhood that I felt extremely unhappy. I learn from TV that American children are so happy every day. Teachers always praise them. They don't have so much homework after school and can play together. Furthermore, they can go out to do part-time jobs such as delivering newspapers and milk which can train their abilities. Then look at Chinese children. They look so miserable after school every day, carrying a huge schoolbag which I could see is too heavy. Some carry more than one bag. Like some of my classmates, they carry huge schoolbags and additional plastic bags which are full of sextodecimo-size reference books, so thick [gesturing]! It must be exhausting carrying them to class, not to speak of living with them...I guess if I recall my childhood in the future, what I can remember is just which exercises I had done when I was seven or eight. We wish so much that we'd had the kind of childhood our teachers mentioned they had.

Jiajia's emotional expression greatly touched me and triggered my reflection. Having fun natural to children but so many Chinese children have become studying

machines who have no time to play or do something they are interested in. All interviewed parents confessed: *“The present-day children are too exhausted”, “Nowadays children study too hard”, “Their burdens are too heavy”*. Xiaoqiang’s father even said, *“The pressure on children is heavier than that on workers, intellectuals and even Hu Jintao [current Chinese President]. They are the most tired in society!”* Present-day children experience the pressure of competition and worry about the future too early. Childhood is no longer a light-hearted period for them. Is this not another kind of “the disappearance of childhood” which Postman (1994) had mentioned? Is this not a kind of assault on the rights and interests of children?

Maomao’s father thought that under the present pressure of competition, the difficulty of the school curriculum increases and going to various extracurricular classes is devastating to children. The amount of mental and physical energy Chinese parents have put into educating their children is something that Western parents cannot compare with. Chinese parents sacrifice more for their children. Speaking of this, Maomao’s father was a little agitated and raised his voice, *“Actually one generation destroys next...and at last various rights of child are not guaranteed, neither are the parents. All this is caused by the competitive society.”*

The present-day children and parents seem to be two “bitter gourds” on the vine of a competitive society, both are miserable. Parents ascribe this to the pressure of social competition while children ascribe it to the parents’ high expectations of their only children. Tingting who just entered a key junior school explained like this, *“If parents have five children they somehow would pin their hopes on all five and*

expect one scientist will come out of the five. Now they pin all their hopes on only one child..... Surely it's tiring!"

Children and parents bear the “hardships” in the present just for the “sweetness” in the future. There is no sweetness without sweat and pleasure comes through toil. One cannot gain without giving up. Such dialectic of traditional thoughts has become the spiritual guide of parents and children. Many parents say to their children that if they study hard now, they can live a “good life” in the future when they will have time to play. Some children accept this notion of their parents and sensibly put the future prospects in the first place although they are eager for the present enjoyments.

Power, Authority and Right: Power Relation between Parent and Child

Here, “power” means the ability to command and influence within the scope of duty. “Authority” means the person in the leading position within a certain scope has the power and prestige that make others obey him/her. “Right” in the modern sense refers to the due power and interests of citizens under the law, and also in general refers to the due power and interests relative to “obligation”. For instance, the obligation of parents is to raise and bring up children and hence the right to educate them with legal sanction.

As indicated in the literature, there was a superior-inferior hierarchical order between the elders and the young in the traditional Chinese family. As *jiazhang* (the head of a household), parents had absolute power and prestige, and were “authoritative” without being strict. Children were born unequal to parents without

any right or power. Since the founding of New China, the family structure and family power relationship have changed gradually. In the wake of China's reform and opening in the late 1970's, modern Western concepts of democracy, equality, freedom and rights influence the Chinese again. The interviewed children were born in the early 1990's at the time of the implementation of the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors". They may not know the tradition, but are not unfamiliar with the concept of "rights". My research data show that there are new changes to the parent-child power relationship in the modern one-child families, and the authority of parents is challenged by children with the rising awareness of the rights of children.

Parents: "Rights of children? No such understanding"

Chinese traditional culture lays stress on collective rights and neglects the rights of individuals. In recent years, with the development of Chinese legislation, the Chinese awareness of law and rights is strengthening. But concerning the rights of children, society mainly pays attention to children's right to receive education and medical care. Other rights especially the rights in the family are still in an ill-defined domain that attracts less attention.

Under such circumstances, when I asked the interviewed parents questions about the rights of children, most of them were puzzled. "What are you referring to?" many parents would ask. Though having been a teacher in elementary school for more than ten years and in contact with children every day, Xiaoyu's mother also admitted that she had no sense of the rights of children and seldom thought about it

in daily life. Many parents were the same. Although they knew there is the “Law on the Protection of Minors”, they did not read the law and think of it when handling child-related affairs.

Some parents considered that children’s rights should be the same as adults’. Yuanyuan’s mother said, *“Children should have the right to receive education and protection, the right of personal freedom and basic rights, just the same as adults.”* Other parents considered that children are not mature and independent and they do not undertake social responsibilities. Hence they should not have the same rights as the adults and should be dominated by parents. As Dongdong’s mother said,

It was impossible for children to have totally the same rights as adults. Even regarding general human rights, they can’t be totally the same as adults because they don’t take up so many social roles and responsibilities. But from the point of view of human nature say, I think, the rights they have. Should be the same as adults’?

She was not quite sure about her remark. I understand her so-called rights *“from the point of view of human nature”* refer to the rights to basic necessities such as eating, drinking, sleeping, wearing dresses, etc.

Chinese parents often impose their wishes and even force their children to do something they themselves consider to be good for the children according to their own life experiences, such as forcing children to go to extracurricular classes. They do not think of the rights of children when they do this. When asked if there is any incident harming the rights of children in daily life, Huanhuan’s mother laughed and confessed that she had done so. She said, *“I had forced her to attend extracurricular classes even if she is not willing. I told her there’s no compromise here. You must go*

to extracurricular classes, whether you do well or not in the lessons.” As mentioned before, parents regard issues relating to children’s school work as “*a matter of principle*” in the family. Most parents can listen to and respect the ideas of children on other issues. However, on this “*matter of principle*”, they seldom respect their children’s views. They always require them to obey their wills.

Researches show that today while the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989* and China’s “Law on the Protection of Minors” of 1991 have been in force for over ten years, parents still lack a sense of children’s rights and do not regard the child as an independent individual entitled to rights. Therefore, even if they have infringed upon children’s rights, they often do not realize it. In the interaction between parent and child, the interviewed parents seldom consider issues with children’s rights in mind, but from the point of view of whether it is “*for the good of their children*”. Parents can sacrifice their own rights for their children’s sake but often forget children’s rights, which makes parental child battering easy to happen.

Child: “I have the Law on the Protection of Minors”

Though only three in twenty of the interviewed children have learned the content of “Law on the Protection of Minors” at school⁷, all except the youngest Jingjing and Hanghang, both grade four students in the elementary school, knew the law exists but not its content. They knew they had rights but not what specific rights they had. Maybe they could judge from the title “Law on the Protection of Minors”

⁷ Schools in Beijing teach the content of the “Law on the Protection of Minors” to students in the second semester of grade two of junior school.

that the law must protect them. Hence when battered or in a danger of being battered, some children often said, “*I have the ‘Law on the Protection of Minors’!*” “*You will violate the law if you beat me!*” Actually then, this law does not proscribe that parental child battering is an offense. Their responses show that children’s awareness of their rights is generally stronger than parents’. Perhaps, this is because it is a matter of their immediate interests.

In the interview, many children said that they in reality did not feel they could exercise the rights to which they are entitled. Tingting thought she “had no rights at home”. So in daily life, they strived for some of the rights their parents deprived them of, including the right to play and rest, the right to express ideas, the right of self-determination and freedom, and freedom from battering, the right of privacy and the right of pocket money management, etc. Dongdong, KK and Huanhuan’s emphasis and pursuit of their rights leave a deep impression on me and make me feel these children are not to be belittled.

Dongdong’s mother told me that 10-year-old Dongdong in grade five of elementary school still considered enjoyment indispensable in life. She was dissatisfied with this. She thought Dongdong should give up playing when he had reached a higher grade, but Dongdong did not think so. He fought with her every day for the right to play. She said,

He always quarrels with me and fights every day for the right to play...Every day he says, “What does this all mean? You make me do homework every day and allow me not a minute’s rest even after I have finished my homework. Don’t you think I’m not tired? Do you know? I’m so tired! You adults can do what you want, why can’t I?”

When I asked Dongdong what he expected of the adults, he answered, “*Just to respect and allow children to their say, not only the right to speak out, but also the right to exercise this right, and some freedom.*” He hoped that children could express their ideas freely and act according to their own ideas. In reality, under parents’ all-round concern and control, the only children lack free space, so that their wish to strive for self-determination and freedom is very strong. KK said that she would express her ideas even when in danger of being beaten because she thought

There’s a gap between adults and children after all. They can’t feel what I think although they also had the experience of childhood. But we are now children in 2004, different from the past. Children in the past were beaten and scolded if they were disobedient. Now we have our own way of thinking and we should speak out. Perhaps after my parents have listened to me, they may think I’m right and won’t beat me.

Parents often forget that the present-day children are different from them in their childhood and always require their children to meet their own standards.

The right of privacy known in mainland China only in the decade or so has become a right of concern to the only children of the present generation. Twelve-year-old Huanhuan told me that she had read the “Law on the Protection of Minors” three times and once raised the question of right to her mother, “*Between us we seldom raise requirements, and respect each other’s privacy.*” She said confidently: “*A child is an individual belonging to herself, not to parents.*”

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions reveal that children’s awareness of their own rights is increasing as they get older. Many children begin to

challenge the authority of their parents directly or indirectly and raise doubts about the legality of their power and authority, like “*Why can you discipline me but I can’t discipline you?*” “*Why must I listen to you?*” This may lead to parent-child conflict.

Parents: “Parents now have less authority and prestige.”

Many interviewed parents indicated that times are different and the authority and prestige of the present-day parents cannot compare with that of parents in the past. Some parents even felt that they “had no authority and prestige”. Parents’ disciplining is often resisted by children. The present-day parents are no longer the traditional *jiazhang* (family head) being high above. The title *jiazhang* is only an ordinary term passed down in history. The following passages express the views of parents on this.

In the past, parents were always right, and you would be beaten if you didn’t listen to them..... Now, parents have to pray and beg. They beg their children: “Please! I do this all for your good. You’ll understand what I mean in the future, but now you surely don’t.” It’s not enough to enlighten her. She can’t be enlightened. Just beg, beg you to do a little of this (Tingting’s father).

I don’t think parents are jiazhang of children. jiazhang is just a common term, and we need to wash down its meaning in order to understand it. In a feudal society, there may be differentiation of positions in the family hierarchy, but now this concept is gradually fading. I don’t put myself in a position higher than my child (Xiaoyu’s mother).

Xiaoqiang’s father also thought that he was not the “*head*” of his child; but instead he was his “*slave*”. Facing the unwashed and smelly dishes on the table, he

returned home from work, was angry and said, *“Parents are slaves of children! How can it be equal? We won’t let him suffer any disadvantage. We give him the best to eat. He doesn’t wash the dishes. He does nothing and yet he is so unreasonable!”*

We can see the present-day parents are not like the traditional parents who demanded their children to listen to them and follow their every word and advice. Xiaogang’s father also admitted, *“The present-day parents have less authority. Parents’ words to children are just like water off a duck’s back..... Parents in the past had great authority. Their words were definitive.”*

Why has the authority of the present-day parents declined? I think there are the following three reasons at least according to the analysis of research data and observations on the one-child families.

Firstly, there is a kind of special affection relationship in the one-child family. The only children have no competitor at home and they dare to confront their parents whereas children having siblings would try their best to meet their parents’ demands so as to curry favor with them. In parents’ view, as has been said before, the care, concern and love on their only children make them pay more attention to their children’s feelings. So they are afraid that overemphasis on parental authority may hurt each other’s feelings and make their children hate them and become estranged from them in the future. As Tiantian’s mother said, *“If you use the authority of adults to keep the present-day children under control, this will generate in them a kind of hostile feeling. If parents have done something excessive, after some time when they calm down, they will regret.”*

Secondly, as parents are playing various roles in the family, their sense of authority has been diluted to some extent. The present-day single-child parent is parent, teacher, nurse, classmate, friend and partner of the only child at the same time. They do not only teach and discipline their children and take care of them, but also accompany them to study, chat, do sports and play, which makes their attitudes and behaviors towards their children full of contradictions. Sometimes they have to be stern and serious and sometimes “*mei da mei xiao*”⁸. Literally, “no big, no small”, meaning “no differentiation between adults (the big) and children (the small)”. The parental authority is unconsciously worn down during the conversion of roles. At the same time, the role distance between parents and children has become closer as the present-day parents and children are very intimate and their communication and interaction are more frequent (Feng, 1998). Hence there is no sense of authority generated by the feeling of distance.

Thirdly, there is an influence of Western thoughts of democracy and equality. The interviewed children and parents are also affected to a certain extent. Many children envy the atmosphere of democracy, equality and freedom in Western families and seek democracy and equality in their own. The present-day parents are also enlightened, and they are willing to listen to their children’s opinions in the hope that their relationship with their children can be like friendship. Some interviewed children and parents did feel they were “just like friends” and there was no hierarchy in the family. Examples were fighting against parents, answering back,

⁸ Chinese tradition emphasizes hierarchical relationship between the elders and the young, between superiors and inferiors in the family. Parent-child relationship is an unequal “high-low” relationship. “Big people” and “small children” are never on equal footing, otherwise people would regard this as “*mei da mei xiao*”, meaning no differentiation between the big and the small, the superior and the inferior, the high-ups and the lowly.

quarreling, joking, seizing TV remote-controllers from parents, calling parents by their names, etc. All these reduce the parents' feeling of authority.

The parent-child "semi-friendship" shows that some parents try to put away the traditional parental authority and establish a kind of new and democratic parent-child relationship. However friends also split up, and the children's "*mei da mei xiao*" behavior has a limit, or parents will be enraged and punish their children if they go too far. Though parents can discuss many things which are not "*matters of principle*" with their children, there is "centralization (decision-making)" after "democracy (discussion)" and the final decision is still in the parents' hands. Moreover, on "*matters of principle*", like children's studies, are in the eyes of parents seldom negotiable.

Children: "Parents are superior to you"

My research data reveal that children are still in a vulnerable position in the parent-child contest for power. Parents are still the stronger party despite the weakening of their authority. They have power to discipline, restrict and control their children's daily life and studies.

Many children have felt the inequality between them and their parents and the oppression of parents. Ten-year-old Lanlan used a vivid metaphor, "*Parents are Brobdingnagians while we are Lilliputians.*" Though the relationship between twelve-year-old Huanhuan and her mother is typically "*mei da mei xiao*" and they are like friends, she still feel "*the position of adults is higher*". Huanhuan's mother admitted, "*My daughter and I often shout at each other at home. Sometimes we even hit each other, and it all ends up with her in tears and losing.*"

In the focus group discussion of grade one of junior school, 12-year-old Shanshan told a story about her failure in her resistance against her parents. She said with resignation,

Parents are parents after all. They won't consider things from the children's viewpoint. Once I talked back to my mum. I got a poor grade in the exam, just 89 marks, and she was just jawing in my ears: 'Why did you perform so badly in the exam?' From seven in the evening until I finished my homework, she kept quibbling. I was irritated at last and shouted at her: 'Not everybody could get a good mark!' My voice was so loud that my dad and grandparents heard me, and they said, 'Why did you lose your temper?' My mum said, 'Her wings are grown; she dared to shout at me.' My mum and dad ignored me for a week, even when I greeted them before leaving for school and after coming back home. But they still helped me check my homework. I feel miserable when I can't get the love of parents, so [afterwards] I seldom get angry with them. When there is a conflict, I just tell myself: parents are parents after all, we have to listen to them, and so I don't quite talk back to them.

This is actually an accusation against parents for not considering things from children's perspective. It is nothing wrong for Shanshan to get 89 marks, which is quite a good result and she was right when she said “*not everybody can get good marks*”. However, “*parents are parents after all*”. Her parents ignored her for a week as a psychological punishment to defeat her in her defiance and audacity to talk back. In her second semester in grade six, she bought a romantic novel *The Allurement of the Wolf* popular with students, despite strong opposition from her mother. As a result, her mother tore the book up and threw the pieces onto Shanshan. They were both very angry. Parents regard romantic novels, fantasy novels and

Kungfu novels prevailing among children as unhealthy and unsuitable for their age and they often oppose children reading these books for fear that it might hinder their studies. The consequence of the conflict is the child's submission, or open agreement but private opposition.

Xiaoyu of eleven think, "*Parents give you life and bring you up, so they can control you and be high above you.*" Considering the basic fact of their raising and bringing up their children, parents naturally deserve the absolute power they enjoy, and children cannot be equal to parents. Parents' earning money to raise children is their main power resource. Children also realize the importance of earning money to promote one's own position. Speaking of the oppression of parents, Dongdong said with resignation, "*Less money and right, not a little...I must wait until I can earn money when my family will listen to me. Now I can't make money, so I can't get equality. I take no responsibility in the family.*" Just as what the Taiwanese scholar Li Meizhi (1998) has pointed out, the relative positions of parents and children in terms of their power and authority is quite often determined by whether one party can control the economic power resource the other party needs, no matter whether the parent generation or the young generation owns the resource.

Most parents think that there is no equality or absolute equality between children and parents because of the limitation of the age and life experience of children. Even if equality should exist, we cannot practise it in real life. This idea affects the attitudes and behaviors of parents towards their children. I feel Hanghang's father was the most authoritative as a *jiazhang* among the interviewed parents. Hanghang was afraid of him and did not dare to challenge his authority.

Hanghang's father admitted. *"Parents are still the stronger party. Children are the party purely to accept and listen to parents."* However, he used *"contractual relationship"* to describe the new-style relationship between his child and himself.

Objectively, children and adults are not equal. But just see how you get along with each other. Except for conflicts with my son over the question of studies, we get along well on other issues....The contractual relationship represents quite well the relationship between me and my child. I talked with him about terms and conditions for everything, say...if he wants to go out, I will ask if he has finished his homework, including exercises the school gives and those I give. If you have, you can play as you like. If you haven't, I'm sorry, you can't go out; because you haven't done your job. For me, if I haven't finished my work I need to work overtime at night.

He felt that *"contractual relationship"* is an equal relationship. But as the terms are set up by parents only, so the relationship is democratic and equal in form but unequal in essence.

The research shows that the traditional parent-child power relationship is changing. Children's sense of their rights of child is growing. They begin to resist their parents and parents' authority is facing great challenge and has a tendency of weakening. It is not a weakening of parents' control and domination over children, but a decline of their esteem and authority. Many parents have *"high power but low authority"* or *"have power but no authority"*. Compared with parents of the past, the authority of present-day parents has decreased, but compared with children, *"parents are still the stronger party"*. Lacking esteem and authority, parents need to depend on forcible means such as child battering to exercise their power and

maintain their authority.

The parent-child power relationship is not the same in different families; and it is changing even in the same family as the child grows up. Finally, parental authority may shrink as a result of their expected lack of economic power resource and self-care ability in their old age whereas the children's status and power rise accordingly. This view accords with Foucault's power theory that power is not considered as a possession of individuals or groups but is a relational and social construction. At present, parents are not able to possess the power over their children forever.

Parents in Transition: Problem of Disciplining and Risk of Child Abuse

Disciplining the only child is a brand-new subject. "Parents in transition" often do not know what to do. "Parents in transition" in this text refers to the parents of the only children in the transition from traditional society to modern society. They have both many ingrained traditional concepts and modern ideas. They are eager to understand their children and hope to discipline them well. However in the gap between tradition and modernity, they often exhibit a contradiction of attitudes and behaviors in the way they discipline their children, sometimes in modern style and sometimes traditional. Meanwhile, the only children of this generation have developed a growing awareness of their rights and they are not willing to accept the traditional discipline from their parents. In this situation, how to discipline the children has become a difficult problem. Many parents face the difficulty of knowing the need to discipline their children but having no idea of how to discipline

them or being unable to discipline them well. When the discipline is ineffective, most parents will resort to the simple and direct old method of beating or battering their children and as a result, they may run the risk of child abuse, although parents are seldom being accused of this in China.

Generation gap causes a lack of mutual understanding

Generation gap refers to an intergenerational conflict caused by the differences in values, modes of thinking and conduct between two generations. In the interviews and focus group discussions, many children and parents talked of the existence of a generation gap and were helpless about “*not able to reach a mutual understanding*”. So we can say that the lack of understanding due to generation gap is an important reason why disciplining children is difficult.

In the analysis of research data, I found that the differences and conflicts between children and parents are not simply covered by the term “*generation gap*”. It is more precise to call it “*generation gulf*” because these children and parents not only grow up at totally different times, but also the children belong to the special “single-child group” which appeared only in the 1980’s. The parents’ generation received education characterized by revolution, hard struggle and love of labor. The values they appreciate are often those their children are scornful of, such as the passion for labor, the love of study, frugality, tidiness, sensibility, good manners, and consideration for others. On the other hand, what their children appreciate is what they oppose, such as chasing after pop stars, hedonism, pop music and fashion, computer games, online chat and online novels. Hence, many parents feel it hard to communicate with their children. Fangfang’s father laughed and said,

I don't understand and sometimes have conflict with my daughter...I'm the traditional type, I think there's a generation gap between me and her. The recent "chao nü" (super-girls)⁹ on TV is so hot among them, and I asked her why she liked watching that. What she appreciates is just what I don't! Hah, the "chao nü" on TV look neither like girls nor boys, why are you so interested in that?

When KK's mother talked about the lack of understanding between her and her child, she felt deeply and even a little sad about it. She said,

I feel the gulf between these children and their parents is so big and the distance is so far...You can't understand, you just don't know what the present-day children are thinking about. You get nothing from the chat with her...I thought there's little I don't understand her because I watch her grow up, but I can't get into her inner world and understand how she really thinks, especially when we have contradiction. I want her to learn something and she argues and resists you. I can't understand. I'm all for your good. Why don't you appreciate it and understand me, and regard me as a hellish woman. I'm bringing you up, with so much hardship. Why do you behave like this? It would have been better hadn't I raised you!

As mentioned before, parents think for their children from a future perspective. They hope their children will study hard now in preparation for the future; but children do not think so far as parents do. They want to play more now. So both parties do not understand and are not satisfied with each other.

The children also expressed their discontent about their parents' lack of understanding. In their discussion in the focus group, the grade two students of a

⁹ In recent years, the super-girls' singing competitions are popular in Mainland China. The first champion winner is Li Yuchun who has an Androgynous image, and therefore is pursued by the young girls.

junior school emphasized repeatedly that they had their own ideas, views and ways of doing things, but their parents did not understand them and they were so annoyed about this. This was what one of them named Xiaoyan said.

I think why we can't reach a mutual understanding is because there's a generation gap between parents and children. Parents think that their experiences are very suitable for us, but we have our own ideas. They sometimes don't listen to us and even deny us the chance to explain...I feel parents only say they want to understand our inner world and care about our spiritual well-being, but we don't really feel their understanding of our daily life and studies, we just can't feel it.

Another student called Wutong said,

I feel that our generation have our own ideas and parents may want to understand us. But they don't seem to know how to make us understand them. Their approach often makes us misunderstand that she is imposing more restrictions on us (me).

What is noteworthy is that the generation gap between parents and children seems to be deepened by the nature of the only child. I asked the interviewed parents what was the difference between the only children of today and the multi-children of the past. Parents all gave negative evaluation of them and labeled them as “self-centered”, “selfish”, “inconsiderate of others”, “not appreciative of parents’ labor”, “poor self-care ability and low capacity for psychological pressure”, “sheng zai fu zhong bu zhi fu” (not content with the happy life they already have). Based on her own experience, Dongdong’s mother who is an only child herself told me with certainty:

Surely different! How can the only child be the same as the child in a family of many children? I think they're certainly different in their psychological disposition and behavior.....The only child must psychologically fragile because he has no rival in the family, no person of similar age to challenge and frustrate him. If there's conflict between children at school, parents will find the teacher at once. This often happens in grade one, so he is psychologically weak.

Huanhuan's mother thought the present-day only children are generally "selfish" because their living conditions are too superior and their parents are excessively thoughtful in their care, which makes these children *"too self-centered and do what they want. They never think of others: what I should do for others and how I should thank others for what they have done for me. No grateful heart. Really, she just takes it for granted that others ought to do something for her."* She admits that *"some children are not like this."* Some parents pointed out that the key to the disposition of the only children lies in the education of their parents.

Unexpectedly, many children also agreed with the views of parents on the only child and confessed that they were accustomed to being "self-centered". Mingming said,

Children in the past had brothers and sisters, so they were not 'self-centered' and they took care of each other and wouldn't only think of themselves. Now there's only me as the only child, I should get all care and attention of my parents. When I see my parents take care of other children, I will be envious subconsciously. It seems not right to think of self interest in everything. We should think of others. But there's only me in my family, with no brother or sister, so it is

natural to be like this.

Parents' discontent and lack of understanding of their only child are also related to their high expectations of the child. The higher their expectation, the bigger their disappointment and more discontent is generated. Some conditions of the only child are actually not problems but they turn into problems under excessive parental demand. As Hanghang's father pointed out, "*The present-day parents require too much of their children. Parents of the past had no time to watch their children, but parents nowadays seem to examine things with a magnifying glass and eventually find many problems.*" This kind of "supervision with a magnifying glass" may exaggerate the children's flaws.

Besides, parents' discontent and lack of understanding also stem from adults' lack of understanding of children. The interviewed parents admitted it is hard to consider things from the perspective of their child. As Maomao's father pointed out, "*When you were young, you thought your parents didn't consider things from your angle. Now you have grown up and it is also hard for you to consider things from your child's angle.*" Most interviewed children also thought that parents will not consider things from the child's angle. However, Jijia thought that if adults really wanted to understand the children, they could make it, but they were not willing at all.

Based on the data I have collected and analyzed, I think the changes of time, the natures of the only child, generation gap, mutual discontent of parents and children and the differences between adults and children are all causes of the difficult problem of disciplining and parent-child conflict.

Contradiction between conventionality and modernity

At times of rapid social changes, the thoughts, value orientations, attitudes and behaviors of people somehow also change. “*Conventionality*” here refers to the old traditional concepts of parents on child disciplining and “*modernity*” refers to the new modern ones under the influence of Western concepts of democracy and equality. Chinese culture stresses “*Yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo*”¹⁰, disciplining children is an incumbent responsibility of parents. There were more than one child in each family in the past where parents often had no time to discipline and teach their children or just did it in a simplified form. Now facing their only child, all interviewed parents considered that “*it’s impossible to let them be*”. Parents must discipline and teach their children and do it well.

In order to use a scientific approach to discipline and teach their children, the educated parents read books and take the initiative to learn the ways. Less well educated parents like Xiaogang’s father often attended a family education class in his child’s school. With such efforts, all the interviewed parents thought the present-day parents’ attitudes and methods of disciplining children are better than before. Lanlan’s father used his own experiences to show that “*Parents of the past were rougher. With so many children, they had no patience to reason with them. They just slapped and shouted a few words at them, and that’s it. But now parents often reason things out and seldom punish their children with a beating.*”

The combination of “*jiang daoli*” (reasoning things out) with “*da haizi*”

¹⁰ “*Yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo*” means that it is the father’s fault to only raise but not discipline and teach the child strictly.

(child beating) reflects a merging of modernity and conventionality. My analysis of research data shows that the interviewed parents generally had ambivalent feelings when they disciplined their children. Sometimes they were democratic and sometimes they were authoritarian. They were sometimes mild and sometimes strict. Sometimes they respected their children and sometimes they did not. At times they are willing to reason things out but at times they just beat their children up without reason. Parents tend towards conventionality as many traditional concepts are already deep in their minds. Even if they are modern in their thoughts and looks, they are somewhat traditional in behavior, and hence arises their ambivalent feelings. Just as Dongdong's mother said, *“Modern in the form, for example, he can call me by my name, or even call me ‘pig’. But I’m traditional in my requirements. I discipline him about his studies, which he doesn’t like. I don’t want to bother so much but I’m forced by the present social situation.”*

Within a family, the contradiction of conventionality and modernity often reflects the contradiction between the two parents. Many parents disagree and quarrel over child disciplining. Jingjing's mother was in charge of supervising her child's studies. She said,

When parents quarrel, they do so about their children and nothing else. He [her husband] thinks I’m too loose to our child. He wants the child’s results to be better and not to accept all desire of child. At the beginning of the school year, my child wanted to attend ‘Taekwondo’ class. I agreed, but his father didn’t, as he thought it useless. Now two sides cross swords. There are two different views both among the teachers and among the parents. The present-day view is affected by Western thoughts. There was only one view in the

past, but now you are at a loss as to how to educate children.

Tingting was very pleased to tell me that her parents often quarreled because of their disagreement over educational viewpoints and methods. One went for battering out of great annoyance; the other did not favour battering because it involves the risk of hurting the child. Therefore Tingting was afraid of neither. Most interviewed children expressed that they were not afraid of their parents and disliked being disciplined by them. But they also admitted that they would indulge themselves if their parents just let go. Their attitudes towards disciplining by parents are also ambivalent. Just as Linlin said, *“They ‘guan’ (control) me. But I will indulge myself in playing video games, watching TV and putting my books aside if they don’t.”* Children’s lack of self-discipline in a way reflects the failure of parental discipline, which results in more parental intervention and control. Parents feel helpless when they cannot discipline their children well. They soon discover that children will be afraid only when “parents are cornered” and start beating them up. Therefore, child battering sometimes becomes “a magic weapon” of parents for disciplining children.

Risk of “child abuse”

In Mainland China, child discipline and parenting are closely connected with the parents’ expectation and conception in the changing socio-cultural context. Firstly, with the development of market economy, the intensity of social competition and widening gap between rich and poor in China, the parent informants always worry about their children’s future. Keen competition in the adult world has filtered down to competition among children in the schools. These parents all want their own

child to excel in order to live a better life in future. Therefore, they try their best efforts to invest in their children, and impose high-standards and strict requirements on them.

Secondly, since the implementation of the one-child policy in the late 1970s, the parent informants have only one child. They expect their child to develop themselves in every aspect. The single child seems to shoulder all the expectations of their parents. On the one hand, the parents provide good care to their kids in terms of material life. On the other hand, they strictly discipline their children and hope they can turn out a “good child” through good education.

Thirdly, the admission of students to colleges and universities in the Chinese mainland has increased in recent years. This makes the parent informants think that it will be hard for their children to make a good living if they cannot get into the universities. This is especially the case for parents who have never received university education before. They impose their unrealized dreams onto their children and require that they must get good examination results in order to get into the universities. As a result, they focus sharply on the academic performance of their children and often discipline them if the latter do not perform well in their studies.

Fourthly, under the context of social reform and globalization, traditional and modern Western concepts of parenting and child discipline co-exist in the Chinese mainland. On the one hand, the parents are not hesitant to be strict in making sure that their children are obedient. On the other hand, they hope that they can be friends to their children. However, as they face the reality of this new generation of single children, they always find it is hard to strike a good balance between strict parents

and good friends as they educate their child. When they lose their temper, they will beat their children. If beating children does not work, either they let their children go or they adopt more extreme methods. Inconsistencies in parenting like this make the discipline and education of children all more difficult.

Yuanyuan's mother felt deeply about the difficulty of disciplining her child. She told me that she "bothered herself a lot when Yuanyuan was young". Yuanyuan did not do homework and often told lies when she was in elementary school. It did not work at all when her parents tried to reason things out, and beating her produced no effect. So they adopted the method of not giving her dinner. The following is a dialogue between Yuanyuan's mother and me (interviewer).

Yuanyuan's mother: I found later it's useless for us to beat the child.

She was thick-skinned, and you have no energy to beat her. She didn't feel the pain though she cried.

Interviewer: Didn't she really feel painful?

Yuanyuan's mother: Maybe she did, but she didn't care whatsoever. It worked only when we didn't give her dinners. (Laughing) If you say there's no dinner in the evening, she protested and nagged for it. If you beat her, she would sing after the beating.

Interviewer: Did you sometimes deprive her of dinner?

Yuanyuan's mother: Yes.

Interviewer: What did she do then?

Yuanyuan's mother: She protested and cried loudly, even louder than when she was beaten. She just cried for dinner like mad. I couldn't but send her meal secretly.

Interviewer: Did her father allow her to have dinner?

Yuanyuan's mother: He didn't, really didn't. I gave her meal only late at nine or ten [in evening] for fear of starving her. I

found this method effective without really starving her.

Interviewer: Did it work to correct her misbehavior?

Yuanyuan's mother: No, it didn't. After all, it's difficult...

Are parental child battering and not giving dinner a kind of child abuse? The difficult problem of teaching and disciplining children may be associated with the risk of child abuse. The self contradiction of the “parents in transition” and the inconsistent views and approaches of the father and the mother are also reflected in their attitudes towards issues as the decision to beat or not to beat children, to “*spare the rod and spoil the child*”, and child abuse. Specific descriptions and analysis will be given in the relevant parts in the next Chapter.

Chapter Summary

As the first chapter to analyze and present data, this chapter has described the special nature and contradictions of parent-child relationship in one-child families in Beijing, based on data obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Such special nature and contradictions find specific expression in parents' heavier sense of responsibility, their closer affection for their children, more obvious generational power conflict and greater difficulty in child disciplining. An elaboration of the contradictions in nowadays parent-child relationship in the mixed contexts of traditional Chinese culture, contemporary one-child policy, and modern Western concepts of children's rights is necessary as all these point to the increasing difficulty of parenting and rising risk of child abuse in nowadays families in China.

This chapter has been divided into four parts. The first part explains the

parent-child affection by presenting the responsibility relationship between the parent and the only child and shows the weakening sense of responsibility of the child with the increasing sense of responsibility of the parent. The second part shows the close and deep parent-child affection relationship by presenting the all-round concern, expectations, restrictions and control of the parent's, as well as educational investments and hardships placed on the child. The third part attempts to reveal the changing parent-child power relationship through describing the strengthening of the child's sense of rights and the reduction of the parent's authority and prestige. The fourth part reveals the difficult problem of disciplining the present-day only child and the resultant risk of "child abuse" through analysis of the generation gap and the inconsistency and contradiction in the parent's attitude and approach to child disciplining.

This research shows that the basic principle of the one-child parents with regard to disciplining children is "responsibility". They do not only consider bringing up their children as their own responsibility. More importantly, they also regard educating their children to be talented persons and preparing them for a "good life" in the future as their responsibilities. Hence on the one hand, they are unhappy about the pressures caused by social competition and the educational system, and on the other hand, they take part in the competition and invest heavily in education for the future good of their children. They lavish all-round concern and care and yet impose strict restriction and control over their children. Though they do not expect their children to support them in their old age, they hope their children can have a filial heart. They do not only have deep love and great expectations of

their children but also harbor much discontent and misunderstanding of them. While they have modern and democratic outlooks, they are also traditional and authoritarian. They are eager to understand their children and make friends with them and yet often impose on them with parental power. They “have great power but low authority” or “have power but no authority” and are facing the dilemmas in child disciplining.

The research also reveals that the only children’s consciousness of their rights is strong but their consciousness of responsibility is weak. Their awareness of rights grows with age. They admire Western freedom, democracy and equality in family and are eager to gain their parents’ understanding and respect. They are dissatisfied with parents’ “patriarchal” type of discipline and raise doubts about and challenge their authority on the one hand and yet they have to obey parents’ arrangements for them and seldom have the freedom of choice. While they love and depend on their parents, they have much misunderstanding and discontent about them. Facing the disciplinary measures of their parents, sometimes they obey and sometimes they fight back, resisting while obeying and obeying after resisting.

Chapter Six Parents' Constructions of Child Abuse

Introduction

The original form of child abuse found in the United States was “the Battered Child”. Child battering has a long history in a variety of cultures. It was constructed as “child abuse” in the 1960s, and then became a social problem attracting wide international concern. Parental child battering is also a common phenomenon in China, but has not yet aroused concern and discussions on child abuse among the academic circles and in society.

Based on the description of parent-child affection, responsibility and power relation in the one-child families in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on whether parental child battering is child abuse from the parents' perspective. The meaning of child abuse constructed by parents is necessarily closely related to their explanation of their child battering behavior. Such explanation includes the cause, purpose, effect, and attitude. The objective of this chapter is to explore Chinese parents' understanding and views on child abuse, and the social and cultural roots of their understanding.

Parents' Explanation for Battering Children

As discussed earlier in the literature review, China adheres to the concept of strict familial education and has had a tradition of “domestic discipline” from the ancient times. Keeping the words and deeds of children within bounds does not

mainly depend on parental child battering but on the parents' superior status and authority established on the Confucian familial and social hierarchy (Lin & Wang, 1995). However, in the interviewed parents' own childhood, the traditional superior-inferior concept was lost and parental child battering was very common. At that time, the family economic conditions were generally poor. Parents required their child to treasure money and objects and take on housework and manual labor and children's studies were not considered important as much as they are now. So, the parents of the past battered their children not so much because of their failure in their studies, but mainly for their not doing the housework well, breaking the bowls and dishes, playing outside and returning home late, dirtying their clothes, losing money and objects, fighting among boys, etc. Tiantian's mother said with a sigh, "*Nowadays children are certainly not battered for such matters.*" As the social economy develops, the family structure and parental concerns have changed and the causes of parent-child contradiction and conflict have also changed.

As mentioned above, changes of parent-child relationship in present-day one-child families have brought out the tendency of the weakening of parents' power and authority. Child battering has thus become not only an important way of disciplining but also a means of upholding parents' power and authority. According to my research data, all the interviewed parents except one mother admitted that they had battered their children, and the frequency was high for some of them. This shows that parental child battering is still quite common in one-child families in Beijing. Some parents believed that compared with Western parents, Chinese parents discipline their children too strictly and too much. It is worth noting that some

parents liked to use euphemistic terms like “*dong shou*” (using the hands *means beat him*) and “*gei ta ji xia*” (giving a few hits) instead of the words “beating” or “battering” and sometimes they seemed to feel ashamed to talk about battering child. It shows that they might tend to rationalize their own behaviors when they were explaining the reasons for child battering.

“Many children are battered because of study matters”

As mentioned in Chapter Five, Children’s study in China is the concern not only of the children themselves but also of their families. It not only affects their own future but also to some extent represents their parents’ success or failure and the family honor. Most parents think they have a responsibility. In nowadays China, competition in society is fierce. Therefore, parents cannot tolerate their children’s dislike of study and poor academic performance. Cases of children not doing homework, getting low scores or even forming bad learning habits may turn into parental child battering incidents.

The interviews show that most parents are dissatisfied with their children’s study performances. In an era when many families have equipped their children with computers to look up information on the Internet and there are a lot of remedial classes and reference books to help them in Beijing, parents just think that their children should study harder and obtain higher scores in their studies under such favorable living conditions. They get angry when their children do not meet their requirements. As Tiantian’s mother said,

Generally speaking, parents often lose temper with their children in cases in which the children don’t do their homework seriously or

finish it and don't get high enough school marks. Many children are battered because of study matters.

That is true. My research shows that parental child battering mainly results from children's study problems. Dongdong's mother also has this view :

This is not an individual phenomenon. It is the result of the education system of our country: only one standard is set for all students, while parents cannot accept the fact their children are not good at studies. In the past, my parents didn't care my studies, but now I have to care about and monitor my child's studies...Parents' emotions are mostly affected by their children's achievements in studies.

Dongdong's mother originally had a good job in a foreign-owned enterprise. But every day it was already after 7 p.m. when she returned home and so she had no time to monitor her child's studies. Dongdong who was in Grade One in a key elementary school liked playing very much. He played while doing his homework and did not meet the teachers' requirements, and that was why teachers often wanted to have a talk with his parents. Consequently, Dongdong's mother quitted her job to supervise her child doing homework every day. She told me, children are tired out after a day of study, but teachers still arrange a lot of homework for them and set very high requirements, so high that some of the homework can't be done without parents' guidance. For example, the required number of words for a piece of writing and the expected quality of it are beyond the children's ability as they have little social experience. So parents have to spend time guiding their child and arrange everything in two hours in the evening?

In her opinion, it was the high standards and strict requirements teachers set that made her add pressure on her child, and she often beat Dongdong, hoping that he would study well and not be blamed by his teachers. In fact, Dongdong was not bad in his studies, but he still did not meet his teacher's requirements. His mother knew that it is children's nature to love play, so she felt the contradiction and conflict between her child's feelings and the teachers' requirements and was helpless about it. I could easily feel that she hated the teachers' requirements but had to cater to them. That was why Dongdong's studies were the first thing to make her lose her temper. During the interview, she explained the reasons and effects of her child battering as follows:

Dongdong's mother: I did "dong shou" (using my hands means beat him) when he was lazy in his studies. When he has no ears, the only thing I can do is to use my hands, to beat him! I don't have so much time to reason with him. He has to take a bath and sleep. Before that, I have to subdue him and make him do according to my requirements. Sometimes he said he's tired, or he's in a bad mood and didn't want to study, and then I had to "gei ta ji xia" (give him a few hits).

Interviewer: Which part of his body did you beat him on?

Dongdong's mother: I slapped his face. But mostly I beat him on the back, and arms, quite hard, and finally he said, "OK, just beat me!"...Later, his father asked me if my beating was too light. I said not really, just look at the red patches on his arms. I've used a lot of energy [beating him] and I don't have any more energy.

Interviewer: Did you feel very angry?

Dongdong's mother: I was. There're so many trifles bothering me

every day. How can I spare any time and energy to educate you [her child]? You [her child] shall do what you should do, like it or not. How much I would I have done what I like to do when dealing with you every day?

Interviewer: Did he cry at that time?

Dongdong's mother: He did. I gave him a slap because I got angry. That's how things go.

Interviewer: Did he feel angry?

Dongdong's mother: No. He forgot it afterwards and won't bear grudges.

Interviewer: Was it effective to beat him up?

Dongdong's mother: It was, why not? Surely it was effective. If you spare your rod, he won't move forward.

Interviewer: Was the effectiveness immediate and did he do his homework better afterwards?

Dongdong's mother: Why not? Battering can solve some problems which will disappear afterwards. He is not always troublesome like that. He gave me trouble more frequently when he was in Grade One and Two. During that period, he always broke off when he was doing homework and went to play. Whatever I said he just didn't pay attention. I beat him several times and ordered him: "Do your homework at once, or else I'll beat you up!" I stood there with a ruler in hand, and he started to do his homework in tears. Now he's grown up, and you don't need to do this. You just say, "You don't want me to use my hands, right? Go and do it!" At the beginning, I beat him mainly concerning his oral arithmetic calculations. For example, he was required to do a specified number of arithmetic sums orally within several minutes, and he always took more time.

Interviewer: To do 50 sums within five minutes.

Dongdong's mother: Right. Beaten twice, he gradually reached the speed. Sometimes I just wonder whether our expectation of him is too high or he has poor self-control and just doesn't want to calculate that fast. I was self-conscious about my studies in my childhood and was the first to hand in my maths exercises. But why does he have so many problems with it?

Obviously, school pressure and study burden are the main reasons for parents' corporal punishment on their children. In compelling children to study hard, parents are not only a collaborator with the education system but also a victim of social competition and the education system. Scenes of the parent standing beside the child supervising his/her studies and the child "*doing homework in tears*" are not seen in Dongdong's family alone in present-day China. Dongdong's mother "*used a lot of energy*" and beat her child until he had "*red patches on his arms*", which means quite heavy beating. She admitted that child battering was not a good method of disciplining and she "*gave him a slap because she got angry*" only after her reasoning with him did not work. "*Jiang daoli (Reasoning) first, when it doesn't work, you had to 'dong shou' (using my hands means beat him). You can't just sit there and wasting the whole evening. Only 'dong shou' can settle the issue.*"

During the second interview after one year, Dongdong's mother admits that "*(Child battering) is not so effective. Though it's an easy job, but after battering, he does not recognize his mistakes and bears grudges.*" It means as Dongdong grows up, he starts to bear grudges because of being battered, and his mother finds child battering is not as effective as before. Children love playing, and after a whole day

of study without playing, children may become ready to play, so they cannot concentrate on doing homework. Parents force their child to do homework. Maybe it works immediately. However, the long-term impact on their child is not well considered.

Children such as Hanghang, Yuanyuan and Xiaoqiang also have such experiences. Hanghang's father tells me frankly, "*I beat my child more among the similar families*". Here "similar families" represent the intellectual's families. He beats Hanghang mainly because Hanghang forms bad habit of learning, for example does his homework dillydally, not serious and makes mistakes in exams, etc. He focuses on training the child "*good habit*" to prepare him for his future work and living in the future society. He said,

I am quite crude. I emphasize efficiency, for example homework should be finished within 20 minutes if he concentrates on it. However, he just does it dillydally, and if I don't discipline him, he just cannot finish it after one or two hours. At this moment, after once and twice of blaming, I "dong shou" (beat him)...my child's bad habits are the mainly reason for my child battering.

Many parents require efficiency out of their child with the standard of adults. They think their child "*just does it dillydally*", and the child does not admit it, so always come off conflicts. This shows different feelings of parents and their child and parents' lacking understanding to their child: young children are difficult to concentrate on one thing, especially which he/she is not interested in.

My research data show that child battering bears no relation to parents' educational level. Whether their educational level is high or low, the interviewed

parents used to batter their children as a means of solving problems. Parents of higher educational level might have higher expectations of their children. Dongdong's mother and Hanghang's father both of them thought that their children were not as good as they themselves were in their childhood and were particularly critical of their children. So they justified when they battered their children.

Xiaoqiang's father did not go to university, so he especially hopes that Xiaoqiang could enter university one day. On mentioning his son who was in Junior Three, Xiaoqiang's father was always bitterly frustrated as he felt that his son could not be transformed into a high-flyer. He told me that Xiaoqiang liked playing very much, had no interest in learning and always got low scores, which had led to a lot of conflicts between them and even turned them into "*chouren*" (potential enemies). Sometimes he had to beat Xiaoqiang with a rod, otherwise he "*zhen bu zhu*" (*couldn't subdue*) him. Obviously, Xiaoqiang's father "*had power but no authority and prestige*" and had to control their child with the help of force to push him to study. But finally they were disappointed.

“He is battered only because he talks back”

In the Chinese tradition, what makes a good child is "*guai*" (obedience), which means "*tinghua*" (listening to and following parents' words and advice), and being compliant, sensible and clever. Almost all of the interviewed parents thought that their children should listen to what they said because their advice was always right. As a primary teacher, Xiaoyu's mother said, "*In the Chinese tradition, children dare not go against their parents. The same applies to students in relation to their teachers because we teach them to respect the seniors since childhood.*"

Obedience is considered to be one of the important manifestations of respect for the seniors.

Parents often complain that their children “*bu tinghua*”, which means the latter do not listen to and follow them, and ignore their words and advice. They even “*dingzui*” (argue back and contradict their parents). This phenomenon gradually appears when the children grow up. Chinese parents are particularly angry when their children talk back because they think it is disrespectful or unfilial. Many parents know that their children “*have their own way of thinking*”. But when their children show their independence and initiative and confront them with a tit-for-tat response, they cannot accept it and in a fury start to batter the children in order to maintain their dignity with force. Although nowadays parents’ authority has weakened, many parents still think that they are *Jiazhang* (head of the family), and do not tolerate their children’s impudence especially towards the superiors, which makes them “*lose face*”. Just as Xiaoyu’s mother said, “*When parents get angry, the simplest way is to batter their children, just because they can’t lose mianzi (face) and dignity...although sometimes the children are right.*” Yuanyuan’s story proves this point.

Although Yuanyuan’s father was not interviewed, from his wife and daughter’s description, I can feel he attached great importance to his authority and “*face*”. So Yuanyuan was a little afraid of him. He could not tolerate his child’s defiant retorts and insubordination, nor would he tolerate when his child did not answer his questions, or admit her mistakes. He just beat her up for all this. Here is what Yuanyuan’s mother said:

Sometimes when we scolded her [Yuanyuan], she did not utter a word. So her father got angry and beat her up...She started to talk back in the recent half year because she's grown up, and mostly to her father. My husband is quite a male chauvinist and does not allow child to talk back, so my child was beaten. For example, my child and our relatives' children were playing at home one day... They threw what they ate and candy paper on the bed. I couldn't blame our relatives' children. So I just scolded her in front of our relatives. However, she couldn't accept this and screamed at me: I didn't do it! You only know how to blame it on me! Once she shouted, her father got angry and started to beat her because he felt he was losing mianzi (face).

No matter whose fault it is, parents cannot blame the relatives' children and can only beat and scold their own children. This is Chinese-style discipline and family relationship. Parents require their children to accept such discipline and at least not to resist in front of other people; otherwise the parents will "lose face".

Huanhuan's mother also told me she battered Huanhuan often because she argued back. *"I beat you just to let you know you're too 'bu tinghua' (disobedient), you talk back to me. It's actually your fault, which exasperates me and makes me beat you."* "Anger" and "exasperation" are the emotional reactions when parents' authority is seriously challenged. She described her feelings and attitude towards her child's disobedience and defiance:

Huanhuan's mother: I did batter her, not because of her studies but because she 'dingzui' (talked back) and 'bu tinghua' (didn't listen to me). When I said once, she just talked me to back ten times, which made me angry. (Laughs) The more she talked back, the angrier I got, so I gave

her a heavy slap. It was her fault, but she didn't admit it. I said once and she just argued back ten times continuously.

Interviewer: Maybe she thought it was not her fault?

Huanhuan's mother: In fact, sometimes she knows it's her fault. I can feel she understands her fault, but she just doesn't want to admit it. She's afraid of losing mianzi (face) at that moment and doesn't want to give in because she knows it means her loss next time.

Interviewer: Didn't she give in after being battered?

Huanhuan's mother: She did. Generally after crying, she does everything she should do. Maybe she gives in just because of my coercion policy, and actually she is not convinced. One day, she threw off her slippers here and there was about to leave for school. I told her to put them away properly, but she just didn't do it. I insisted she wouldn't be allowed to go to school if she didn't put the slippers away properly and she refused. We both held out for more than ten minutes. At last, her tears rolled down and I said, "No way! You can cry, but put them away first." I forced her to put the slippers away, and told her, "If you are like this today, you'll do the same tomorrow, and forever. And I'll have to tidy up things for you for the rest of your life. This is impossible!" (Laughs)

Interviewer: And then she put them away?

Huanhuan's mother: Right. She put them away while crying. I have to let her know I do not tolerant such things.

In Huanhuan's mother's opinion, "battering is quite useful". Now her daughter sometimes throws off the slippers and heard she say "put them away properly!" She

does that at once because she remembers last time she finally had to do and was late for school that day. The mother admitted that under her “*coercion policy*”, her child gave in. Nevertheless, she also agreed that child “*may be not convinced at heart*”, and so child has not attained self-discipline after all. That means child battering is not necessarily effective.

Parents choose to use coercive measures to discipline their children mainly to maintain their authority and not necessarily to correct their children’s misbehaviors. In many cases where the children commit mistakes, if they do not talk back, and admit their mistakes, they will not be battered. Some mistakes themselves do not spark off parental child battering. However, children’s defiant retorts in those cases anger their parents who think they do not accept discipline and are disrespectful to the elders. As Jingjing’s mother put it, Jingjing was battered “*only because he ‘dingzui’ (talks back)*”.

“Children’s moral conduct is the main issue in child battering”

Chinese think problematic parents have problematic children. Children become problematic because parents have not disciplined them properly. Therefore, when people criticize a child who has poor conduct, they like to say that it is because he/she has “*shaojiao*” (inadequate discipline from parents or lacks family education). Most of the interviewed parents expressed that they emphasized their children’s moral behavior. The first thing they teach their children is how to “*zuoren*” (conduct oneself as a person), which is always the basic requirement in the Chinese culture. Tingting’s father is a community worker. In his opinion, “*We can learn things whenever we want to. But once a person’s character is formed, it’s hard to change it*

after he is 20 or 30 years old.” This is probably because study is something tangible and can be evaluated from one’s homework and academic achievements, but moral conduct is something abstract, which is not easy to measure. Generally, parents begin to exercise strict discipline only after they have discovered problems in their children’s conduct, such as stealing things and telling lies, etc.

The interviews show that the most common misbehavior of children their parents cannot tolerate is telling lies, i.e. dishonesty. Mingming’s mother told me,

I did beat him up severely several times when he was small because he told lies, didn’t tell the truth, for he was afraid I would scold him, and get angry. I’m still keeping his review when he was in Grade Three. I put it up on the wall for more than one year, or almost two years...In his childhood, I really never beat him for reasons other than his lying.

However, she was not willing to explain the facts and causes of Mingming’s dishonesty. In fact, children tell lies mostly related to their studies and they simply want to escape from the pressure of studies and parents’ blame and to make their parents happy. KK’s mother said,

She didn’t get a high score in her exam, about 80 marks, but she didn’t tell the truth and said she did quite well, just not to disappoint me. I learned from her teacher later that she lagged behind in her studies. I got very angry. I trusted her, but she fooled me. Maybe she was well-intentioned, fearing I might get angry and wanted to tell me the truth when she got higher scores next time. But the fact she was dishonest really made me very angry.

Yuanyuan always got battered when small because she didn’t finish her

homework. Her mother explained that battering her was not because she did not do her homework but because *“she always told lies, cheating the teacher saying she forgot to bring her homework and telling us there was no homework.”*

Parents realize that their children tell lies only because they are afraid of being scolded and make parents angry. As Hanghang’s father pointed out, *“A child tells lies only to evade [the consequences]. He is too weak to have other means.”* Children are not born to tell lies and they lie only because in their daily life they know their parents will get angry on discovering the fact and even beat them up. Hence, lying has become a means for children to protect themselves.

Xiaoyu’s mother also explained that she *“beat her child up mainly for the problem of moral conduct.”* She was very strict with her child. She required the child to abide by certain rules and principle and told her what she could do this and what definitely not. When the child did not abide by the rules, she would be battered. The mother remembered when Xiaoyu was about two years old, she cried out for things she liked in a supermarket. In the mother’s eyes, Xiaoyu *“didn’t have principles, so I didn’t buy anything and battered her after returning home. From then on, she never nagged for things like that.”* Xiaoyu’s mother believed, *“you cannot reason with children before they are three years old, so I think force is quite useful.... When they are not able to understand, beating and punitive methods can help them form a good habit.”*

Obviously, to require a two-year-old child to *“have principles”* is to require the child to live up to adults’ standard. In fact, a two-year-old child has no idea of money; she does not know how much things in the supermarket cost and the

financial condition of her family. She only expresses her desire for something, but adults always do not understand it. From this, we can see that some parents lack the knowledge related to the growth of children and do not consider things from the children's perspective.

“...which was related to my mood and the pressure of my work”

Facing the intense social competition nowadays, many parents feel the great pressure of work which somehow affects their mood and attitude towards their children. When parents are in a good mood, they can sit down and patiently reason with their children. They can have discussion with them, tolerate their mistakes and show democratic attitude. But when they are in a bad mood, they find faults with their children, do not tolerate their mistakes, lose their temper over trifles and batter them. Tiantian's mother once gave her son a slap when he opened a coke and splashed the coke on the wall and the refrigerator, because she was in a bad mood that day. Maomao's father also admitted that *“I often gave her corporal punishment several years ago, which was related to my mood and the pressure of my work.”* Few parents talked about this point until I raised it, and they admitted their child battering is connected with their moods.

Hanghang's father was quite impatient. He told me he had no time and patience to reason with his child and always brought his emotions in his work upon him. He explained,

If I had the time, I wouldn't have beaten but talked with him patiently and done something about it. However, I am too busy to have this time and patience. If nothing comes out of talking once or

twice, I'll just start to beat him... Sometimes, parents just want to "shengshi" (save the trouble). A slap is more convenient, simple and direct than "fei koushe" (wasting your breath talking).

When asked if child battering had anything to do with his mood, he confessed,

Yes. In the present social climate, including the family environment, people always bring their emotions in their work back home, though you shouldn't do this to your children. However, you'll still have emotions when you are teaching your child. This is how things go.

Actually, parental child battering is often the result of parents' unreasoning emotions and unreasonable thinking rather than the children's mistakes. Sometimes, even though the children have not committed any mistake, the parents still vent their anger on them simply because they are in a bad mood. If they are in a good mood, they would not batter their children even when they offend them. That is why we can say that child battering sometimes becomes a way for parents to release their feelings. Xiaoyu's mother also admitted that she often brought her emotions in her work back home. This was what she said:

There are many primary and middle school teachers suffering from melancholia. There are also many whose health is below standard. Nowadays, children are not easy to discipline. It is quite tedious to teach children at school for the whole day. They are not my own children, so I can't do whatever I like to them. And that's why I release my feelings on my own child. Usually, she just makes a very small mistake and I'm likely to lose my temper. My child says, she serves as a "sa qi tong" (vent for my anger)...

As a teaching professional, Xiaoyu's mother used reasoning with her students at

school. But back at home, her role changes and as a “family head” did whatever she wanted to do, venting her temper at any time on her own child and disregarding her feelings.

According to the parents, they batter their children mainly because of the children’s problems, but not because of their own problems. Even if they may admit that sometimes their bad mood or impatience make them batter their children, the precondition is their children’s mistakes. Obviously, parents lack self-reflection on their own behavior and have the tendency of “victim blaming”. The aforesaid analysis of my research data reveals that parents ascribe their child battering act mostly to matters such as their children’s studies, obedience and moral character. This finding is line with the research result of Tian and He (2003) who found that the subjective intention of parents to inflict corporal punishment is to foster a child who is “good at studies, tame, gentle and has good moral character”.

My research has shown that parents have developed a set of theories of child battering. Parents’ attitude towards child battering depends on their opinions of whether it is necessary and whether it works or not. Many parents do not want to batter their children as far as possible. However, they cannot help doing that in real life. Chenchen, Jiajia and Xiaojun’s mothers objected to child battering and claimed, *“Don’t readily beat the children, or else they will remember it for ever.”* In fact, interviewed parents were not entirely opposed to child battering. They mainly advocated giving moderate corporal punishment on children. In Jingjing’s mother’s opinion, *“you can’t spare the rod, nor can you beat them all the time. They will get used to it, and ‘develop an iron body’ (become physically toughened up). You beat*

them to let them ‘zhang jixing’ (remember the lesson).” Most parents batter their child just to make them remember the lesson so that they will not commit the same mistakes again.

In Tiantian’s mother’s opinion, the “*reasoning things out*” method advocated by educationists alone sometimes does not work on children whereas “*language punishment*” and “*corporal punishment*” work. She observed, “*Most children grow up under parental language punishment. Their mistakes and ‘crimes’ are listed whenever they commit obvious mistakes.*” Such language punishment actually means scolding, criticizing and even threatening the children, which is similar to Steinmetz (1977) describes as “verbally aggressive”. Regarding corporal punishment, Tiantian’s mother had this to say:

I think we can use it with moderation if it really works. But we can’t use it too much though it works. We should use it carefully not readily and too often. But once we use it, we must make the child remember. For most children, language punishment and moderate corporal punishment are necessary. For example, if the child is addicted to the Internet, it’s no use to reason with him, then you have to give him language punishment and corporal punishment to stop it. Children naturally like surfing the Internet. If parents treat it lightly, this can bring their children serious harm. Empty preaching is useless. Ways advocated by mainstream educationists are useless. We must use language punishment and bodily punishment.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Chinese parents are responsible for their children’s future. Therefore, some parents have the children’s future good in view and think it very important to discipline their children strictly as early as

possible so that they can adapt to society and abide by its rules, or else they may face punishment by the state. Tingting's father pointed out:

[Child battering] should be useful because firstly it makes her recognize what punishment is. If I don't punish her, society and the state will impose stricter punishment on her. That's why there're state punishments like reeducation through labor, imprisonment and even execution by shooting. She'll be punished by the laws if she violates any of them. At home, if she violates moral ethics, damages the environment and break the rules, she should also be punished.

These parents' views match the research result of the Taiwanese scholar Lin & Wang (1995). They indicate that punishment is often considered as a necessary tool that turns an externally controlled person into one who is governed by self-control. An important purpose of education is to socialize people so that they can learn the social norms. As general educational methods are not effective in making some people acquire the social norms, some teachers or parents may seek primitive and harsh methods, such as corporal punishment, to make children compliant. In real life, adults would tend to think that corporal punishment is acceptable and they therefore use it in child discipline.

Many interviewed parents stressed that we should consider specific conditions like the child's character, age, sex, etc. when conducting child battering. They suggested that no child battering should be applied to children who "jichou" (bear grudges), are introverted, have reached middle-school age or adolescence and girls, because these children have quite "strong self-respect" and battering may arouse their rebelliousness and hatred of their parents. Just as Huanhuan's mother

said,

It depends on the type of children. If they are introverted and take it to heart, then no battering should be carried out, otherwise they will “jichou” (bear grudges), just like those who killed their parents...My daughter doesn’t mind too much about it and “bu jichou” (doesn’t bear grudges).

It can be seen that parents care a lot about their children’s affection for them. They do not want their child battering act to affect their parent-child relationship and generally conduct child battering only when they think their children do not “bear grudges”. It is obvious that since child battering is the simplest and most direct way to discipline children, handy for every parent and it may yield immediate effect, so it has become a habitual act of many interviewed parents. Their explanation and attitude towards their above-mentioned reasons and purposes of child battering have direct impact on their construction of child abuse.

Meaning Construction of Child Abuse by Parents

As mentioned in the literature review, the Chinese Constitution has stipulated that “It is forbidden to maltreat the old, women and children” (Article 49). However, it does not define explicitly the term “maltreatment”. Generally speaking, the Chinese seldom use the phrase “*nuedai ertong*” (child maltreatment/abuse). Therefore, I can only start with “parental child battering” which is familiar to the Chinese and explore parents’ understanding of child abuse.

The interviewed parents would not talk about child maltreatment/abuse issue until I raised such question. My question to them was: “*Do think parental child*

battering is 'nuedai ertong' (child maltreatment/abuse)?” They surprised probably because they did not expect I asked such question. They were quite hesitant in their answers. As parents, they lacked serious thinking about child battering and even had only a very vague concept of child maltreatment, so it is quite difficult for them to define the latter during this interview. Some parents emphasized that it could not be generalized and it depended on actual situations. Besides the particular situations of the interviewed families, I cited three true cases (see Appendix 3) from the press and the Internet in the hope that they could be inspired to think further over child abuse. Below is a summary of the interviewed parents’ construction of child abuse in four aspects.

Construction from the perspectives of purpose, motive and reason for parental child battering

Most of the interviewed parents believed that battering conducted by parents on their own children was not child abuse. Their main argument is that the purpose and motive of parental child battering are reasonable as it is meant to discipline the children for their good. Parental child battering has good reasons related to, for example, children’s study problems, their disobedience and defiant retorts, their conduct, etc. In the eyes of the interviewed parents, the purpose, motive and reasons are criteria for judging whether a parental child battering act is child abuse.

Among the interviewed parents, KK’s mother presented a typical parental view that parental child battering is not child abuse. She commented, *“Abuse is another concept, like not feeding the child, torturing her mentally and simply disliking her. It’s ill-willed. Our battering is out of love. We can’t help carrying out*

battering for the child's good, which I think is totally different from abuse."

During the second interview, KK's mother gave her opinions on the three cases cited in the Appendix 3. She thought that the three parents "*should not have battered their children*" and "*what they did was too much*", but she still stressed that

Normal parents beat their children only because they "wang zi cheng long" (hope their child will be a high-flier), which is not abuse. Abuse is malevolent in cases where the child is not their own, or the parents are abnormal and have mental problems. Such parents are different from us in their purpose of maltreatment and their mentality.Seeing whatever the child does as wrong and beating her up, or battering without reason and abnormally is real child abuse. If there are good reasons such as the child not finishing her homework, or telling lies, etc., we can't call it child abuse because it's for the child's good and educating her. Although parents have different educational levels, all of them "wang zi cheng long" (hope their child will be a high-flier).

In her eyes, maltreatment of children is unreasonable and abnormal child battering. Some parents observed the fact that many contemporary parents have only one child has strengthened their high expectations of their child and their practice of corporal punishment.

Huanhuan's mother emphasized that the main difference between child abuse and corporal punishment is in the motive of child battering. Battering for the child's good is corporal punishment, otherwise it is child abuse. Therefore, in her opinion, the three cases (in Appendix 3) are not cases of child abuse,

...Because the parents didn't mean to bring such severe harm. They did it only out of impulsive anger. It's impossible that parents would try to batter their children to death, unless the children not their own. The three parents didn't mean to hurt their children. They just wanted to discipline them for their good, unlike in some patriarchal rural districts where parents favor their male children and intend to batter their daughters to death, which constitutes abuse. The difference [between corporal abuse and punishment] lies the parents' intention. The three parents beat up their children for their good, and they had no intention to batter them to disability or death...Maltreatment always comes with malevolence and hatred. For example, people maltreat the old just to want them to die. However, the intention behind child battering is different. Parents always consider their children's good no matter how severely or often they batter them. I think child abuse is only related to the intention of battering, and has nothing to do with the frequency and severity of battering.

That is typical teleology, in which parents only consider the purpose but not result of child battering. To them, child battering does not constitute child abuse no matter whether it brings harm to the child, as long as the purpose is “*for the child's good*” and it does not have the malevolence of maltreatment. In Yuanyuan's mother's opinion, the malevolence of maltreatment or abuse lies in “*the intention to cause harm*”, the starting point of which is different from that of corporal punishment. During the second interview, she pointed out,

Maltreatment is child battering without reason while corporal punishment involves a causal relationship in which the cause is the child having committed mistakes first. And in some cases of maltreatment, conflicts between the father and the mother are

transferred to their child. The child is innocent and serves as a vent for the parents' anger. Battering as corporal punishment is different. It aims for discipline and for the child's good, with a different cause. The three cases developed into maltreatment, which is different from sheer abuse. Abuse is meant to cause injury with the result being intentional. For corporal punishment, the result is not expected or predictable at the beginning and is not intended to cause harm. Maltreatment is to bring harm, for example, using a cigarette end to burn the child. These three parents hadn't thought of the result of corporal punishment, and they were kind of having difficulty in understanding. These cases were quite accidental because the parents concerned didn't expect they would harm their own children.

Maomao's father had similar thoughts about corporal punishment and abuse.

He said,

At least, their starting points are different. Committing mistakes should be punished. In maltreatment, [the parents] have mental and psychological problems and batter their children no matter whether their children have committed mistakes or not. Some parents maltreat their children just because they hate them, or somehow not happy with them, or their children don't satisfy them. Maltreatment has no reason and doesn't target at specific incidents. For example, some parents who may be drunk and battered their child, or they stop him from doing his homework, which constitutes maltreatment.

We can sum up the above viewpoints as follows. Malevolent and unreasoned parental child battering which intentionally brings the child harm is child abuse; battering with good intentions, motivated by consideration of the child's good is corporal punishment. Only Dongdong's mother distinguishes the "intent" from the "act" of parental child battering. In her opinion, parents' original intention is not to

abuse the child because no malevolence is involved. However, “*the act of child battering is itself a kind of maltreatment*” in which the strong bullies the weak. She admitted that though with good intentions, battering can lead to harm and abuse results. “*Alas!*” she said with a sigh,

Children are not strong and their ability to strike back when battered is weak. So they can't fight you. Battering a weaker person is itself a kind of maltreatment. However, it's not like that from the angle of intention. Who wants to maltreat her own child? You just want to restrict and supervise him, but battering itself brings the child harm and maltreatment.

Dongdong's mother was one of the two interviewed parents who admitted that their child battering was itself a kind of maltreatment. So she also thought that the first two cases (in Appendix 3) were examples of child abuse.

Construction from the perspectives of the severity and the means of child battering

A minority of the interviewed parents recognized child abuse from the perspective of the severity of child battering, thinking that despite the parents' good intentions and purposes, parental child battering can still constitute child abuse because sometimes it may lead to very serious results and psychological harm. Xiaoyu's mother observed, “*Beating that makes the child feel some pain is corporal punishment but maltreatment is a kind of cruel violence. So ordinary beating isn't equal to violence.*” In these interviewed parents' eyes, the first case is child abuse because Wang Chuang's mother (Case 1 in Appendix 3) gave her son such severe battering that it led to his acute renal failure. Most parents held that “*ordinary beating is not violence*”. According to the Amendment to The Law on the Protection

of Minors implemented on June 1, 2007, “Violence against minors in the family is forbidden” (Article 10). However, there is no law to define in writing whether child beating is family violence or how severe it is to make it family violence.

In most parents’ opinion, the severity of child beating is related to the means and tools used in beating, as well as beating with the hands does less harm. Therefore, whether tools are used or not is an important factor to determine the severity of child battering. Beating with the hands on the buttock, back or face is normal and not child abuse. But severe beating with tools or tying up the child to batter him/her constitutes child abuse. This is because parents themselves cannot feel the pain if they use tools and are likely to beat more heavily, while tying up the child will prevent him/her from dodging the blows. The interviewed parents thought their child battering was only “*moderate corporal punishment*” as they did not use any tools and beat heavily. Here is Yuanyuan’s mother’s opinion:

We always beat our child on her bum sort of rationally. Our hands hurt because we never used any tools. Generally speaking, every family beats their child up. But few families beat them severely. Burning the child with a cigarette end, for example, is unacceptable. At most a ruler or a rod may be used. I remember when I was naughty in my childhood, my mother used a ruler to beat my palms and bum.

Some parents argued that the degree of harm of child battering inflicted on the body is not as serious as it is on the mind. Corporal punishment is only physical but maltreatment is psychological and mental punishment as well. Just as Hanghang’s father said, “*Severity refers to the impact on the child’s mind and*

growth, and not merely the body. Mental harm is the primary hurt and physical injury is secondary.” Physical injury is superficial while psychological harm is deep. That is why a few parents called the second case (Case 2 in Appendix 3) a child abuse case because Xu Li’s mother set an unattainable academic goal for him, battered him very frequently and gradually hurting him mentally, though without severe physical injury.

On the contrary, having been a policeman for nearly twenty years, Lanlan’s father said in the second interview that both cases were only instances of corporal punishment because the parents have not “*the intent of maltreatment*” and “*serious harms both mentally and physically*”. In his opinion,

Maltreatment is much more serious. It is long-term and harms both mentally and physically. Ordinary child battering is corporal punishment, and turns into maltreatment only when it gets severer. In this way, it is subjectively understood to be corporal punishment but objectively seen as maltreatment in the result. Parents don’t mean to maltreat their own children. But to the children, it may be maltreatment. Parents don’t intend to carry out maltreatment which is the result the parents don’t want.

He admitted that although parents have no intention to conduct maltreatment, what they do may result in maltreatment. They may have no idea of abuse, but the children may think it is abuse. When expressing his views on child abuse, he felt the contradiction.

Construction from the perspective of the frequency of child battering

Some interviewed parents emphasized that frequent child battering is child

abuse while occasional battering however severe is not child abuse. So in their opinion, the first case in which Wang Chuang was severely battered by his mother only once is in agreement with the Chinese saying, “*Rather not batter them but once you batter them, make sure they remember it well*”. As Tiantian’s mother said, “*If Wang Chuang had never been battered before, this single incident does not constitute child abuse. But if he was frequently battered, it is then a case of child abuse.*”

Lanlan’s father was the parent who was most concerned about the frequency of child battering. As he said,

Disciplining the child by means of battering at will is surely maltreatment. Beating once in a while, or for certain purposes such as to discipline her well once and for all to make her afraid and listen to you in future, or just like me, “dong shou” (using the hands means beat child) out of exasperation, should be not [child] maltreatment.

He concluded his view, saying, “*Battering almost every day constitutes maltreatment while battering once in a while doesn’t. The action may be classified as maltreatment, but it’s not so from an integrated view.*” Here, “integrated” means besides frequency, child abuse should be determined by factors like the intention, motive and purpose of child battering. “*Severe battering does not mean maltreatment*”. It depends on the purpose it serves. He also thought that parental child battering always had a good purpose, which shows that he believed in teleology. However, in the second interview, he remarked: “*Severe battering is maltreatment*”, “*forcing children to study is a kind of mental maltreatment*”. This

shows that after the first interview, he had new thoughts and understanding of parental child battering and child abuse, which at the same time reflects the vague and contradictory opinions of the interviewed parents on child abuse.

Construction from an integrated view

Some parents advocated viewing child abuse from an integration of factors including the purpose, motive, reason, frequency, severity and means of child battering. Hanghang's father explained this view most fully. During the second interview, he specifically expressed his understanding of child abuse by integrating the three cases in the Appendix 3. Here is part of my conversation with him:

Interviewer: Do you think battering in the three cases are cases of child abuse?

Hanghang's father: It depends on the purpose, motive, frequency, severity and means of battering. It's not easy to distinguish between corporal punishment and maltreatment because a lot of "ganqing secai" (emotional feelings) are involved. Maltreatment involves bad motives, bringing harm to the child and producing trouble. All the three cases are not maltreatment.

Interviewer: So can you explain specifically what you think is child abuse?

Hanghang's father: Child abuse means using irrational, illegal or unbearable ways to treat the children. For example, to guarantee a certain proportion of students get promoted to a higher grade, the headmaster manages the students in military style, punishes them to stand or kneel, feeds them badly and allows them to see their parents only once in half a year, because parents have signed a

contract with the school which allows the school to discipline their children in whatever way as long as it does not hurt the children too severely. Children can do nothing but study, that's where maltreatment comes. Since the school and the parents possess only one objective which is about utilitarian or commercial. They disregard other aspects of the children's needs, and this constitutes maltreatment. But parental child battering is always incidental and not premeditated: they batter their children only because of momentary outrage.

Interviewer: Do you think whether the battering is child abuse or not depends on the means, motive and purpose?

Hanghang's father: Right. In my opinion, there are several motives for maltreatment. The abuser maltreats others to get fun, advantage, or other things or just satisfaction from the act. Parents are different. We spend money and hope our children can reach our goal. When they can't realize that goal, we just get impatient and beat them up, which to some degree is maltreatment. I do have self-reflection. When my child first attended English class, I got crabby at the beginning because I'd spent so much money but he just didn't learn it well. So I battered him. Now I felt I've infringed upon my child's right and interest. A friend's daughter learned the piano. But she couldn't play it well, so he gave her a slap, dashing her against the corner of the piano and her forehead bled. He felt guilty afterwards and asked himself, 'How could I have treated my own child this way?' Nowadays, children's tuition fees took up a large part of the family income. As a result, parents behave unreasonably only because of money and not for their

children's good...Many children play the piano well because they are battered a lot. They pay a high cost that outweighs the gain because they've lost their happiness and suffered pains in the process.

Interviewer: Aren't these cases of parental child battering in relation with interest?

Hang hang's father: Battering once in a while, though out of impure motives, isn't maltreatment. Battering in the first case is harm but not maltreatment. Maltreatment means battering frequently or almost every day, which harms the child's mind. My child is left-handed, and when I wrenched his left hand to stop him from writing with it and required him to use the right hand, I might have overdone and maltreated him. But I seldom beat him when he wrote.

Interviewer: Just now you mentioned the purpose, motive, frequency, means and severity of battering are related to what constitutes abuse. What do you mean by severity?

Hanghang's father: Severity means the impact on the child's mind and growth, and not only on his body. Mental harm comes first and physical harm second. In the second case, the degree of the child's mental distortion resulting from child battering makes it maltreatment, but the battering itself does not constitute maltreatment.

In Hanghang's father's eyes, parents in the three cases had conducted "unsophisticated discipline" on their children. Parents committing child abuse must have bad motives and intentions, the frequency of battering and the severity of harm, and the means of abuse must be unbearable to the children. Whether the means is bearable or rational is also decided by the parents. Parents never hear their children's

views.

What is noteworthy is Hanghang's father's opinion on his own child battering act. He was the only interviewed parent who admitted during the two interviews that his act was "*somewhat a kind of maltreatment*". In the first interview, he laughed, saying that "*[Parental child battering] should be classified as maltreatment, because children may be able to bear it.*" This may be because he had a rod which was specially used for beating up his child and he admitted, "*I beat up my child more often than other parents*". Battering with a small rod makes children feel painful but does not produce severe injury because the contact area is small. During the second interview, he seemed to have an all-round and deep reflection on this problem. He confessed that his child battering was not necessarily for his child's good but because he had high investment in his child's education and high expectations of the child and yet did not receive the expected reward. He had self-reflection on his child battering and also hid the rod he used to batter his child after the first interview.

Tiantian's mother also viewed child abuse from all aspects, and she especially focused on whether the parental child battering was "*rational*". Here is her opinion:

The difference between corporal punishment and maltreatment lies in whether the parents are rational and is definitely related to the motive behind parental child battering. Parents will surely say it's for the child's good, but this is not a specific motive. They must find a clear motive and purpose, such as correcting their children's addiction to the Internet...Maltreatment is related to whether

parents have a clear motive and the frequency and severity of their child battering. Severity means whether the child is injured....Battering almost every day is also maltreatment, which can be statistically proved...The application of tools or use of malicious language are also maltreatment, as the destructive power of language doesn't seem to be weaker than battering. In the second case, the mother said, 'I will break your legs if you go to play football any more. I brought you to this world and it doesn't matter if I beat you to death.' This is hurtful language. Its damage to the child is worse than corporal punishment.

Among the interviewees, Tiantian's mother was the only one especially alert to verbal abuse, but not very sensitive to bodily maltreatment. She believed in parents' rationality and thought that parental child battering was based on a clear purpose and good reasons, such as to correct the child's behavior, help him/her improve in his/her studies and moral character. Such parental child battering would not be too severe and is not child abuse. On the contrary, parents have committed child abuse when they batter their children without a clear reason or good intention, or do so with a rod or belt to hurt the children. She explained, as an example, that parental child battering constitutes child abuse when parents release their emotions on their children and batter them simply because they themselves have been treated unfairly in their work, or when they have psychological problems or the tendency towards violence, which are all unreasonable. The problem is that parent child battering is often irrational. What is more, even if the act is rational, child battering can still lead to child abuse. Rationality and irrationality can be interchanged during the process of child battering.

The interview data presented above show that the parents focused on different points in their conception of child abuse. They represent mainly the diversities in the construction of child abuse of different parents or adults. Below, on the other hand, are the similarities of their understanding of child abuse.

The interviewed parents focused on the aspects of their purpose, motive and reason for child battering to determine whether it was child abuse. Since all the parents thought they were reasonable in their child battering, what they really cared about were the underlying purpose and motive. They invariably regarded their child battering as corporal punishment and believed that corporal punishment is a kind of limited physical discipline on children who have made mistakes. Child abuse on the other hand is an act of infringement conducted by parents malevolently, unreasonably, frequently and severely to harm their child's body and mind. The interviewed parents specially emphasized that the primary basis to distinguish child abuse from corporal punishment is to see if the parental child battering is malevolent and unreasonable or not. Whether corporal punishment is a form of physical child abuse is quite controversial in international academic circles (Clark, 2004). The interviewed parents in this research gave a clear answer: corporal punishment is not child abuse, it is only an ordinary method of discipline employed by parents.

Influence of Parent-child Affection and Power Relation on Parents' Construction of Child Abuse

The interviewed parents all focused on the motive and purpose of parental child battering and emphasized the parent-child affection with blood ties between them and their own child. Therefore, their construction of child abuse has strong

emotional overtones and is deeply influenced by the parent-child affection and power relation. Hence they generally did not admit that their child battering was child abuse. Just as Hanghang's father said, "*It's not easy to distinguish between corporal punishment and maltreatment because a lot of emotional elements are involved.*"

Parents won't maltreat "their own child" unless they are mentally abnormal

Parent-child affection is based on blood relationship. Whether they like or dislike their children's characters and behaviors, parents have affection for their own offspring. This parent-child affection is particularly conspicuous in the modern Chinese one-child families. As mentioned in the previous chapter, parents look after their own children in all ways and want them to have an all-round development and healthy growth. They see it as their responsibility not only to bring up their children but also to educate them to become successful persons living a good life in the future. For the good of their children's future, they invest generously in their education. All this demonstrates parent-child affection and parental love for children. This research has shown that when parent-child interaction and conflict are involved, parents used to see them from the perspective of parent-child affection, which they take as an important or even the only factor for child battering.

"*Their own child*" is a term often used by the parents during the interviews. Although some parents occasionally mentioned that their child also belonged to the country, they were first and foremost their offspring. Hence, as far as child abuse is concerned, most of them stressed that "*biological parents*" would never maltreat "*their own child*" unless they are psychologically abnormal or have mental illness.

All of them held that stepparents and foster parents might practise child abuse. Here is Fangfang's father's comment on the first two cases (see Appendix 3):

Battering like this seems too much and excessive. Parents definitely wouldn't carry out child abuse on their own child, though stepparents may. If biological parents batter their children like that, surely there must be some other reasons, and they don't mean to do it. Unless they are psychologically abnormal, what parents would maltreat their own child at will? At least from the perspective of rational thinking, consciousness and affection, the battering wasn't a kind of child abuse.

Obviously, he thought that biological parents' child battering is different from stepparents'. Rational thinking, consciousness and parent-child affection would guide them not to maltreat "their own child". That is to say, most parents believe they would not conduct child abuse simply because they never want to. Even though the battering is very severe, they still believe that "there must be some other reasons" or the abuser is psychologically abnormal.

Xiaojun's mother expressed the same opinion. She thought that parents would not maltreat "their own child", and they did so only because their expectations of their child were too high. She pointed out that the second case and the third case (in Appendix 3)

were not maltreatment, unless she was the stepmother, then you may call it maltreatment. She really had no alternative, so she battered her child as the last resort. "Hu du bu shi zi" (Even a vicious tiger will not eat its cubs). No creature would maltreat its offspring, let alone a mother. I think it's just corporal punishment. ...Now, there's

only one child in the family. Parents “hen tie bu cheng gang”¹. Their expectations of their only child are excessively high. After all, the quality of our citizens is so low. So what can they do about their own child?

On the other hand, Xiaojun’s mother thought that the first case (in Appendix 3) in which Wang Chuang’s mother battered her son into acute renal failure was “*somewhat a kind of maltreatment*”, because it was too severe, and she was puzzled at it, “*Wang Chuang’s mother battered her son in such a way. Does she have some mental illness? No one with normal human feelings can figure it out. Isn’t the child her own child?*”

In her opinion, parents batter their own child not because they mean to hurt them but to discipline them. So parents should not beat child too heavily. In the case of Wang Chuang’s mother injuring her son as a result of battering him, it just means such parents “*have mental illness*”, or perhaps because the child was brought up by his aunt, so he and his mother were not intimate, i.e. their parent-child affection is not strong enough. Otherwise, her battering was totally incomprehensible to normal human beings. The psychopathic perspective which was the first model explaining child abuse was more acceptable to these parent informants.

Jingjing’s mother also thought that Wang Chuang should be beaten because he did not finish his homework, but the excessive battering his mother inflicted on him was a sign of “*abnormality*”. All the interviewed parents would believe that the

¹ “*Hen tie bu cheng gang*” literally means the dissatisfaction that iron could not turn into steel. In this context, the parents are dissatisfied that their mediocre child *could not turn into high-fliers at once*.

abusers were abnormal rather than think they had maltreated “*their own child*” because they were all loving parents who treasured their only child so much that they could not accept the label of “child abuse” from the view of parent-child affection.

The feeling that child battering by “biological parents” is different from that by the abuser

All interviewed parents emphasized that they felt regretful, sad, guilty, painful and even had “tears in their hearts” after battering their child, and on the other hand, the abuser do not have such feelings because they just want to harm the children. Just as Maomao’s father said, “*After corporal punishment, parents feel distressed and regretful, but the parents who maltreat children won’t feel so.*” Hanghang’s father agreed, “*People who carry out maltreatment will get fun, advantage, or other things, or just mental satisfaction from it.*” Parents explain their feelings to prove that their child battering is not child abuse, but they ignore their child’s feelings, which is typical of a parent-centered view.

However, parents always take action to alleviate the impact of child battering on parent-child affection and their sense of guilt. The interviewed parents, out of their wish to protect their “*face*” or self-esteem, usually do not apologize to their child for parental child battering. But most of them will make some reparation. Some parents reason with their child, some appease them, and some cook delicious food for them or buy them things. Xiaoyu’s mother told me that every time she “*lost my temper I felt especially regretful. So after beating her, I would sometimes hug her and coax her. Not until I have made her happy would I feel relieved... ha ha!*” In her

opinion, parents “*let the children suffer some physical pain just to make them ‘zhang jixing’ (remember the lesson). The intention is not to maltreat them. When we beat them, we also feel painful in our hearts.*” As the Chinese proverb goes, the pain of beating a child is in the heart of the mother.

Yuanyuan’s parents often adopts the tactic of “*da yi ba zhang, rou san rou*” (*giving one slap and soothing three times afterwards*), which means gently comforting the child after the battering, so as to minimize the adverse effect of child battering on parent-child affection. Here is what Yuanyuan’s mother said:

In my opinion, we can beat children, but we must let them know the meaning. After we’ve beaten our child, we comfort her. We explain to her why we beat her because we don’t want to alienate and lose our only child. We are “da yi ba zhang, rou san rou”. We sometimes emphasize that “da shi qin, ma shi ai” (beating is caring and scolding is love) and we beat her just for her good. My husband values a lot the parent-child affection. Every night, he turns the light off for her and sometimes passes her a cup of water, because she likes drinking water. [Her husband frequently beat their child] Beating makes them more intimate. She “bu jichou” (doesn’t bear grudges) and get on well with her father. So, people always say the worst thing is apathy. You beat her and reason with her afterwards, and she knows you do it for her good.

Research data show that one-child parents nowadays care a lot about their child’s affection for them and worry that their only child is not intimate with them and are afraid of losing their child in future. Most of the interviewed parents think their devotion to their child can prevent them from bearing grudges. Thus, child battering does not affect parent-child relationship. They even suppose that “*beating*

makes them more intimate”, and so it is not child abuse.

Although Xiaoqiang’s father felt that parental child battering had a little bad effect on parent-child relationship and his child may bear grudges against them, he was sure that his child would one day understand the pains parents took. Many interviewed parents’ recollection of their own childhood proves this idea. Talking about his childhood when he was often battered by his parents, Tingting’s father said, *“I did hate (my parents) because I was beaten and it hurt. Why not? Now I know it’s normal, because I’ve understood my parents.”* After he has become a father, he understands the pains his parents took, which realizes the old Chinese saying, *“yang er fang zhi fu mu en”* (We never know the love of our parents until we have become parents ourselves).

On the contrary, Tiantian’s mother looked back on her childhood when she was often battered by her mother and said that frequent parental child battering would affect parent-child relationship.

Frequent battering surely hurts the child somehow. When they grow up, they won’t mention it, but the relationship between those children often battered and their parents is certainly different from that between those seldom battered and their parents. I never have a heart-to-heart talk with my mother, not even now, though I’m over 40 and my mother is approaching 70.

Although parents feel distressed and regretful after battering their child, they cannot remove from their minds the damage to their children. Frequently battered children do not necessarily bear grudges against their parents, but this does not mean they do not have a mental scar. Research has shown that parents underestimate the

adverse effect of corporal punishment and even child abuse on parent-child relationship.

Parents have the right to batter “their own child”

Chinese culture has emphasized that “*yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo*” (*feeding without teaching is the father's fault*). Parents as *jiazhang* (family head) are bestowed with the power and authority to take whatever punitive actions needed to correct their children. The remnants of the feudal attitude still remain in the minds of many Chinese who hold the attitudes that “*battering is caring and scolding is love*”, “*bang xia chu xiaozi*” (*the rod makes an obedient son*), and “*bu da bu cheng cai*” (*the rod makes a successful child*), the Chinese equivalent of the Western saying “*spare the rod and spoil the child*”. Many of parents take it for granted that it is their right to batter their own child when they try to teach him/her.

In the eyes of the interviewed parents, children are pure, innocent, naive, simple, dependent, immature, ignorant, irresponsible, lacking social experience and requiring their parents’ care, help, guidance and discipline. Hence, children have to obey their parents, willingly or under compulsion, or else they will be punished. Jingjing’s mother insisted,

We have the right to beat our children. If they’re really intractable and it’s useless for us to say whatever to them, beating them is the only way. We can beat them before the age of 11, because at that stage they trust their parents, rely on them and are easily convinced. But after that, it is difficult to convince them, even by battering them.

Parents are quite clear that they cannot beat other people’s children and they

can only beat “their own child”, which seems to presume their right to beat their own child. On mentioning the troubles of a teacher, Xiaoyu’s mother remarked, “*Pupils are not my own children, and I cannot do whatever I like to them.*” Here, “*do whatever I like*” surely presupposes that parents can beat or scold their children whenever they like.

Maomao’s father thought his child battering did not affect their parent-child relationship and explained, “*In my child’s eyes, parents have the right to beat her. I’m not sure. Do children think their parents have the right to beat them? (Laughing) Does such an idea slowly come to them?*” In his opinion, parental child battering is not the same as teacher’s student battering and here is his analysis:

After all, the relation between parents and their child is different from that between the teacher and the students. Parents live with child every day. In the eyes of the children, these are my parents; they love me; they beat me. This is a blood relation. On the other hand, that one is my teacher, not a member of my family, and she teaches me only for the time being. But these are my parents who will live with me for the whole life. Children can distinguish such a relation with parent-child affection when they are little. Though they can’t express it clearly, they know it’s a unique relationship at heart. So they won’t tell others after their parents have beaten them. But if their teachers have beaten them, they will tell others: ‘My teacher beat me.’ Some teachers batter their students really out of love, hoping they will succeed quickly. However, what society criticizes so much is that many teachers impose corporal punishment on their students not because they want to turn their students into high-fliers but because you disturb my class or my lecture, rather than treating students as their own children.

He stressed the parent-child affection based on the blood relation, and so their child battering is acceptable to their child. Thus, most parents believe that their child battering act is not child abuse but cannot accept child battering carried out by other people. Tiantian's mother told me that her son and other male fellow students were beaten by the coach with a belt when they took the military training. "*We teach our children not to beat others, but the coach whipped my child with a belt.*" She was so furious that she reported it all the way to the Ministry of Education.

That is right: "*We teach our children not to beat others.*" But why can parents beat their own child? Obviously, parents think they have the right to batter their offspring. Admitting this or not, parents exercise this right in daily life.

Chapter Summary

Through the analysis of data from two rounds of in-depth interviews with one-child parents in Beijing, this chapter presents these parents' explanation and attitude towards their child battering and their understanding and construction of child abuse. The underlying social and cultural root of their views and their adult-centered standpoint are revealed. This chapter consists of three parts.

Part one shows these parents' explanation of and attitude towards the reason and purpose of their child battering. This part is the prelude to their construction of child abuse. Parental child battering mainly results from the child's study problems, their disobedience, defiant retorts and moral conduct, as well as from parents' mood and character. Parents batter their child mainly to correct their mistakes and discipline them. Their dominant opinion about child battering is that they regard it as

a necessary and effective disciplinary method, so they advocate “*moderate corporal punishment*”.

Part two presents parents’ construction of the meaning of child abuse through their answers to the question whether parental child battering is a kind of child abuse. They understand child abuse from such aspects as the purpose, motive, reason, frequency, severity and means of child battering. In their opinion, parents’ battering children with malevolence, without reason, frequently and severely hurting their children’s body and mind is an infringing act and constitutes child abuse, whereas parents’ moderate disciplinary acts for the children’s mistakes are corporal punishments. The primary basis to distinguish child abuse from corporal punishment is the malevolence and unreasonableness of parental child battering. Most of the interviewed parents think their child battering is only corporal punishment and not child abuse.

Part three outlines the biggest similarity between different parents in their construction of child abuse. Most of them are concerned about the motive and purpose of parental child battering and emphasize the parent-child affection between them and their own child. There is strong emotional color in their construction of child abuse which is deeply influenced by the parent-child affection and power relation. They do not consider the problem of child abuse from the perspectives of the right and the physical and mental development of the children.

Research data presented in this chapter reveals that parental child battering is still very common and “child abuse” is quite an offensive term to the interviewed parents. They do not want to connect their child battering to child abuse and

repeatedly emphasize that *“it is for the good of their child”* and they batter them only because of an angry impulse. They believe that the parent-child affection makes it impossible for parents, unless they are psychologically abnormal, to maltreat *“their own child”*.

Chapter Seven

Children's Constructions of Child Abuse

Introduction

Since the implementation of *the UN Convention on the Rights of Children* issued by the United Nations of 1989, more and more attention is being paid to the rights of children and more and more people are listening to children's voices on different issues. However, the view of the children on child abuse has only been a concern for the researchers in the recent years (McGee, 2000; Mullender, Hague, Iman, Kelly, Malos & Regan, 2002). Increasingly, listening to children has become a fundamental concern of the child protection professionals in the West (Cashmore, 2002; Goodman, Batterman-Faunce, Schaaf & Kenney, 2002; Jones, 2002). Chinese children's understanding of child abuse, however, is a research gap. The purpose of this chapter, as distinct from the previous chapter, is to present and emphasize the perspectives and views of children concerning parental child battering and child abuse, so as to prevent the children's voices from being overwhelmed by the adults'. It will look at the meaning construction of "child abuse" by the children as reflected in their explanation of the reasons why they are battered, their attitudes towards battering and its effects on them, and explore the uniqueness of Chinese children's understanding of child abuse and the social and cultural roots affecting their understanding. The structures of discussion in this chapter parallel those in chapter six.

Children's Explanation for Being Battered by Their Parents

In the Chinese culture, children never have equal status with adults; the inferior status of the children becomes a foundation for child battering. Since ancient times, it has been natural for children to be battered by parents. It is rare that a child never got beaten in his/her childhood. However, few people pay attention to the children's explanation, feelings and attitudes after being battered. Besides, in nowadays urban China where one-child family is the norm, people may think that children will only be spoiled and coddled, not beaten. Hence it is not easy to notice the other side of these children's lives, namely, that they may also be battered by their parents. Yet my interview and focus group data show that it is prevalent that these only- child get beaten by their parents, so there is no direct relation between being battered and being the only-child in the families. Some children I interviewed have vivid memories of being battered, but they have forgotten the specific reasons why they were beaten at that time. Of course, maybe the children do not want talk to me about the things in which they are "*at fault*". Even when the children do give explanations for the beating, they are often different from those of their parents. Such deviations reflect the difference in the feelings as well as perspectives between children and parents towards parental child battering.

"Bad scores in school examination"

Nowadays in China, academic performance is a very serious topic and a major cause for child-parent conflicts. The interviewed children, who all live in Beijing and are well-provided for with food and clothing, feel that they do not need

to study hard to change their lives as their parents did in their childhood. More and more fun things attract them; therefore, besides a few outstanding students who have strong self-discipline, most of the children study under the supervision of their parents, or are forced to study.

School achievement has become the first standard to evaluate children. The most common questions adults have for their children are : “*How many marks did you score in the examination?*” “*What is your rank in the class?*” Many children say that from the emotional changes and the concerned expression in their parents’ eyes, they can easily feel that their parents follow their study closely and have high expectations on their academic records. For example, Fangfang who is a freshman in the junior school ranks first in her monthly English examination, and she usually senses that her parents’ emotion is affected by her academic achievement. She said,

I feel that my parents place great hope on me. A few days ago, I got the highest score in the English examination, which greatly delighted my parents. But whenever I get poor scores in the examination, it displeases them. Last time, I failed in the ‘aoshu’ examination, and my parents had gotten angry with me for several days.

The child’s “*poor scores in examinations*” may make the parents angry for several days, and some parents may even beat the child. Hanghang, who is 9 years old and studies in the fourth grade in the primary school, has only average academic achievement. He tells me that because of his unsatisfactory scores, his father always beats him with a stick. When I met him in his home for the first time, the impression he gave me is that he was very timid. In the interview, he often kept silent. It seems

that he could not reply many questions or was unhappy. The following is a segment of the dialogue between Hanghang and me.

Interviewer: Do you have any unhappy things in your life?

Hanghang: (Kept quiet for a long time) ...Too many, I cannot remember all of them.

Interviewer: Too many? ...Do you often cry?

Hanghang: Yes.

Interviewer: What makes you cry?

Hanghang: When my father blames me for my poor achievement.

Interviewer: What poor achievement?

Hanghang: My academic records.

Interviewer: How about your academic records in your class?

Hanghang: Average.

Interviewer: Do you feel unhappy when your father blames you for your poor scores?

Hanghang: Yes, sometimes, when he beats me.

Interviewer: Do you remember the reason why your father beat you recently?

Hanghang: There was no examination in school recently.

Interviewer: Oh, then what was the situation before that?

Hanghang: (Remained silent for a long time) In the earlier examination, I got only "B" and "A-" grades and never got full scores; therefore, my father scolded me.

Interviewer: What will make your father beat you again?

Hanghang: If I continue to get unsatisfactory scores in my study, he will beat me.

Interviewer: Which part of your body will usually be beaten?

Hanghang: He usually beats me with a stick, and I really don't know which part of the body he beats, but practically everywhere except the face.

Interviewer: Does it hurt?

Hanghang: Yes.

I feel distressed because a 9-year-old child should have a carefree childhood; however, based on the interview data, I know that he has experienced “*too many*” unhappy things as a result of his poor study performance. Under the present education system, schools generally hold a lot of examinations, so whenever the exam scores are released, it is natural that some families will be delighted while some not. In this connection, students with high scores will be awarded by parents while those with lower scores will be blamed and criticized or even beaten. For example, Hanghang, who only gets average scores, is often battered by his father because his school achievement does not meet his father’s requirements. His father can not forgive him for not getting full scores in the examinations. “*Getting full scores*” is a high standard for the children and it exerts great pressure on them. It also demonstrates that the parents pay more attention to the scores than to the children themselves. In the parents’ views, paying attention to the scores means caring for the children because the scores are connected to the future of the children. However, Hanghang’s father explains that the reason why he beats his child is his bad study habit, not his scores. According to him, the two things are different. But in fact, the study habit affects the academic records and grade, which in turn are the only standards to evaluate the study habit.

About the reason for being battered, the explanation the 11-year-old KK gives is different from that of her mother’s. In the interview, her mother told me that the child was beaten not because of the score itself, but because the child was

dishonest in not telling her the real score. On the contrary, KK who gets average scores thinks that she is beaten because her scores cannot meet the requirements of her mother. She said,

My parents lost their temper because of my poor scores in an examination. At that time, I was near the bottom in my study, so no matter how hard I tried to study, the scores could not be increased. As a result, they beat me so fiercely that no matter how hard I begged them to stop, they wouldn't. I felt so disappointed and angry with them. Later, my father teaches me how to study harder and my scores then improve.

Although Xiaoqiang obtains bad academic achievement, he has good performance in other fields as well as strong capability in communicating with others. He tells me that he cannot learn anything in the middle school. Thus, he wants to enrol in a vocational high school. His explanation for being beaten is similar to that of his father; that is, “90% of the reason is study.” But he is unwilling to tell me any experience of being battered probably because he believes “*this will have bad effects on his parents' face*”, or he may be worried about his face.

Sometimes, outstanding students may also be battered for study problems. Because the higher scores the students get, the higher expectations the parents place on them, so they cannot be permitted to make any mistake or regress in study. Tiantian remembers clearly how he was beaten two times, all because of his study. He said,

When I was in grade one in the primary school, I could not read the Chinese Pinyin (Chinese pronunciation). So, my mother slapped me. This is the first time my mother beat me. Then she taught me how to

do it. However, I still could not read it correctly. Suddenly, she boxed my ears so hard that my nose bled. The second time she beat me was in my fifth grade. My playing came between my study and me; thus my grades in “aoshu” class went down. Once, I could not even remember the multiplication distribution rates, which enraged my mother, and then she beat me on every part of my body. After beating me, my mother regretted, so she tried to make me laugh again. Basically, my mother has beaten me two times in my memory. Usually, she only scolds me.

Besides the schoolwork and examination from school, there are also examination drilling classes and extracurricular classes such as “aoshu”, English and musical instrument. The children will be beaten if their grades in such classes do not meet the requirements of the parents. On the other hand, what many children have said verifies that parents will regret after they batter their child.

Xiaoyu who is in the sixth grade, began to play electronic organ in the kindergarten and passed the ninth grade examination, which is the highest grade in electronic organ. But she finds playing electronic organ boring. She told me, “*Every day, I had to play electronic organ for two hours under the supervision of my father. Later I felt so tired that I wanted to give up. However, I insisted on it after being forced by my parents.*” In China, many children who play musical instruments are forced by their parents. The hard life of playing instruments is accompanied by the experiences of beating and scolding. So eventually, most of them come to hate such instruments.

“Not following parents’ instructions and talking back”

Parents have absolute authority and they sometimes do use this power. So

children are not supposed to act against their parents' wish. If they do not follow the parents' instructions, they may be beaten, regardless of whether such acts of defiance are intentional or unintentional. Ten-year-old Lanlan has never forgotten one of the experiences of being battered when she was 4 years old. At that time, grandmother bought her a barbola. She enjoyed the barbola so much that she kept playing it for hours and did not go to bed even when her father asked her to. Then her father beat her on her arse with a broom, which hurt badly. At the same time, the barbola was broken, over which she cried for a long time. Six years has passed. However, she still remembers this incident and is unwilling to forgive her father's actions. It shows that beating children leaves an indelible impression on them.

As described in Chapter Five, parents care for, restrict and control their children, hoping that the children will develop in all aspects according to their expectations. Therefore, if children do not follow their orders in such aspects as eating, sleeping, watching TV, playing computer and studying, in the parents' views, such behaviors are violations of their orders. As a result, the children may be beaten. Tingting said,

Once I did not want to go with my parents to the park, because I did not dare to try the thrills of the rides. But I knew that my father would demand me to try every game, so in the morning I stayed in bed for as long as I could and did not put on my clothes. This made my father think that I disobeyed his order and he threw a book which hit my ears. This triggered the quarrel between my father and mother.

As the children grow up, they gradually possess their assertions and nerve, and desire to express their ideas. The research data show that many 12- and 13-year-old children who begin to study in the middle school have strong intention to express their ideas, for they think they have grown up and are unwilling to obey their parents and even begin to argue with them. Such actions are regarded by parents as “*dingzui*” (talking back), so there are a lot of conflicts between parents and children. Many children think the adolescence stage is characterized by behaviors like “rebel” or “revolt”. Compared with their parents, the “only-child” born in the 1990s, being well read, well informed and possess an active mind, like to show their personalities.

In my interview and discussion with the focus groups, I find that most of the children think that they will only obey the right ideas of their parents. If they think their parents’ ideas are wrong, they will only implement such ideas based on their own interpretation. They even dare to “rebel” against their parents. “*Disobeying parents’ instructions and talking back*” is one of the ways how children react against the authority of the parents. Many children admit that they do not follow their parents’ orders at home and usually talk back. These children, especially those with their own opinions and a strong personality as well as a stubborn temper, are often battered by their parents.

Twelve-year-old Huanhuan has a pleasant personality and her own opinions, but she is completely controlled by her mother. At the first grade in the middle school, she does not like to be regarded as an innocent “*small child*” any more. On the contrary, she thinks she is a mature “*big child*” or youngster with her own

capability. So she always rebels against her mother. Her explanation for being beaten is similar to that of her mother; that is, *“I do not ‘tinghua’ (obey my mother’s orders) and I ‘dingzui’ (talk back). My mother always regards me as a small child. However, in my view, I have my own capability to some extent; at least, I am a big child.”* She is dissatisfied because her mother ignores her capability and the fact that she has already grown up.

Twelve-year-old Yuanyuan is an open-minded girl with a strong personality. In the interview, she emphasizes that she has her own “ideas” and “opinions”. However, her parents refuse to listen to her and ask her to obey their orders. When Yuanyuan told me one story about her being beaten for talking back, she cried.

Once, my uncle brought me some VCD discs, one of which was Harry Potter 3. I and my cousins watched the movie upstairs. After my parents returned home, they found that the rooms upstairs were in a mess, which made them mad. I said that after the guests left, I would clean them. However, my father said that I should say no more because I should have cleaned the room long before. Then he beat me.

Her bed room and study room are located upstairs; thus she is responsible for cleaning these rooms. At that time, she did not mean to not clean them; she just wanted to clean them after the guests returned home, but her parents asked her to keep the rooms clean at all time. She complained, *“My ideas are different from those of my parents, and it is unfair that the children always have to obey their parents! I have my own opinion.”* Yuanyuan would not have been beaten if she had not expressed her opinion, and had cleaned the rooms as soon as possible. However, she

expressed her opinions, which was seen by her parents as talking back and not following their instructions, hence a challenge to their authority. What is worse, such defiant actions were done in front of other people, so this could not be endured at all.

The analysis of the data shows that children have explanations different from their parents' with respect to talking back. Children may think that they are just expressing or explaining their ideas, but sometimes parents misunderstand them and think that they are refuting. But in fact, the children have no intention at all to offend their parents or challenge their authority. Eleven-year-old KK gives us this example.

If my parents accuse me of making a mistake, I always want to refute such accusations. However, my parents regard such actions as an offence. For example, if my mother accuses me of doing something I didn't do, she is treating me unjustly; then, I will be very angry with her, and will loudly say that I have not done such things! Then my mother will always say, "Don't 'dingzui' (talk back) when 'daren' (adults) are speaking."

"Don't 'dingzui' when adults are speaking"-- This is what the Chinese parents usually say when they scold their children, to emphasize the authority relation between them and their children. Parents are "daren" (adults); thus when "adults" are speaking, the children cannot talk back. Xiaojun told me, "*I usually get beaten for talking back as this always makes my father mad. He used to say, 'Da si jiang zui de, yan si hui shui de'¹.*" This is one of the Chinese old sayings, which means that if the child does not follow the parents' word or talks back, he or she may be beaten. I had said the same thing to my daughter.

¹ This is a Chinese proverb, meaning that those who talk back may be beaten to death and those who can swim may be drowned.

The children participating in the study complain that their parents seldom consider the psychological needs and desires of them, for example, their desire to express their ideas, to be respected, to be understood as well as to have free space. As a result, these psychological problems often go undetected until they get so serious that they attract the parents' attention. But by then, it is usually too late.

“Moral problems”

The interviewed children who are beaten because of their moral problems have no complaints about this, but there are few children who are willing to candidly discuss these things. The moral problems that the children are willing to mention in the interviews are just telling lies, etc.

Mingming, younger than 14 years old, frankly evaluates himself as mature in thinking but immature in action. His explanation for his being beaten is the same as that of his mother. He thinks that although his parents attach importance to his study grade, they do not put too high requirements on him in his study. Therefore, as long as he tries hard to study, the grade does not matter. His parents pay much more attention to cultivating his morals. He agrees that one's moral standard should best be cultivated in childhood, and that one must seize the opportunity to do so. Since his childhood, he has been taught *“to not tell lies, to treasure what he has and to have good manners in his daily life.”* He remembers how his mother once slapped him on the face because of his *“moral problems”*. He said embarrassedly,

My mother does not beat me because of my study, but she thinks that I should not tell lies. If I tell a lie and do not change my actions after she has taught me several times, it will bother her. Furthermore, if I

“dingzui” (talk back), she will be enraged; however, she generally does not beat me because of this matter. But once, my mother slapped me on my mouth and it bled. After that, she returned to her room. Later, when my aunt found that I was bleeding in the mouth, she told my mother. When my mother knew that, she came to me and helped me to clean the wound.

Mingming does not explain the reason why he lies to his mother. Research finds that there are many reasons why children deceive their parents. For example, some children make up several unreal stories and regard their fantasies as reality; some children tell lies out of their vanity or because they want to be praised by their parents; some children worry that after their parents know the truth, they will be angry with them and beat them, so they tell another lie with the purpose of covering the first lie; some children are unwilling to see the disappointed expression on their parents' face, so they tell a white lie. This shows that when some children do not speak the truth, it does not necessarily mean that they have moral problems. It all depends on the specific conditions. But the interviewed children, just like their parents, think that such matters belong to moral problems and agree that they should be punished.

In addition, in some families with strict family education, there are many rules. For example, children are not allowed to spend money on anything without a proper reason, to speak rudely, to scold others, to be rude to the elders or to go to their classmates' house without their parents' prior permission. Violating any of these rules will be a possible reason for being beaten. Eleven-year-old Xiaoyu excels

in moral and academic performance, but she is often beaten by her father for playing electronic organs and by her mother for her poor moral manners. She told me,

In my childhood, my mother beat me because I always told lies and had bad habits. At the third grade in the primary school, I often went to the grocery store to buy food with my weekly pocket money. Because of this, my mother always scolded me and even beat me because I did not tell her prior to spending the money.

The fact that she has to get prior permission from her mother before spending her own pocket money clearly shows that her mother treats her strictly.

“Taoqi (Naughtiness)” and “ignorance”

Many children are battered because of their naughtiness and such experiences remain fresh in many boys’ memory. As far as naughtiness is concerned, there is obviously a sex difference. Almost every boy has been beaten at least once for being naughty, causing a disturbance, getting into trouble, misbehaving in classes or not observing the school disciplines. Ten-year-old Dongdong looks very clever, smart, open-minded, active and naughty. He likes sports and electronic game machines. He is voluble. Although he admits that he was once beaten because of “his bad grade”, he does not give specific details about the matter. On the contrary, he takes delights in talking about an experience of being beaten for his “taoqi” (naughtiness). He told me,

Once when we were relaxing in the club, I picked the lock of other people using an iron wire and then threw it into the garbage bin. After the owner found this, he asked my mother to look for the lock in the garbage bin. At that time, my mother had no choice but to do as

told. After returning home, my mother smacked me with a ruler and hurt me badly, resulting in bruises, swells, and great pain. I said, "Why do you beat me? I threw the lock away just for fun."

He is so happy when he is thinking of the scene of his mother hollowing out the garbage bin. He thinks it is funny. Another thing he can remember is staining his mother's new clothes, which remains fresh in his memory. He said, *"I held the coke in my hand like this (made gestures with his hands), and sprayed the coke onto my mother's new clothes by mistake. She beat me again and again. She was really angry, because the clothes were new"*. Being battered so frequently, he has much higher tolerance towards being beaten. He even practices battering himself and does not hedge when his mother is battering him.

Eleven-year-old Chenchen is a good boy and performs very well at school. His sole experience of being battered traces back to the time when he was 5 years old. On Children's Day, his mother took him to the supermarket and bought a big cake for him, which cost a lot of money. His mother was occupied by other things and asked him to bring the cake home first. When he arrived home, because there were too many things in his hands, he dropped the cake on the ground. Thinking that the cake could not be eaten any more, Chenchen threw it into the garbage can. Because of *"his carelessness"* and *"ignorance"*, a valuable big cake was wasted. Later, he was told that he could still have eaten the cake if he had removed the husk. His mother thought he did not cherish the cake and he got battered. This case reflects that the parents' requirements are sometimes too demanding. Chenchen believes that *"he has wasted half a month of his parents' salary"*. So it is reasonable for him to be battered.

“Being a ‘saqitong’ (something to vent one’s anger on)”

Many interviewed children feel that they are used to their parents venting their anger and complaints on them. Sometimes they get battered not because they make mistakes, but because they have different opinions from their parents’ or their parents have a bad mood at that time. Children are generally dissatisfied with this condition but they can do nothing to change it. Mingming can understand the hardship of his mother: the pressure of her job, heavy housework and children’s education, which are all burdens she has to endure. Consequently, it is not surprising that he sometimes becomes his mother’s “saqitong” (something on which to vent one’s anger and grievances). However, he admits that he also makes some mistakes, which provides excuse for his mother to batter him. He said,

I know my mother leads an uneasy life and she is not young any more. But I think she is too quick tempered sometimes. I can understand she has to work really hard and has to take care of the family members after working. So I always feel like I’m her “saqitong”. I once asked my mother, “Why do you relieve your pressure on me?” She tells me, because you always make mistakes. If you didn’t make any mistakes, you wouldn’t be beaten! (Laugh) Basically, parental child battering in my family is to let parents relieve their anger. Whatever the reason, for my parents, it all boils down to my mistakes.

Xiaoyu is the most experienced in this aspect. She said,

I always obey my mother. The reason is that I am afraid of being battered by my mother. She always treats me “saqitong” (vents her anger and grievances). My grandma tells me my mother may have

occupational problem. She is used to disciplining students at school, so she must discipline me at home.

Her mother admits that she treats her students in a different way as she treats her own child. For her child, Xiaoyu's mother does whatever she wants on her. Similarly, Yuanyuan sometimes get beaten without knowing what is wrong. Hence she has a lot of grievances. She told me, *"One day I got up slowly and could not find my comb anywhere. My father hit my shoulder with a long comb. My shoulder was bruised for several weeks. At that time, I had to go to school, crying on the way. I did not talk to him for several days"*. She did not know why her father battered her. It may have been because she got up too slowly, or she could not find the comb, or she was late for school. Whatever the reason, it is probable that her father had a bad mood at that time and must have been relieving his anger on the child.

Analysis of the data from the interview and the focus group shows that children's attitude towards parental child battering depends not only on whether or not they believe that the battering is necessary and helpful but also on their recognition of their "mistakes" and their comprehension of their parents' intention in battering their children. Nobody wants to be battered and everybody knows it hurts when being beaten. However, to my surprise, most of the children participating in the research, except six of them, namely, Jijia, Linlin, Yuanyuan, Hanghang, KK and Maomao, do not argue against parental child battering. They just hope that it can be less frequent and less severe. Maybe they think all children must be battered when they make mistakes. With the constant inputs from the parents, children gradually accept the idea of their parents. They generally consider parental child

battering an effective discipline method for the children. This is exactly what Xiaoxiao, a girl from Grade 6 in the primary school, said in the first focus group discussion:

Taking my family as an example, I think it is acceptable to treat children a little strictly. Like me, I am not docile at all. When my mother batters me, she always explains why I deserve the beating and encourages me to get rid of the bad habits. I think it is right for my mother to do this. I will not feel sad after she batters me. In fact, parental child battering is for the good of the children. If we make mistakes and keep making such mistakes in the future, it is definitely not good for us.

During the discussion, she is always very serious, like a grown-up. Sometimes she can even be quite stubborn. She insists on her opinion although the others do not agree with her. Her mother expects her to be the best in her class and she can fully understand her mother's requirements. She will even support parental child battering if that is what it takes to help her achieve her goal.

Yulu, a 12-year-old girl from the second focus group, seems to have similar opinion. She said,

I think parents won't batter their children when they do everything in the right way. If the children are battered, they must have done something wrong. If they perform well, the parents will not beat them. Parents will only batter children when they can not tolerate any more. In fact, no parents want to batter their children. For the good of the children, the parents sometimes will batter their children. The parents' aim is to make the children "zhang jixing" (remember the lesson) and to prevent them from making the same mistakes in the future. I can still remember the following incident clearly: When

I was in the kindergarten, once, after I had learned a bad word at kindergarten and used it when talking to my father, he beat me hard. The result is that I “zhang jixing” (remember this lesson) and have never used those kinds of words again.

Many children think they should be punished if they make mistakes and parental child battering is one of the punishments. It is therefore not strange that Xiaogang who is seldom battered by his parents has this idea. “*Children who are not docile at all should be battered, as it is helpful for them, especially when they are still very young.*” However, Xiaoqiang who is often battered by his parents, said, “*Parental child battering should be performed when it is necessary.*” In his opinion, making huge mistakes, such as violating the law and discipline, and fighting at school deserves a beating. But for other things like study problems, children should not be battered. He thinks battering can be helpful to some extent, but too frequent beatings will lose its effect.

The research shows that children’s attitudes on parental child battering are more complicated than their parents’ and are full of contradictions. Many children have ambiguous attitudes towards being battered. They do not oppose parental child battering completely but hope that parents can avoid battering them. Dongdong, who is often battered, told me that he “*condemns violence*”. But when talking about parental child battering, he said,

I do not agree with it [child battering] completely, but I do not oppose it. I think it is better not to batter children. The parents can of course tell the reason why they batter the children. After all, parental child battering has been used for a long time. Wouldn’t it be a happy thing if children can get good results under parents’

pressure [to study]? Of course, at the time when we are subjected to parents' pressure [punishment], our feelings are not good. But sometimes it can bring us good results if we can tolerate the pressure [and take our parents' advice to improve].

Dongdong has experienced such pressure. He says he has no method to change this and does not care too much. He thinks parental child battering sometimes has positive effects and can help the children to succeed. He repeats the example where a pianist became successful after being beaten by his father. However, parental child battering sometimes has negative effects and causes the children to commit suicide or run away from home. When Dongdong makes progress on study “*under their parents' pressure*”, he does not oppose parental child battering. But when he feels unhappy after being beaten, he “*condemns violence.*”

Mingming has his own set of child battering “theory”, which is similar to that of the adults/parents. He emphasizes that before parents batter their child, they should take the concrete issues, like the characteristics of the child and his/her age, into consideration. As a whole, he thinks battering is wrong but one has to consider the concrete conditions why battering is carried out. “*We cannot say that parental child battering is all wrong, and we know that no battering is a treat*”. Sometimes “*battering is quite necessary*”, especially if the child has committed such moral mistakes like lying. But for helping children improve their study performance, battering is not a good method. The more the parents batter the children, the more pressure the children have, and the worse their study performance will be. He emphasizes that different methods should be adopted for different children. Some children who have poor enduring ability cannot be battered. Parents should sit down

with them and talk with them. Besides, no more beating should be used when the children have grown up, since their thoughts are different. They will think it is a loss of *mianzi* (*face*) if they are beaten at such age.

During the second interview half a year later, Mingming further elaborates his attitude as follows:

Parental child battering should be avoided if other educational methods can be used. Children at any age should not be battered. The little children will confess to false charges under torture yet not understand the faults. And for those elderly children who have a strong self esteem, they will form a negative mentality if they are battered by their parents. But some children with no self-knowledge should be battered.

Obviously, his attitude towards parental child battering is quite contradictory. Such contradiction is also reflected in Tiantian's opinion. He said, "*Corporal punishment is acceptable if only it is not too serious and not too frequent*". However, during the second interview, he tends to oppose parental child battering. He said,

Children are weak and should not be battered. I am against battering [child]. Children will cry when they have grievances. They can endure normal pains. However, they will cry if the pain is too severe. I will cry when I have grievances. Children may leave home if they are battered frequently.It is acceptable that parents occasionally batter their children. There are no parents who have never battered their children. If you spare the rod, you will spoil the child.

In this section, children's attitudes to parental child battering and their explanation for being battered have been described and analysed in detail as they will have influence on their construction of child abuse.

Meaning of Child Abuse as Constructed by Children

On the problem of “child abuse” that involves children, listening to their voices is of vital importance. Before this research, I did not know what kind of perspectives and views children, especially children from China, have on this problem. With deep curiosity and interest, I commenced the interviews. The result shows that just like their parents, children acknowledge that child abuse is a serious criminal case, something they have learnt from the legal programs on TV. Other cases which are not regarded as child abuse do not get much attention in China. The word “child abuse” is quite strange for Chinese children. They almost never think about its meaning, and two small children have never even heard of the word. Therefore, to find out their understanding and construction of “child abuse”, I need to start with the children’s own experiences of being battered.

“Do you think parental child battering is ‘nuedai ertong’ (child maltreatment/abuse)?” When I asked the interviewed children this question for the first time, their answers were odd, uncertain and full of contradictions. Such questions were too abstract for the children, so for the second time, I introduced three cases in Appendix 3 to them, which then became the context for them to construct child abuse. Although I can never expect them to give a clear definition of child abuse, I find that they do have their own opinion on it. Data from in-depth interviews and focus groups show that children understand child abuse from the following aspects.

“Unreasonable child battering is child abuse”

Generally, the interviewed children consider battering caused by their mistakes corporal punishment or discipline while unreasonable beating not caused by their mistakes child abuse. Most of the children think their parents beat them when they make mistakes, so they do not take it as child abuse. Just as Xiaoyu said, *“I do not think it is child abuse when I get battered by my parents because I have committed some mistakes. If I make mistakes, I deserve to be punished.”*

Twelve-year-old Xiaojun also said,

Child abuse refers to unreasonable beating when the parents are in a bad mood. [Whether the battering is child abuse or not] depends on the reason for the beating but not whether the child is injured. Corporal punishment is beat the child, guanjiao (discipline) or make the child stand when he/she makes mistakes. I was once punished to stand still for an hour, facing the wall and reflecting on my mistakes. While abuse is unreasonable battering, corporal punishment is a disciplinary method. But corporal punishment that causes serious injury also becomes abuse. Corporal punishment is acceptable to me. When I think I have made mistakes, I can accept beating from my parents but, I expect the punishment to be limited so as to avoid causing too much injury. Otherwise, it will become abuse.

During the second interview, Yuanyuan indicated the difference between child abuse and corporal punishment. *“It depends on the reason [for the beating]. Beating caused by my mistakes is corporal punishment and not abuse, but unreasonable battering is abuse.”* Yuanyuan sets herself firmly against parental child battering, but she does not classify all parental child battering as child abuse.

Mingming holds the same opinion. He said, “*Unreasonable parental child battering is child abuse. However, if the child does make mistakes, he/she should be punished and the battering will not be [child abuse].*”

When children consider whether a battering case is child abuse or not, most of them will pay attention to the reasons why they get battered and whether they have done anything wrong. Parents always have their reasons for battering their children, namely, that the children have made some mistakes. However, the children may not admit that it is their fault. In this respect, parents and children always have quite different standpoints and perspectives. Yuanyuan admits that there are similar differences in opinion between her and her parents on this issue. In the opinion of the children participating in the study, reasonable causes of parental child battering include: not finishing the homework, lying, being impolite, performing badly at school, making mischief, or making mistakes, etc. Bad performance in study, in particular, is considered the “fault” by some children. Therefore, battering children because they perform badly on study is not considered child abuse. Children think they should not be battered when they retort or talk back because they are just expressing their own opinions and it is not a fault.

“Behaviors causing injury are child abuse”

Most of the children participating in the study believe that corporal punishment is just punishment to the body, such as being slapped on the face, being asked to stand against the wall, etc. which will cause no injury. Only punishment resulting in injury is child abuse. However, the injury may either be physical or

psychological or both. The following segment of conversation between Yuanyuan and me demonstrates her understanding of child abuse:

Interviewer: Do you think parental child battering is child abuse?

Yuanyuan: It is child abuse when it causes injury to the child, no matter whether it is physical injury or spiritual injury.

Interviewer : What do you think is spiritual injury? You said you would forget it one hour after being battered.

Yuanyuan: Whatever it may be, I felt being injured in my spirit and my heart [psychologically] during that one hour.

Interviewer: Is parental child battering that happens occasionally child abuse?

Yuanyuan: Only those that cause injury are child abuse.

Yuanyuan believes that parental child battering that causes injury is child abuse, no matter whether the injury is physical or psychological. Even though it is for the good of the children, if the beating is serious, it is considered child abuse. She thinks the first case (see Appendix 3) is child abuse. *“The reason is that the child was battered heavily and could not stand up. The battering had caused psychological injury to the child is abuse; the battering causing pain and injury so much so that they couldn’t be tolerated is child abuse.”* The understanding of “injury” mentioned here is representative of the children taking part in this research. This indicates that the children have a lot of tolerance towards parental child battering. Consequently, most children consider the first case child abuse while the second case not (see Appendix 3).

Ten-year-old Lanlan has much higher tolerance towards physical injury. That is, it depends on whether the child needs to see the doctor or not. She said,

If the beating is terrible and the child should be sent to the hospital, this is a little abuse. But if the beating is not so terrible and the child doesn't need to see the doctor, this is not abuse. Smacking a child's bottoms with two fingerprints left there can not be taken as child abuse, and a slap on the face is also not child abuse.

On the contrary, Xiaojun and KK tend to agree with Yuanyuan and do not agree with Lanlan. Xiaojun said, *"Beating that causes extreme pain that is hard to tolerate is 'severity' even if the child does not need to see the doctor."* KK also thinks that though all three cases (see Appendix 3) are not child abuse, in no case should the parents have battered their children. If parental child battering occurs too often and causes too serious injury, it must be child abuse. She also explains her understanding of "often" and "serious".

Interviewer: What is "often", to your understanding?

KK: It means the frequency is three or four times a week.

Interviewer: What is "serious"?

KK: Using a strap to beat the child and causing bruises on the skin, e.g. using a broom to beat the child on his/her bottoms until he/she can't even sit. All kinds of beating like this are serious.

Interviewer: Your parents have battered you. Do you consider that child abuse?

KK: No, because that is not serious. Only those that cause serious injury which the child can't tolerate or can't even sit are abuse. I have never been battered to that extent. At most, I will be smacked on the bottoms with two red fingerprints left there.

Interviewer: Do you think child abuse and corporal punishment are different?

KK: They are different. Abuse is much more serious than corporal punishment. Abuse is something like not being allowed to eat, having to work all day, and being battered until it causes renal failure.

The research shows that children have a clear definition of physical injury but a vague definition of psychological injury. For psychological injury, they seem to equate it with psychological pressures and psychological scars. As Xiaogang said, *“Corporal punishment is only punishment to the body, while abuse is pressure to both body and spirit. Abuse will definitely cause psychological injury and leave psychological shadow, which will make the children different from other normal children.”*

Generally speaking, children believe child abuse will cause psychological injury. Yuanyuan has repeatedly mentioned that parental child battering may cause injury to the psychology and spirit of the children, but she cannot explain the demonstration of this kind of injury. Generally, parents pay attention only to the physical injury done and think that there will be no problem if there is no feeling of hate on the part of the children. They always neglect the spiritual and mental injuries caused by their battering. A handful of children think that although Xuli from the second case in Appendix 3 is not battered heavily, he is abused because he is deprived of his hobby and rights, and has no free air, so he must be suffering from psychological oppression. What is more, his mother says if he plays football again, she will break his leg, which is a threat and causes serious psychological injury.

“Battering with tools is child abuse as it is apt to cause injury”

The children participating in the research are sensitive to whether tools are used during the battering. They are against using tools to batter children, since battering in that case will cause very serious injury. It is also unfair because the parents feel no pain while the children feel lots of pain. They think it is fair if their parents batter them with their hands because then both of them will feel pain. Most parent informants did not admit that they had used tools to batter their child. However, from what the children have said, I can tell that parents are used to battering the children with their hands, but sometimes they will use tools such as a broom, stick, ruler, whisk, slipper, shoe leather, book, and comb, depending on what tool is available at that time. Some parents even prepare special tools for battering children. Some mothers are used to twisting the arms and legs of the children. Two boys in the discussion of the second focus group showed me the scars on their arms which their mothers left.

In addition to the two reasons mentioned above, the child informants put more emphasis on whether tools are used in parental child battering. So Tingting thinks the three cases are all child abuse. She said,

Not all battering are abuse. Only battering with tools such as a stick, stone, knife, and whip is abuse. Beating a child with a book is not abuse, as it will not cause injury. If parents batter their children lightly, it is not abuse. Serious battering is abuse, and battering with tools, which is apt to cause injury, is abuse.

Her father once threw a book at her, so she emphasizes that being beaten with a book is not child abuse, aiming to exculpate her father. In fact, books with a certain weight can cause injury when being thrown at the head of a child.

“Treating children as slaves is child abuse”

Unlike other interviewed children, 10-year-old Dongdong admits that he is not interested in the topic of child abuse at all. His understanding of child abuse is quite different from others. He uses words like “right” and “slave” as a comparison. A section of our dialogue during the first interview is listed below:

Interviewer: In your opinion, what will be considered child abuse?

Dongdong: Something like “kezhi” (constraining) children, battering children without any reason, namely, treating children as slaves is child abuse.

Interviewer: What do you mean by “constrain”?

Dongdong: Parents think they have their right. Although I also have my right, their right is something like “kexing” (something that overrides another) of my right.

Interviewer: Do you think it is child abuse if they constrain your right?

Dongdong: Yes.

Slaves are people who have been deprived of their right as human beings. “*Treating children as slaves*”, constraining children’s right, are severe and inhuman conditions. This understanding of child abuse indicates that Dongdong has a much higher tolerance towards parental child battering. In other words, other than treating children as slaves, nothing is child abuse. As a result, child abuse rarely happens.

Although Jiajia and Chenchen have not used words like “*slave*”, they do think child abuse must be some very venomous treatments to the children. Jiajia sets an example,

Child abuse is beating up children. I have read a story in a political textbook describing how a mother once tied up her child and battered him. After that, she even threw the child to the ground from the second floor, simply because she is the stepmother of the child. There are also some psychological problems with this mother, so she often batters the child. This is definitely child abuse.

To the understanding of Chenchen, “*child abuse is asking children to keep working until they get exhausted, or not allowing them to eat.*” Keeping the children working all day round, not allowing them to eat, and burning them with cigarettes are widely considered by the children as child abuse, since such actions are like torture and cause injury to the children.

“Aiming to maltreatment without any consideration for the sufferer is abuse”

Almost all interviewed children believe that when their parents beat them, it is corporal punishment or discipline but not child abuse. It is because their parents are doing this for their good. It is just that their parents want to “*turn them from iron into steel*” (Chinese proverb, meaning wish their child could turn into high-fliers). Hanghang, who always gets battered, said, “*By battering me, my parents just want me to correct my mistakes, so it is not child abuse.*” These opinions are the same as their parents’.

Twelve-year-old Fangfang finds the phrase “child abuse” strange. She said with hesitation, “*Child abuse? Generally, abuse is some strangers abducting children*

and whipping them, forcing them to work and battering them. Parental child battering is for the good of the child, so it may be not abuse. General abuse is a term for the abusers themselves.” In other words, while strangers abuse children for their own profit, parents are aiming to help the children for the interests of the children. Even if their children bear grudges against them, they do not care because even though they only have this one-child, most of them do not expect the child to support them when they are old.

Thinking that parents will do everything “*for the good of the children*”, Mingming thinks none of the three cases in the Appendix 3 are child abuse. He said,

Child abuse is parental child battering for pleasure and without any reason. The mother in the first case did it with a positive motive and “wang zi cheng long” (hope the child will be a high-flier). But her method was wrong. It was beyond the limit. Abuse is aiming to maltreat the child, without any consideration for the child. In the first case, the method of discipline was wrong, but it still can not be considered domestic violence.

In his opinion, domestic violence happens between husband and wife but not children. He thinks parental child battering is a discipline method. Children are used to being battered by their parents and this tradition passes on from generation to generation. However, he dislikes this kind of discipline method and swears he will never batter his child unless his child does something harmful to the society. Obviously, however much someone thinks he/she dislikes this method, he/she will not hesitate to use it if the needs arise. Chinese parents consider disciplining their

children their lifelong responsibility and right. This right sometimes even takes precedence over the law.

Construction of child abuse by the interviewed children above is centrally reflected during the third focus group discussion:

Xiaotang: As far as I know, child abuse is battering children without any reasonable cause, or carrying out violence on children frequently.

Xiaolong: I think there are three points when talking about child abuse. First, the beating is frequent; second, the beating is strict and venomous; third, the beating causes massive injury such as fracture, burn or scald that needs to be treated in the hospital.

Xiaoyan: I think child abuse is something causing injury to the children's spirit, such as depression, suicide, loss of self-esteem or some psychological problems. I think sometimes, for the good of the children, the parents will batter them. However, sometimes it goes too far and causes spiritual injury to the children. This, in my opinion, is child abuse.

*Wutong: I think child abuse happens when the parents neglect the discipline method and adopt unsuitable methods. For example, when children commit a tiny mistake, the parents will batter them without asking for the reason. In this case, parents neglect the thoughts of the child and this will probably cause psychological injury to the child. In addition, from some TV programs, I notice that some parents with poor education often release their grievances on the child. They consider the child their *chu qi tong* (something to release their grievances on) rather than one of their family members. They seldom*

pay attention to the feelings of their child.

Juanjuan: I think in a normal family, child abuse will not happen unless there is a stepmother or stepfather in the family. Stepparents are likely to maltreat the children. However, biological parents will not hurt their own child on purpose.

Yulu: I think child abuse is beating and scolding the children unreasonably. It is not for the good of the children. If parental child battering is for the good of the child, it cannot be considered child abuse.

Yiyi: I think child abuse is unreasonable beating. It depends on the mood of the parents rather than on the performance of the children. If they are happy, they will not batter you, but when they are unhappy, they will.

The research data show that the views of the children participating in the focus group discussion basically conform to those of the children participating in the interview. They discuss the following aspects of child abuse: reason and frequency of parental child battering, seriousness of body and mental harm, intention and motivation of the battering. The previous sections present the differences and diversity in the construction of child abuse as discussed by the children, and in what is going to follow, their similarity in the understanding of child abuse will be outlined.

The research finds that when constructing “child abuse”, most children focus on the objective reasons and outcomes of parental child battering, such as the seriousness of harm. Their discussion shows that children have a great tolerance to the outcome of parental child battering, and the reason of such tolerance is that they

believe in parent-child affection and they trust their parents will do everything for the children's good. In the children's opinions, there are differences between child abuse and corporal punishment, the former being more serious and cruel than the latter. When the children make a mistake, corporal punishment will be the disciplinary method parents use with the purpose of correcting the children's mistakes. Child abuse is parents cruelly beating their children without any reason, which seriously harms the children physically and mentally and is not done for the benefits of the children. In the children's views, whether they make mistake and whether they get serious injury are the main principles in distinguishing between child abuse and corporal punishment.

Influence of Parent-child Affection and Power Relation on Children's Construction of Child Abuse

From the children's explanation of parental child battering and construction of "child abuse", we can find that children generally think that their own parents will not beat them without any reason because parents love "*their own children*", and it is not possible for them to abuse their children. The children's construction of child abuse has more affectional and emotional color than that of their parents, for the children are deeply affected by parent-child affection and power relation. Therefore, even when they are battered, they will not consider that their parents are abusing them.

Children "feel" that "their own parents" will not abuse them

In the children's views, being battered by parents is different in nature from being battered by others. Research shows that when children are beaten by their

parents, they will “feel” it with affection; however, when they are beaten by others, they will objectively analyse such beatings. The concept of “*cha xu ge ju*” (differentiated mode of association) from Fei Xiaotong (1985) can be used to explain such differences. In any human relationship, there are differences in the proximity level and since the parent-child relationship is the closest one, the explanations children give regarding behaviors relating to parents and those relating to teachers are different.

The interviewed children generally are opposed to teachers beating their students. According to the explanation of KK,

The parents gave birth to the child. Therefore, if the parents beat the child, they will not beat him/her seriously, and will only beat him/her out of love. However, there’s no blood tie between the teacher and the child, so if a teacher beats a child, it will be regarded as “pianxin” (to give more love to one than to the other).....If teachers cannot set a good example for the students, they will not be able to distinguish the good from the bad in the future.

Teachers are trained professionals engaged in education, so they cannot teach children using beating. Besides, education must be done in a rational way. In Dongdong’s view, a teacher beating a student can be regarded as child abuse. However, if his mother beats him, his mother is just fulfilling her responsibilities as parents and this does not constitute maltreatment. He thinks that parents have “the responsibility to discipline” him, whereas teachers only have “the duty to discipline” him, and that is the difference. The following is the dialogue between him and me in the second interview:

Interviewer: Do you think that parents beating you and teachers beating you can both be seen as child abuse?

Dongdong: Oh?... a teacher beating me certainly is child abuse. Jiazhang (The head of family)...? My mother beating me isn't the nature of child abuse. If my teacher beats me, my mother can sue him/her.

Interviewer: Isn't your parents beating you child abuse?

Dongdong: It is not child abuse.

Interviewer: Why not?

Dongdong: My sixth sense will tell me, I can feel it from their facial expression, and from the seriousness of the beating. It is not maltreatment for certain because they do not beat me using big tools.

Interviewer: In your opinion, what is the child abuse?

Dongdong: If some people who have no affection for you beat you, it is maltreatment. They take advantage of you and discipline you just because of this being their duty. As for the parents, who have the responsibility to discipline the child, they beat you based on love and for your own good.

Obviously, Dongdong's cognition of child abuse has strong affection factors. From the facial expression of the parents, the not too serious beating and the fact that no big tool is used to beat him, he can surely tell that it is not child abuse. He gives an example and said,

Maltreatment refers to those bad guys who abduct you and beat you or your stepmother beating you. If my study grade is good, my mother will not beat me. Even if she does because of my bad study grade, I am still helpless. She does it for my own good in the future.

In other words, if the children's own parents beat them, the parents must have rational reason and it must be for the good of the children. If the bad guys, stepmothers and teachers who do not have affection for the children beat them, it is maltreatment and is not done for child's good.

Children believe in their "feelings" based on parent-child affection and love of their parents. As the "only-child" in the family who are well supplied with foods and clothes, they feel the love and all-round care of their parents every day. So they think that when the parents beat them, their parents are doing a favour for them and for their bright future. In this respect, the interviewed children generally accept the words of their parents. When discussing this problem, KK said, "*My parents do not abuse me, but provide me with good food and fine clothes. Although it hurts and makes me angry when they beat me, I still think this is not maltreatment.*" For the children, the pain from the beating seems to be reduced once their material life and mental care are satisfied by their parents. Besides, the pain will soon be forgotten.

Twelve-year-old Tiantian has been beaten with belts by the drillmaster during military training. This, in his view, can be regarded as child abuse. The following words demonstrate that he believes there is a difference between being battered by parents and by others, for he can "feel" the difference.

Interviewer: Do you hate your mother after you are beaten?

Tiantian: Yes, in the following one or two days.

Interviewer: Does this affect the relation between you and your mother?

Tiantian: No. Beating is just beating!

Interviewer: Do you object to such method?

Tiantian: No, because she is my mother after all.

Interviewer: Oh, if your teacher or drillmaster beats you, do you object to it?

Tiantian: Yes. The teacher dare not beat me, because such action will breach the law on protecting delinquent children.

Interviewer: Does your mother not breach the Laws on Protection of the Minors if she beats you?

Tiantian: My mother beats me because she is angry with me or it is just out of love. When the drillmaster beats me with a belt, it is not a correct action and it is not done out of love.

Interviewer: Do you think such beatings can be regarded as child abuse?

Dongdong: That is child abuse.

Interviewer: Do you think that parental child battering can be seen as child abuse?

Tiantian: It is education that involves a little violence.

Interviewer: Can it be seen as child abuse?

Tiantian: It should be not seen as child abuse.

Interviewer: Why?

Tiantian: Because they are doing a favour for us; furthermore, they are so worried about us.

Interviewer: As you have said, parental child battering cannot be seen as child abuse. Then, in your opinion, what action is child abuse?

Tiantian: I have never thought about this.

Interviewer: If your mother beats you so seriously that it hurts you, do you think it is child abuse?

Tiantian: Hurt me? And I bleed?

Interviewer: Yes, you bleed and have to be taken to the hospital.

Tiantian: Is she too angry?

Interviewer: Yes. Can it then be regarded as child abuse?

Tiantian: No, because it is to educate me and she is angry with me.

Interviewer: In your opinion, parental child battering should be not seen as child abuse. Is it caused by affection?

Tiantian: Yes.

Interviewer: Do the children blame their parents?

Tiantian: Er!

Parent-child affection makes Tiantian believe that her mother beats him “*out of love*” and “*it is education involving a little violence*”. He is unwilling to use the term “child abuse” to describe his mother’s action. The statement, “*After all, my mother gave birth to me*”, justifies the rights of his mother to beat him, so he forgives his mother.

Huanhuan, often surfing the net, thinks that she knows something about the U.S.A, and in her opinion, parental children battering is child abuse. However, faced with the question, “*If your mother beats you, can it be seen as abusing you,*” she answers, “*No, it is not to abuse me. My mother is an irascible person. Sometimes, she beats me, but it is not serious. However, she sometimes beats me on the face, which is not good.*” For the Chinese who are sensitive about their “face”, it is a behavioral norm that “*if you beat somebody, you will not beat him/her on his/her face*”. Huanhuan endures her mother’s battering because of parent-child affection.

Chenchen divides the action of beating children into two kinds: “*legal*” and “*illegal*”. “*Children may be beaten to the extent that they get hurt. But if he has learned a lesson, admitted his mistakes and the battering parents stops at this point, this is legal. But if the children admit their mistake and the parents still beat them so*

seriously that they have to see a doctor, this is illegal.” So, according to Chenchen’s understanding, Wangchuang case (Case 1 in Appendix 3) should be “illegal”. However, in his view, it should only be seen as family violence, not child abuse, because he thinks one’s family members will not be heartless. Only stepmothers, who are stereotyped as being callous, can abuse a child so heartlessly. They are sure that “*their own parents*” will treat them well. The research finds that children have more understanding and tolerance for their parents than parents do for their children.

“Even after being beaten, children will not bear grudges”

In interviews and discussions of the focus groups, children always emphasize that they “*bu jichou*” (do not bear grudges); it means that after being beaten, children will not hate their parents for long. In the children’s mind, not hating parents is the basic manifestation of parent-child affection, of duty as children as well as of filial piety. Even if it hurts when they are being beaten and they know it is not right that their parents beat them, after a few days, everything will return to the normal state, and it will not affect the parent-child relationship. Such “magnanimity” involves parent-child affection, personality of the children and the parents’ actions after the beating.

Huanhuan is an open-minded girl. She said, “*The angrier I am, the faster I will forget the beating. At the moment of being beaten, I am very angry. After crying for a few minutes, I will wash my face, and then everything will be normal again.*” Forgetting the unhappy things may be the survival skill of the children.

Nearly all children express the idea that after the consolation and care from the parents, they quickly forget the pain of being battered, and will not be angry with

their parents, nor will the battering affect their affection for the parents. KK said, *“Once, after beating me, my father asked me whether it hurt. At the moment when I was beaten, I was very angry. He beat me so hard that I begged him to stop but in vain. However, when he tried to make me laugh again, I would be happy. ...A few days after the beating, our relation may be recovered and I ‘bu jichou’ (do not bear grudges).”*

Shanshan, a first grade student in the middle school, participates in the second focus group. Her mother often beat her when she was in the elementary school. She said,

I am not comfortable after being beaten, and in my mind, I think it is my mother’s mistake. However, after a while, my mother asks me what I want to eat. At that time, she treats me so well that I do not hate her any more. My mother says she is also uncomfortable when she beats me. From the television programs, I see many parents abuse their child, and they hate the child so much that they lose control. Sometimes my mother beats me so hard that I cry. Then my grandparents will blame my mother, and sometimes she may cry because of this.

When the children know that their parents are not comfortable about beating them and that their parents will give them care and love afterwards, they will be moved by parent-child affection, and will not be willing to regard parental child battering as child abuse.

The following dialogue between Mingming and me further demonstrates why children *“do not bear grudges”* after being beaten. This makes me think that adults have successfully input their ideas into the children’s mind. He repeats that

parental child battering is “*for the good of the children*”. Beating is another form of taking care of the children. If parents are totally disappointed with their children; they will not want to discipline them at all. He agrees with an old Chinese saying that “*da shi qin, ma shi ai*” (*beating is care and scolding is love*).

Interviewer: Does it hurt when you are beaten?

Mingming: Of course, but if it is your parents who beat you, you feel different.

Interviewer: What is the difference?

Mingming: They are my parents. When I was a young child, my parents treat me very well and they bought foods and clothes for me. How can they beat me now?

Interviewer: You cannot understand?

Mingming: I can't! The person caring for you may beat you. The parents beat you because they care about you. If they feel that they are not able to cultivate you, they will not want to batter and scold you anymore.

Interviewer: Do you agree that “da shi qin, ma shi ai (beating is care and scolding is love)”?

Mingming: Yes.

Interviewer: When your parents beat you, do they explain that the beating is for your good?

Mingming: At that moment, they usually will not explain. Afterward, they will say: “I do not beat you for no reason; the reason why I beat you is for your good”. My mother will say: “Your self-esteem will be increased after you become a middle school student; then I will not beat you. But you should know that you cannot do whatever you want to do. If I do not beat you, it's because you are growing up and are mature enough to discipline yourself.”

Interviewer: If your parents beat you, will it affect the relation between you and your parents?

Mingming: As far as my personality is concerned, and as long as I understand why they beat me, it will not affect our relation. But if they beat me without any reason, e.g. after they lose money because of gambling or if they are unhappy and “sa qi” (vent his anger) to you, it will affect our relation. If you make mistakes, they will beat you, and at that time, you will understand your parents are doing a favour for you. Generally, parents will not do it without considering the benefits of their child.

Interviewer: Namely, beating you will not affect the relation between you and your parents?

Mingming: No. The relation between my parents and me is very good. There’s no gulf between us.

The relation between Mingming and his parents is intimate and close. The closer the two persons are, the higher the tolerance they have for each other. This is the Chinese concept of self-expansion (Yang, 1996; Li, 1998), according to which one party will include the other party who is close to him/her as his/her own. In the parent-child relation, they view each other as part of their own, so children will not hate their parents.

Although children do not hate their parents, most of them express the idea that when they are beaten, they are very angry, and they hope that they will not be beaten in the future. Xiaoqiang expresses the opinion that although he does not mind being beaten by his parents, the long-term beating does result in a strained relation with his parents. He begins to dislike his parents; therefore, he wants to leave home for other places. But he does not have sufficient money to support himself, so he

said, *“I expect that when I am 18, I will leave home”*. Still, he tries to defend his parents’ face by saying that his being beaten is not maltreatment. It demonstrates the ideas of Li Meizhi (1998) that because of Chinese filial piety tradition, Chinese people will still help and respect their family members even though they are not liked and the relation is not close.

“Parents have the right to beat their child”

Xiaoyu discusses child abuse from the perspective of the rights of their parents. In her logic, parents gave life to their children, so their status is higher than the children’s. Parents are entitled to beat their children in order to cultivate them into “qualified adults”. Therefore, parental child battering is not child abuse. Although she is afraid to be beaten, she believes the traditional saying that *“beating is care and scolding is love”* and *“spare the rod and spoil the child”*. The following dialogue reflects her opinion on these problems.

Interviewer: Does parental battering violate your rights?

Xiaoyu: No. It is the parents’ right to beat their children. Our parents are our guardians before we are 18 years old, so they cultivate us into qualified adults in their own ways, including beating and scolding. Most of the parents think so, but in my view, no matter how slight the beating is, it still hurts. I don’t like this method.

Interviewer: Do you think that parental children battering can be seen as child abuse?

Xiaoyu: No.

Interviewer: In your opinions, what is the child abuse?

Xiaoyu: For example, teachers beating their students is maltreatment.

Interviewer: Why can't parental child battering be seen as child abuse?

Xiaoyu: Because "bu da bu cheng cai" (spare the rod and spoil the child).

Interviewer: But the teacher may also want to cultivate you into a qualified person.

Xiaoyu: But the teacher is not my jiazhang (parents), so he or she has no right to beat me.

Interviewer: Does it mean that if your mother [a teacher in the primary school] beats other children other than you, it is child abuse? But if she beats you, it is not child abuse?

Xiaoyu: Er.

She also thinks that parental child battering is different from a teacher beating students. Most of the children participating in the study think their parents have the right to beat them. Just as Dongdong explained, *"Because the parents' status is higher than the children's and they have the responsibility to discipline and educate their children."* A few of them think that *"parents have the right to discipline us, though they have no right to beat us too serious"*. In other words, the right to discipline children does not include cruelly beating them.

The research shows that although few children define child abuse in the parent-child relation context, they often understand parents' behavior from the perspective of parent-child affection and power relation, and defend their parents by justifying their behaviors.

Other than the similarity of the above mentioned views of the children, the research data also show that many children are filled with conflicts when discussing

“child abuse”. The answer from Yuanyuan can well express the conflicts in children’s mind. When asked whether she thinks her parents beating her can be regarded as abuse, she answers hesitantly,

Sometimes, parents only consider their own feelings rather than my feelings. So battering me seems to be child abuse. But after a while, I understand them because they beat me out of love, not abuse. Parents care about their face. I care about mine too. But the authority of the adult cannot be challenged. Sometimes, my father asks me to do many things in the presence of guests, and he does not listen to me. If I make a mistake in his company, he will blame me. So with respect to this question, I am filled with contradictions. When I think of their love, I feel that they do not abuse me; however, when I think that they do not take my feelings into consideration, I feel that they abuse me without any reason. Sometimes, I find my father unreasonable. He sets high standard for me. In his opinion, only the result is important, not the process or the reason.

Yuanyuan usually played with her father, but she was also afraid of him, so she could not tell him everything and was angry with her father to some extent. The idea that “*beating makes them more intimate*”, as expressed by Yuanyuan’s mother is not manifested in Yuanyuan’s answer.

As said above, the children judge whether or not their parents are abusing them through “*feeling*”, but such “*feelings*” often conflict with each other. Emotionally, Yuanyuan is unwilling to take parental child battering as child abuse, but sometimes, if she gets beaten for no reason, she will think that it is child abuse. It shows that it is hard to judge child abuse only through “*feelings*”. In reality, many children have the conflicts and ambiguous ideas just like Yuanyuan. For example,

Maomao said, “*One half of parental child battering is to educate us, and the other is to abuse us*”.

There is a difference in the cognition of parents’ rights, and a few children do not agree with the rights of parents to beat their children. KK said, “*Adults should not misuse their rights to beat us whenever we do not follow their orders. [My parents say] ‘If we weren’t your jiazhang (parents), we wouldn’t discipline you.’ I don’t think it is good.*” It is common that children are against this style of *jiazhang*.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the understanding and attitude of the children participating in the research toward parental child battering and “child abuse”. From this, we can find the perspective and opinion of children and the effects social culture has on them. The chapter has been divided into three parts.

The first part demonstrates children’s explanation of being beaten and their attitude towards it, which is the preceding part of their constructing “child abuse”. The explanation of being beaten as given by the children is more diverse than that of their parents. Besides the more common problems like study problem, not following parent’s orders, talking back and moral questions, etc., the children also focus on affairs that their parents do not notice, such as being naughty, innocent and doing wrong things. Most of the children hope that their parent will not beat them, but a few of them are firmly against parental child battering. This shows their conflicts and helplessness.

The second part presents the meaning of “child abuse” as constructed by children through asking them the question “whether or not parental child battering is child abuse”. The majority of the children answer the question in two aspects. They are the objective reason of parental child battering and its seriousness. At the same time, a few of them also focus on the frequency of beating and purpose as well as motivation. In the family, corporal punishment is a means of discipline used by parents when the children make mistakes, with the purpose of correcting such mistakes. Maltreatment is that parents beat the children cruelly and without any reason, which harms the children both physically and mentally. In the children’s views, the primary basis for separating child maltreatment from corporal punishment is whether or not the children make mistakes and whether the actions harm their body/mind badly. Children generally think that parental child battering is corporal punishment, and not child abuse.

The third part presents the similarity and differences of children constructing “child abuse”. The similarity as expressed by most of the children is that they believe their own parents will not beat them without any reason and will not beat them cruelly because parents are very love of their child. Their opinions on child abuse are more emotional and affectional than those of their parents on similar questions, for they are deeply affected by parent-child affection and power relations. Therefore, even if they think that they should not be beaten by their parents, they do not think they are maltreated by parents. The difference is that a few children express their conflicts and ambiguous ideas on such questions.

The research results presented in this chapter show that children do not define child abuse in the context of parent-child relationship. They believe their “*feelings*” and love from parents, so they speak in defence of their parents based on parent-child affection. This shows that their understanding of parental child battering includes their identification with their parents’ views as well as some irrational cognition. In the following chapter, we will specially analyze the differences and similarities between parents’ views and children’s views and the social and cultural roots of such differences and similarities.

Chapter Eight Convergence and Divergence of Children's Views and Parents' Views on Child Abuse

Introduction

The previous three chapters presented the affection relation and power relation between parent and child in one-child families in Beijing, and their effect on how parents and children understand parental child battering and construct "child abuse". It also summarized the similarity and diversity of the views of parents and children respectively. Combined with the study findings in the previous chapters, and the other data from in-depth interviews and focus groups, the main content of this chapter is to discuss the similarities and differences between the parents' view and the children's view, and the reasons for such similarities and differences. This chapter is a preliminary conclusion of the study data.

This chapter is concerned with the similarities and differences in understanding of parental child battering and child abuse at the group level and socio-cultural levels, as opposed to individual level. It focuses on the differences between the views of the children and those of the parents. Because neither the children group nor the parents group is homogenous, there are bound to be individual variations in both groups. The views of a child, as well as those of a parent, may differ from other children and parents in their respective groups. In this light, therefore, comparison is on the group levels. It goes without saying that

comparison at the group level does not negate the fact of diversity in the conceptions of child battering and physical child abuse among the children and the parents.

Through the comparison of the views of children and those of parents/adults, this chapter will further analyze and discuss the understanding of parental child battering and "child abuse", and the relation between the concepts of child abuse, discipline, corporal punishment and domestic violence and so on, and to reveal and analyze the Chinese myths on the problem of child abuse.

Similarities between Children's Views and Parents' Views

In this study, I have tried to highlight the unique voice of the children concerning parental child battering and child abuse by looking at how their views differ from their parents'. But the similarities in view between the two parties as found in the findings, to a certain extent, manifest the children's internalization of their parents' views and their identification with the Chinese culture.

Perspective of understanding "child abuse"

The study has found that children and parents have very similar perspectives with regard to child abuse. Their answer as to whether parental child battering is child abuse is mainly based on the affection relation and power relation between parent and child, with the former playing a more important role in the construction of child abuse. They focus more on the motivation and intention of child battering. Therefore, it is not thought to be child abuse when the parents batter their child with a good intention, as they are just exercising the power / right of parental discipline.

As discussed in literature, Chinese people emphasize the *guanxi* (relation) between persons and are accustomed to placing themselves into this *guanxi* when understanding and interpreting their behavior. For two persons with *guanxi*, there will be some specific characteristics in their behavior, affection and cognition based on the proximity level of relation. Many studies have shown that Chinese people especially emphasize the difference between "*insider*" and "*outsider*" (King, 1993; Yang, 2004). In the "*insider*" circles, especially within the family, the important prerequisites for maintaining relations are affection and responsibilities, rather than rights. Everyone is dependent on their families for quite a long period of time, from being born to living independently, and therefore has special affection for their families. Traditional Chinese culture stresses "family-centered" relationship where affection and a "strong sense of unity" among family members are particularly stressed (Huang, 1988). According to this "unity" relation, parental child battering is understood as the performance of responsible parents. When understanding matters among the "insiders", this affection must be taken into account.

Although this study shows that the parent-child relationship in the Chinese one-child families has undergone great changes nowadays, the parent-child relationship is still very close and great importance is attached to the parent-child affection based on blood ties and disciplining of children by their parents. Therefore, the children and parents who participate in the study often beautify the behavior of parental child battering because of this affection factor, and consider that parental child battering is for the good of the children. They are unwilling to regard biological parents battering "their own child" as child abuse. Although the awareness of

children's rights has grown, and some of the children protest against being battered, the children, when interviewed, consciously or unconsciously defend their parents by giving a well-meaning explanation for their parents' battering. These findings are consistent with those of the study of the Taiwan scholar Zhu Ruiling (1989) who indicates that Taiwan young people are inclined to believe in the traditional Chinese family ethical value that "*tian xia wu bu shi de fu mu*"¹. Hence, the finding of this study further demonstrates the effect of cultural norms on the understanding of child abuse.

Europe and the United States tend to understand the problem of child abuse more from the perspective of human rights. Therefore, improper parental discipline will not be accepted regardless of how close the parent-child relationship is. Chinese people lack the awareness of human rights in general and are accustomed to regarding children as objects of education rather than independent subjects of rights and equal individuals with dignity. Rarely, they understand the problem of child abuse from the human rights perspective.

Understanding of the meaning of "child abuse"

Although there is a great generation gap between contemporary children and their parents, understanding of "child abuse" of these minor children participating in the study is similar to that of their parents. Children and parents generally agree that child abuse has the following characteristics:

¹ This is a Chinese proverb. Literally, means *there is no wrongful parent under the sky*, meaning that parents are always right.

Firstly, child abuse must involve subjective malevolence, which is a characteristic that makes it most distinct from corporal punishment and physical discipline. A malicious act means an action with intention and motivation to cause injury deliberately, for instance, beating a child until he is crippled, or burning a child with cigarettes, where the subjective malevolence is obvious, and harm on the children can be expected. On the contrary, if parental child battering is done for the good of the children, it will not be considered child abuse.

Secondly, child abuse is an unreasonable act. Parental child battering without any good reason is child abuse. For instance, a father batters his child to vent his anger, especially when he is drunk. If the child is at fault, and parental child battering is performed for the purpose of discipline, it belongs to a case with cause, and is therefore not child abuse.

Thirdly, child abuse results in mental or psychological harm, which is a characteristic recognized by both children and parents participating in the study. Child abuse must result in mental or psychological harm. If parental child battering does not cause such harm to children, it is not child abuse.

Finally, child abuse is a situation which occurs very frequently and causes serious harm to the children. The frequent battering and battering with tools is considered child abuse, because it will inevitably cause serious harm physically or/and mentally. Frequency and seriousness as the characteristics of child abuse are agreed by a few children and parents interviewed, as well as most of them stress the *“intention of child battering”*.

Compared with the other concepts like "corporal punishment", "*guanjiao*" (discipline) and "domestic violence", "child abuse" focuses on malevolence -- apparently a moral evaluation -- and with it come irrationality and seriousness, psychological harm incurred, and frequency of the action. Because of the bad connotation associated with child abuse, the children interviewed are unwilling to use this derogatory term for their parents, especially in the presence of "outsiders" -- the interviewer.

Lack of sensitivity to child abuse

The study has found that children, like their parents, lack sensitivity towards "child abuse", as Mingming said: "*Parental child battering cannot be called abuse, unless the parents are sadistic*". This represents the views of the majority of those who participate in the study, so most of them define parental child battering as "*guanjiao*", "corporal punishment", and occasionally as "domestic violence". Unless beaten black and blue, most cases will not be considered child abuse even if you see children with an injured face and body. When asked whether the first two cases in Appendix 3 are child abuse, the Form 2 children in the third focus group have the following views:

Yulu : *I think this is done to guanjiao, and the parents do this for the good of their children, with the hope that they will become better. So I think it should not be regarded as child abuse.*

Xiaoyan : *No. I think that the first example should be corporal punishment, which is somewhere between guanjiao and child abuse because his mother surely does it for the good*

of him, i.e. with good intention, but it caused serious harm in the end. The second example should be child abuse. It is meant to hurt the spiritual world of the child and to deprive him of his right to play. The nature of children is playing. I think what causes the abuse is not the frequency of battering, but depriving children of love and rights. I think this is the main thing.

Xiaotang: I think both cases are child abuse, because although the intention of the first one is for the good of the child, it is, after all, battering resulting in the child being seriously injured. As the consequences are extremely bad, it must be considered child abuse and not corporal punishment. The second is also child abuse because the action is meant to deprive the child of the freedom of space, and to force the child to learn all day long. Although it is done for the good of the child, I feel that the child is like being in prison, learning every day and doing nothing else.

Juanjuan: I think in both cases, it's done for the good of the children, and therefore it tends towards corporal punishment and not child abuse. After all, the children should have their own freedom. So the method of communication used by the parents in the first story may be a bit excessive, but it is still not child abuse.

Wutong: I think, both cases are guanjiao, though a bit too severe. But I still insist on my point of view that they are just using the wrong education methods.

Most children think that the two cases involve discipline and corporal punishment because the intention of the parents is good, and there are some reasons for battering the children, just that the "wrong education methods" are being used. A few children think that both cases are child abuse, mainly because of the

psychological harm caused to the child or the seriousness of the battering. The study has found that children and parents are often confused when using the concepts of "child abuse", "corporal punishment" and "*guanjiao*" to analyze the cases. According to my analysis, each of these concepts should bring about a completely different behavior from the parents.

"*Guanjiao*" focuses on education, emphasizing the control and instruction of children by reasoning things out or restricting their action, but not necessarily by battering them. Huang (1988) points out that the word *guanjiao* is often misunderstood. The literal meaning of this term is "control and teaching". But sometimes people say: "I will *guanjiao* you!" That makes people feel that *guanjiao* is a punishment used to discipline or control children's behavior. The reason why *guanjiao* is often regarded as a synonym of punishment and reprimand is that parents often *guanjiao* their children for their bad behavior which has to be corrected. In this study, therefore, sometimes children and parents use "*guanjiao*" and "corporal punishment" more or less synonymously.

"Corporal punishment" is one of the ways to discipline children. It focuses on the physical and educational aspects and emphasizes physical punishment, mainly battering, for the errors the children have made. My data show that children and parents are more willing to use "corporal punishment" as a conceptual resource to understand the behavior of parental child battering.

"Child abuse" and "domestic violence" are less used to refer to the behavior of parental child battering. "Domestic violence" focuses on the violence and seriousness of the action. But the children and parents participating in the study

usually think “domestic violence” only refer to the marital violence between spouses. Firstly, this is because the regulation of “Prohibit domestic violence” is in the “Marriage law”; secondly, it is because the researches and interventions into domestic violence in China are mainly concentrated in violence against women in the family.

Attribution of parental child battering and child abuse

The interviewed children and parents attribute parental child battering to various causes, generally summed up as causes at the individual level, interactional level and structural level. The study has found that there is often not just one single factor playing a role in parental child battering and child abuse, but some deeper structural, systematic or cultural reasons beyond the individual level. Therefore, in the analysis, the ecological perspective which emphasizes the complex interrelationships between individuals, families, communities, and the society must also be taken into consideration.

Individual level

Apart from a few interviewees who feel that parental child battering occurs because the parents are sometimes in a bad mood, venting their anger on the children, most of the children and parents interviewed regard parental child battering as mainly attributable to the fault of the children, such as learning problems, morality and behavioral problems. The study has found that the most common phenomenon causing child battering is the learning problem, which is a peculiar phenomenon in the contemporary society in China. The academic performance of the “only-child” in cities is being paid unprecedented attention to by parents, and poor academic

performance, poor study habits, homework left undone and playing without being fond of learning, etc. are the direct causes of the children being battered. Even lying or talking back of children is often related to learning problems. If children do not get good scores, they may not dare tell the truth, and hence they lie. And when the parents criticize them for not putting sufficient efforts on studying, the children may talk back at their parents.

Why are children battered because of learning problems? As described in chapter five, what parents are most concerned with and devoted to is the children's study, because the current academic performance of children is related to their chances of getting higher education and their prospects in the future. Providing care, teaching and massive investment in education for children is considered the responsibility of parents, whereas getting good grades is considered the responsibility of children, as well as a return to the payout of the parents. Parents attach importance to their child's school work is a cultural tradition of the Chinese. So if the children learn badly or get poor grades, not only the parents, but also the children will consider it wrong. After Xiaoqiang and Dongdong were battered, they always blamed themselves, "*Why do I learn badly?*" and "*Why can't I live up to the expectations of my parents?*"

However, one criticism of applying the ecological model to family violence is that there is the danger of victim blaming, or unfairly viewing victims as participants in the abuse (Kemp, 1998). The study has showed that it is not the child alone, but the factors coming into play with the characteristics of the child. The failure of the children in learning may be due to the too high expectation from the one-child

parents, which in turn is a result of the education system and fierce social competition. Parents are not reconciled to their only child failing in the competition, as this will make them feel they have failed to do their responsibility. Therefore, they often feel helpless.

Interactional level

As far as disciplining children is concerned, although parents have greater power than their children, the power relationship between them is not stable. A kind of competition relationship will gradually be built up in the parent-child interaction (Fish, 2000). The findings of this study prove the above views of Fish.

Children and parents have acknowledged that there is a deep "generation gap" between them. They do not understand each other and are dissatisfied in many areas, and it is quite common that parent-child conflicts occur because children talk back or are disobedient. In fact, this is also the results of the conflict between "*conventionality*" and "*modernity*" discussed in Chapter five. Although parents know that the world of children is different from theirs and that children have their own understanding and thinking, as well as their own perspective and views on anything, parents often do not respect or do not know how to respect children's views. The parents expect their children to do things according to their will and will not tolerate children talking back or being disobedient. But the children want respect and equality, especially as they are growing up. They do not want their parents to regard them as "*small children*", and they consider themselves "*big children*" or "*young people*", and are keen to express their views. But parents often do not want to accept these changes and consider that their children have become "disobedient",

or "ignorant", so they become very angry. Thus, parent-child conflicts are most visible during the child's adolescence.

This is consistent with the research results of Meng Yuqun (1998) who points out that there are four main contradictions of relationship between parents and juvenile: first, juvenile "consciousness of independence" contradicts with parents' unwillingness to grant them equal status; second, there is the increasingly obvious generational differences; third, the parents' too high expectation for their children contradicts with their children's desire and ability; fourth, the limitations of juvenile characteristics contradict with the parents' lack of understanding. Moreover, due to the developmental characteristics of the juvenile, in particular because of the bias in educational thinking and attitude of parents, the contradiction of parent-child relationship during adolescence is deepened. Parents who want to discipline their child will easily come into conflict with the child.

Why will children be battered when they talk back? First, children and parents have different views on whether children should be obedient to their parents. Children generally consider it unnecessary to always obey their parents, because what parents say is not necessarily right. If they feel that the view of the parents is wrong, they may use their own points of view. At the same time, parents believe that their children should obey them, because they think what they say is reasonable and is certainly good for the children. Chinese people think that "*guai*" or obedience is children's virtues. As the Chinese saying goes, "*Bu ting laoren yan, chikui zai yan qian*"². That is to say, parents have more life experiences than children, and will

² This is a Chinese proverb, meaning those who do not obey the elders will suffer losses right away.

arrange everything for the children, so they believe that the children will suffer if they do not obey. So when children do not obey or talk back, parents will be anxious and angry and may batter their child. Second, the parents feel that their authority is challenged by the children and they lose "face". When parents want to restrict their children with their advice, and children talk back, it is regarded as disrespect or impiety for the parents. By battering the children, parents teach them that parental authority cannot be arbitrarily violated.

Even though some parents admit that what they have said is not right, they will still expect their children are obedient, may even overtly agree with them, the opposite may happen covertly, which shows how important it is for the parents that children be obedient. Lanlan's father is particularly dissatisfied when Lanlan is disobedient. He said: *"I want her to obey me. Rationally, I do know that sometimes it's not a big problem even when she does not obey me because I know what I say is not always right. But the fact is that I will be impatient when she does not obey me. I don't mind what she actually does but she should at least profess obedience."* Such professed obedience helps to protect the parents' "face".

Structural level

Parents talk more about structural and institutional factors. Maomao's father analyzes the three cases in the Appendix 3, and indicated that it is not entirely the responsibility of the parents that the parent-child conflicts go to the extreme. The pressure of competition in society, the pressure from school and the economic pressure on investment in education result in parents putting pressure on their children. Although children do not explicitly regard the pressure as the cause of their

being battered, many parents say that battering is related to those pressures, especially pressures from schools and teachers. The parents are required by teachers to be responsible for the study of their children; therefore, many parents have to play the role of teachers, such as inspecting the children's homework, preparing them for the dictation, and signing on various homework and examination papers. Hanghang's father also believes that the parents now spend too much time on the children's study and that half of the teaching is done at home. Every day parents are suffering as they accompany their children with their learning. If the parents sacrifice their time and put in a lot of efforts, and yet the children's academic performance cannot reach the expectations of the teachers or parents, the children may be battered by their parents who vent their grievances on the children.

Many researchers believe that parental child battering results from too high expectation on the part of the parents who hope that their children can fulfill their own dreams and ideals (Pan, 2002). Indeed such cases exist. But some parents, especially those with high education, say that their expectation for their child is not high. However, under the pressure of schools and teachers, they have to hold down their children because teachers often "invite" parents to schools to discuss their children's poor school work. The parents feel this is a loss of "face". They do not have so much time to contend with the teachers and are unwilling to offend the teachers, so they can only oppress their child. Many parents blame the children for being frequently criticized by the teachers for their failure in efforts. In face of these seemingly unsolvable issues, the simple solution is to batter their child. The pressure of parents comes from teachers, and parents in turn oppress and batter the children.

This shows that individual factors, interactive factors and social structural factors are interacting.

Dongdong's mother was very dissatisfied with the heavy burden of the school work and the frequent "invitation" from the teachers. She said that she did not lay much emphasis on the child's academic performance, but she did attach importance to the child's initiative in learning and his eagerness in the acquisition of knowledge. In fact, she believed that as long as the child has these factors, he would make good achievements. But the teachers demanded that the examination results must not be lower than 95 marks, and those who got below 95 should be re-tested. Therefore, study has become a very mechanical thing. During the interview, she kept expressing her extreme disappointment with the current school education system.

If it is not for the pressure from society and schools, the fear of being criticized by teachers, and the pressure of competition for a place in higher education, many parents believe that they would not force their child. Mingming's mother told me she had to pay RMB30,000 yuan sponsorship fee to secure a place for her child in a good middle school, and recently received two telephone calls from Mingming's English teacher and Math teacher about his poor results at English and mathematics. The mother said, *"Sometimes I am vexatious and anxious with him and want to batter him, such as to pinch him. I was disappointed because 'Hen tie bu cheng gang' (Dissatisfaction that iron cannot turn into steel)."* Mingming also admitted to me rather embarrassingly that his teachers had sometimes lectured his parents due to his poor academic performance.

Under the pressure of teachers and examinations, it is very difficult for parents to maintain a normal attitude to children. If children do not participate in such competitions, they may face elimination. The parents cannot reconcile with the possibility that their only child may be eliminated, and they will help or even force their children to progress. Therefore, it is a must that children are strictly disciplined, and battering and scolding children seems inevitable.

There is a common tendency for people to attribute the causes of good behaviors to factors within themselves, and those of bad behaviors to external factors. That is evident when the parents try to explain parental child battering. They generally attribute battering to the fault of the children and social pressure and less to their own responsibility.

As to child abuse cases amounting to a maltreatment crime in China, they are all, according to both parents and children, attributable to psychological diseases and abnormality of parents, or to malice of the abuser who has no affection relation with the children, and who wants to meet their psychological satisfaction or material interests through harming children. It is consistent with the psychopathic perspective which is the first model applied to explain child abuse. It explains why people tend to focus their attention on the abuser's personality when there is no reasonable explanation for child abuse.

Tolerance of parental child battering and antipathy of "child abuse"

Children and parents generally agree that parental child battering plays an educational role, and so they are very tolerant of it. But most of them, especially parents, find it difficult to accept the Western concept that parental child battering is

attributed to "child abuse". The following words of Yuanyuan's mother most clearly express this view:

In order to educate children, [parental child battering] may be more tolerable according to the cognition in the society. I once watched a television program on a psychological counseling case: if a father is especially indifferent to the child and all he cares about is the provision of meals for the child, then inevitably the child will hate him, which may result in self-closure on the part of the child. I think this is not good and is a kind of abuse, though no bruising is incurred. Parental child battering at least means a kind of concern and there is a glimmer of hope for the child. I think when the child has committed something wrong, parents will commonly use parental child battering. But most battering is not child abuse because after all, very few children do get injured. ... I think this concept of "child abuse" is introduced from the West but you have to consider the situations in China. The Chinese have performed battering and scolding for several thousands of years, and if you now call it "child abuse", everyone will find it unacceptable!

She clearly said that she could not accept the Western concept of "child abuse", and she defended that the Chinese tradition of beating children is a method of child discipline. KK's mother also compared the difference in attitudes to child battering between China and the United States. She said,

In the United States, parental child battering occurs infrequently, as it is a violation of human right. But according to the traditional Chinese teaching, "bang da chu xiao zi" (the rod makes an obedient son) and "bu da bu cheng cai" (spare the rod and spoil the child) are deep-rooted. (Parents) believe battering can "zhang jixing"

(make child remember the lesson). Based on our national conditions, parental child battering is acceptable (laughing).

This shows the conflicts of Eastern and Western concepts in the globalization process. If asked whether it is a universal value that children should be free from violence, the majority of the Chinese people would answer "yes", saying that children have such a right, at least in law. However, cognitively, they do not associate parental child battering with "violence" towards children, but with discipline for children. In China, there are completely different explanations for battering depending on who the battered subject is. Whereas battering of spouses and elderly may be associated with violence, child battering is done "for the good of the child", and is a normal act allowed by culture. In China, as long as the children are wrong, their parents seem to have legitimate reasons to batter them. Parental child battering is a punishment the children deserve. Such view is agreed on by many children and parents interviewed. The children's tolerance of parental child battering comes from affection, trust and filial piety, for they believe their parents will do everything for their good.

Children and parents support battering or other appropriate corporal punishment as long as it is moderate. This seems to match "*zhong yong zhi dao*"³ of the Chinese traditional culture. But it is not clear where the "degree of moderation" lies. In reality, it is ultimately decided and grasped by parents/adults, who think they

³ The so-called "*zhong yong zhi dao*" explained by agent of Jurists Cheng Yi in Song dynasty is: "Justice means no bias, and commonplace means no change; Justice is what the right is, and commonplace is an unchanging principle in the world". Zhu Xi further explained that: "Justice, there will be no bias and no dependence. It dose not go far away; commonplace, there will be common behaviors and common thoughts."

know the intensity and position where to batter their children. As Maomao's father stressed, *"you must impose a certain degree of battering on a child. Your objective is to make sure that you punish your child by battering, while not causing injury. So what position you batter and how much strength you use is important."*

Interestingly, after it was reported that Wang Chuang's mother wounded her son and was sentenced (Case 1 in Appendix 3), there were parents consulting doctors and experts on what position of the child's body is more secure to batter on. This shows that, on the one hand, parents are concerned about their child's safety; on the other hand, they do not want to give up the practice of battering child. In my research, the children have a vague understanding of *"moderation"* as *"not too serious and not too often."* They consider that it is not right to batter children too frequently and too relentlessly as to cause injury to the children.

Parents have stressed that parental child battering should be moderate, first because they are worried about their children being injured; second because they are worried that their children would hate them, thus hurting parent-child affection. As Tiantian's mother said, *"Parents should be rational, and they will be doing themselves a disservice if too much scolding and battering is conducted on the children. Just as too many good words are suspected of gabbing, which is annoying, so is too much punishment."*

Children have also stressed that parental child battering should be moderate, first because they are afraid of pain and can not bear it; second because they are worried that battering may bring about runaways from family and other negative consequences. In the discussions on the issue, the members of the child focus groups

have reached a consensus. As Dajie said:

Now there are a lot of TV documentaries showing runaways and vagrancy. Some parents have been battering their children since they were young and the anger of the children accumulates bit by bit until it reaches a point where the anger will explode and then the children will talk back at their parents, fight with them, and then run away. This shows that frequent battering and too relentless battering play a counterproductive role. Parental child battering can only be performed if it is not too tough.

Children and parents believe that moderate parental child battering is not child abuse. They think that child abuse is a vicious act done to cause serious harm to children maliciously. They are both offended by and disgusted at such child abuse.

Lack of consciousness of psychological harm caused by parental child battering

The data presented in the Chapter six and seven showed that children and parents generally lack consciousness of the psychological harm caused by parental child battering, which only seems to cause bruising on the body. Compared with the concern parents pay to education and physical health, little attention is paid to children's psychological status, needs and changes unless the children have apparent mental illness. As psychological harm is less easily identified than bodily harm and as it is accumulative, parents may not be aware that parental child battering will cause psychological harm. Instead they think that their children have a cheerful and open disposition and "bu jichou" (not bearing grudges). Some even think that the "more the battering, closer the relation". Most interviewed children also said that they would not be angry a few days after being battered, but during the battering,

they may be angry and sad. However, this psychological harm is often ignored. Therefore, parental child battering is not considered child abuse as long as there is no serious physical injury incurred.

It is worth noting that children and parents are more sensitive to psychological abuse, such as child neglect, confining the child's personal freedom, depriving the child of love, and injuring the child's self-esteem; such acts are considered more serious than bruising because they may result in psychological harm. Lanlan's father considered that his child battering was not child abuse, but that *"forcing children to learn or forcing them to do something is actually a kind of mental abuse"*.

Children and parents tend to think that child abuse must be accompanied by psychological harm, but parental child battering generally does not have this feature. Many parent informants agreed with Yuanyuan's mother who believed that child battering was better than child neglect and psychological or emotional child abuse, because *"parental child battering at least means a kind of concern for the child"*.

Views on "spare the rod and spoil the child"

The traditional concept of *"bu da bu cheng cai"* (spare the rod and spoil the child) seems to offer tacit support for parental child battering. The views of children and parents on *"spare the rod and spoil the child"* can be summarized into three different camps. Some agreed with this idea and even use the growth experience of some celebrities and the parents themselves as an example; some others did not agree with it, saying that it can not be applied to the modern society. But the dominant view is that there is some truth in the saying, though not the whole truth,

because the actual situation varies from person to person. Besides, as the child grows, parental child battering plays a smaller and smaller role.

No interviewed parents use the traditional concept of "*spare the rod and spoil the child*" as an excuse for their child battering, but there is evidence that many parents use it to defend themselves and other parents, and shared by some children. Many interviewed parents admire those parents who can batter their children to become successful persons, and even take delight in talking about the story of the famous pianist Fu Cong. Lanlan's father said:

It is said that if Fu Cong did something wrong when he played the piano, his father would take a board to batter him that could be heard upstairs, haha. ... In the past, the apprentices battered turned out to be stronger and better men than those not beaten. ... Battering is relatively popular as it can bring quick effects. Some say such methods can also be used in training "talents". However, it will depend on whether the battering is done properly. If so, the child may become a talent. If not, there will only be trouble and nothing can be gained.

KK's mother has a similar view. She said,

Anyway, this has been our tradition for years, do you not admit it? I watched television that many battered children are very promising. Do you agree? Whether battering is appropriate varies from person to person and from family to family. If you batter and hence drive him/her into prison, is it not more trouble for you?

In some television programs on celebrity interviews, the celebrities often talk about how they were battered in childhood, but after they grow up, they may think it

is right to be battered by their parents. In fact, after they have grown up, they are already considering issues from an adult's point of view. Intentionally or unintentionally, by publicizing such cases, the media not only affect the parents, but also the children. Tiantian felt that "*spare the rod and spoil the child*" is "*half right and half wrong. Half right of battering is family education and can only be performed in the urgent situations to let us 'zhang jixing' (remember the lesson).*"

From the description of the children, it can be found that parents often teach their children with the stories of celebrities and their own growing up experiences. Teaching by using examples is very effective in helping children internalize the concept of the parents, which is also the traditional concepts widely accepted by the Chinese community. Many children told me that their parents often said, "*my battering you is for your own good*", "*spare the rod and spoil the child*" and so on. Children are often taught that they deserve the beating and beating is love. These discourses seem to justify parents' use of corporal punishment. As a result, the battered children also think that they are at fault and accept their parents' beating as necessary and beneficial to them.

Meimei, a member of the second focus group, said,

I think parents have the right to batter their child. My Dad told me that he was battered by my grandfather in his childhood... After battering, my dad almost always scored 100 marks in examinations and also worked as a monitor. As my dad always educates me, I now think that sometimes battering plays an active role.

The concept of “*spare the rod and spoil the child*” is passed down from generation to generation. Grandfathers pass it to fathers, and fathers pass it to daughters. In this way, the children unknowingly internalize the point of views of their parents.

Dajie vividly explained “spare the rod and spoil the child” as:

We are like a small tree. If the parents do not batter and teach us, we may not grow up smoothly; but then it will be impossible for us to become the future talents in our community. Instead, we will undoubtedly become useless. Only if our parents point out and correct our fault gradually will we grow healthily and strongly, and make contributions to society.

When asked whether he really feels that way himself, or whether it is what his parents tell him, he responded: “*I have my own ideas but my father also talks like that*”. Obviously, his thoughts are influenced by his father's.

The study has found that there is no pure "child's perspective". The children's perspective has already included the internalization of strong parental perspective. From social influential processes, the main social function of the power resources is that the power holder is able to influence the others who rely on the resources, and the courses of influence contain submission, identification and internalization (Kelman, 1965). Submission means the one being influenced may not agree with the views of the one influencing him, but still acts in accordance with the wishes or demands of the other party; identification means the one being influenced wants to be the same as the one influencing him; and internalization means that the former fully accepts the values and attitudes of the latter. The social influence of the parents is expected to enable the children to internalize or agree with the values and

behavioral patterns of their parents, which is one of the important courses of socialization of children.

There have been a lot of changes in the environment where children are brought up and socialized in contemporary one-child families in China. As described in chapter five, the role of one-child parents has changed; they are not only parents, but also teachers, classmates and partners. The normal socialization process of children is only complete through interaction with a variety of different social roles and different types of people. The multiple roles of parents, who have close contacts with children, help children develop the advanced cultural knowledge, the precocious interpersonal relationship and adultized tendency of language and behavior and so on (Feng, 1998).

The "adultized tendency" is also manifest in the understanding of parental child battering and child abuse among the children participating in the study. They have a high level of acceptance of the views of the parents and Chinese culture, which is achieved mainly through the long-term indoctrination by the parents of such concepts and practice of what the parents advocate. Parents convey their beliefs and values, indoctrinate their children of such concepts by means of discipline behaviors and attitude to children through parent-child interaction within families. Parents let their children believe that everything the parents do is for their good, including parental child battering. Not only are parents disseminators of culture, but so are television, books and other media that diffuse culture. According to Yang Guoshu (2004), Chinese people live in a society and culture which strive for sameness and are likely to agree with the authoritative opinions. In the family, the

children agreed with the concepts of parents to a large extent when they were young, but as they grow up, their own views will develop, either gradually identifying with, differentiating from, or integrating with those of their parents.

Differences between Children's Views and Those of Their parents

The study has found that in the same social and cultural contexts, children's and parents' points of view are indeed similar on parental child battering and child abuse, yet there are also differences, manifesting the fact that children have their own characteristics, positions and perspectives. These deserve analysis and discussion.

Different focuses on constructing child abuse

When children and parents talk of "child abuse", they both refer to the intention, reasons and consequences of parental child battering. But the focus of each party is different. What parents are concerned about is the subjective intention of parental child battering, whereas what children are concerned about is its objective reasons and consequences. Therefore, many parents believe that corporal punishment is just corporal punishment, which is done in order to discipline their child. No matter how serious or frequent parental child battering is, it is not child abuse, because the subjective intention is good. On the other hand, children first consider whether the children are at fault, and then whether the consequences are serious. If the children are battered due to their mistake and if no serious physical or psychological harm is caused, it is not child abuse; on the contrary, if the children are battered without reason, it will be child abuse. Some children believe that, even

if the children are battered due to their mistake, but if the battering is very serious, then it is also child abuse, such as the case of Wang Chuang (see Case 1 in Appendix 3). Clearly, in the children's perspective, some serious corporal punishments are child abuse.

The difficult issue here is that the views of parents as to whether children are at fault may be different from those of the children. Sometimes while parents believe that their children are wrong, such as talking back, the children do not think so. Based on the different perceptions of "fault", there will be different judgments on whether it is child abuse. So it is essential to listen to the children's voice. Whether children are wrong or not is decided not just by their parents, but the children themselves too.

Liabilities of society and parents for parental child battering and child abuse

As described above, the attribution of the interviewed children and parents on child battering is very similar. The difference is that parents speak more about structural factors, such as society, systems and culture, but rarely about their own liability. On the contrary, children rarely explicitly mention the deep reasons in the structural level, but more about of parents. For example, parents sometimes vent their anger on the child when they are in bad mood; parents do not understand their child; parents do not respect their child's right. As Shanshan said, "*I am not comfortable after being beaten, and in my mind, I think it is my mother's mistake.*" Perhaps this difference is related to the perspectives and cognitive ability of the children.

Fifteen-year-old Jiajia also believed that parents should be liable for child battering. She is the only child of the interviewed children who has not been battered.

She said,

Why is a child battered? He/she does not know nothing [They could be reasoned with]. Even if a child does not listen to his/her parents, I think the child may not necessarily be wrong. All children are the same because they were born the same, and trained by their parents from their birth. Maybe some parents can train the child to be particularly obedient, sensible and empathetic, and understand what their parents say. So it's not necessary for parents to batter them because there is nothing to cause their parents to be angry. Other parents may be more indulgent and seldom use discipline; instead, they condone their children. If these children do not accomplish their homework after school, if they are told times and times again and yet do not listen, then their parents will batter them. I think this, in fact, results from the parents' ways of bringing up their children.

Jiajia thought that if the parents did not teach and discipline their children from childhood, the blame should lie with the parents but not the children. In fact, the growing up process of most children is similar, but while some parents have never or rarely battered their children, others often do, which shows that parental child battering is not a matter of whether the children have “problems” or not, but a matter of whether parents tend to take corporal punishment and consider that corporal punishment is an effective and necessary method of discipline, and surrender themselves to this method.

Children's views are more inconsistent than the parents' views

The research data reveal that there are inherent contradictions and indeterminacy when children and parents are asked to give their views on child battering and child abuse. This reflects their vague understanding of child abuse and the inconsistent attitude to parental child battering. This also reflects the conflicts between the old and new values in times of change. Parents' contradictions manifest mainly the cognitive and behavioral inconsistency. Parents who claimed "*best not to batter children*" often did batter their child, such as Dongdong's mother and Hanghang's father.

However, the contradictions in the views of children are more complicated than those of parents. This is mainly because the special parent-child affection makes children often feel puzzled when trying to understand what happens between the parent and themselves. Therefore it is difficult to make a definite judgment, especially when the judgment is not in favor of their parents. Because of the power relation between parent and child and the influence of Chinese culture, parents will not scruple when they talk about their children, but children may hesitate when they evaluate their parents' behavior, attaching more "*affectional color*" in their understanding. The contradictions in the views of children are mainly reflected in two aspects: First, the attitude towards parental child battering is very contradictory. Children are afraid of pain and do not want to be battered, yet they understand that their parents do this with good intention, and therefore accept corporal punishment as a way of discipline. Second, the understanding of child abuse itself is also very diverse/contradictory. If the same parental child battering occurs in other families,

the children may condemn it as child abuse. But if it occurs in child's own family, it may be not child abuse or at least not completely child abuse, because their parents love them.

Yuanyuan has also expressed her contradictory views of child abuse (see Chapter Seven). When she thinks that her parents love her, she feels that parental child battering is not child abuse; but when she thinks parents batter her without reason, she feels it is child abuse. Based on the contradictory ideas, ultimately, children are inclined to take a more tolerant view towards the issues concerning their parents. The study has found that children's thinking has its own characteristics. They may look at the same case from two parts: one half is child abuse and the other not. This is a reflection of the lives of children: while they do get the love of their parents, they are still often battered.

Expectations on social intervention into parental child battering and child abuse

With regard to social intervention into parental child battering and child abuse, the expectations of children and parents are hugely different. The data from in-depth interviews and focus groups show that children and parents always compare China with the United States. Children envy the American attitude towards children, and generally hope that parental child battering will be intervened in China. Parents generally stress that China's national situation is different from that of the United States. So one should not demand China to follow the American standards, and not advocate intervention in parental child battering unless the case is particularly serious.

Children's views

As mentioned earlier, many children keep a tolerant attitude towards parental child battering because of parent-child affection and filial piety. But still, nobody wants to be battered. Through television, internet and newspapers, they know that parental child battering is not allowed in the United States, so they think that the children in the United States are more fortunate. Huanhuan most liked the concepts of the United States, and she said assuredly,

In the USA, parental child battering is child abuse. The children can call 911 for the police if child battering occurs in the family. ...The state should pass laws making it compulsory for the parents to be responsible for ensuring that no harm is done to the children. ... parental child battering should be prohibited.

Xiaojun learned from television how intervention in parental child battering works in the United States, and wondered why the United States regulates it but China does not. He said, *“I think that corporal punishment should be prohibited because of the bad effects. If it becomes a habit, the children will have a vengeance mind after being punished. Laws should be enacted to prohibit parental child battering.”* However, when he finds out that the parents in the United States may be arrested if parental child battering occurs, he thinks *“the United States is too strict on it”*, and that it is unacceptable in China. He does not want the parents to be punished because of parental child battering.

Jiajia also knew that *“parental child battering violates the law in the United States”*. She envies the American attitude *“giving children a respect”*. She believed

that no one had any right to batter children, not even the parents as parental child battering would somehow cause physical and mental effects to the children. When she talked about how one of her classmates who was always the first in class was battered because of one mistake in a test, she angrily said, parental child battering should be *"absolutely prohibited"*.

The study has found that globalization has far-reaching effects on the concepts of children. Most of the interviewed children expressed the wish that the society should intervene in parental child battering. At least when being battered, they want somebody to discourage the parents from doing so. Dong dong said, *"It will be better if it is prohibited, of course; then we can be exempt from physical sufferings"*. Even if the children feel that parents have a right to batter, they still expect mercy from their parents, hoping that they will be protected. KK opposed parental child battering, but also thought that prohibition of parental child battering had advantages and disadvantages. She said,

There are both advantages and disadvantages if parental child battering is prohibited. The positive aspect is that it can reduce harm done to the child and let the children feel less painful, less inferior. ... However, there may be some children who are especially unruly, and will not listen to their parents. Then, battering must be used as a punitive approach. Otherwise, he simply can not be controlled and he will be lawless. But I agree that extremely heavy battering should not be exercised. A little bit of battering is all right because otherwise, he will not be aware of his mistake.

A few children believed that parental child battering for the purpose of disciplining children could not be prohibited while child abuse should. However, the

law may define the degree of battering allowed, in the hope to control the behaviors of parents.

Parents' views

Many parents stressed that "*our own national conditions are different from those in the United States*", which is a developed country where the status of children is high and there is a strong consciousness to protect children. As a developing country, China cannot follow the United States. Not only does it not have the capacity to intervene in parental child battering, but parental child battering itself is considered not a problem. For thousands of years, the Chinese have been educated to think this way.

Yuanyuan's mother who had gone to *the USA* described the differences of the "*national conditions*" between China and America as follows:

Unlike other foreign countries, China has a huge population but not enough resources. For normal and healthy child, the opportunity for education is the first priority. There is no way to achieve other ends at present. Children with disabilities or some other problems, such as psychological problems, and those who run away from homes, assistance should be provided for them. We have not reached the level of the developed countries. When I went to the USA, I found that on the school buses, places where children are most likely to get hurt when there's an accident are all padded. The buses are designed entirely based on the needs of the children, not to mention that they are all bullet-proof. Child buses are the most expensive and the best; if the guardian of a child is not there to pick the child up, the child will have to stay in the school bus; even his/her brother and sister is not allowed to pick him/her up. The awareness of child protection is

particularly strong, so people say that the United States is a paradise for children and a grave for the elderly. The children in the United States are extremely well taken care of and can't be battered. How can we catch up ah? We are too far from it!

In China's social and cultural contexts, family is a private sphere: "*Qing guan nan duan jia wu shi*"⁴ and "*duo yi shi bu ru shao yi shi*"⁵. So the state and society in general do not intervene in parental child battering inside families, unless it is particularly serious, is threatening the child's life, which will arouse the concern of the community. For the ordinary parental child battering, Huanhuan's mother believed that "*there is no need to guan (control, intervene)*" because each family has its different circumstances. She explained: "*Even though I hear parental child battering in other families, I will definitely not intervene because I agree with the idea of 'the less trouble, the better'.Now few are willing to intervene in the private affairs.*"

Lanlan's father is a policeman and what he said can best illustrate the perspective of the parents on this issue. He said,

Normally, if parental child battering occurs just once in a while, it will not be noticed. But if the battering causes injury, some one should intervene. But actually there is no one to do so. ... Parental child battering has existed for so many years, and is considered not a problem. If you suddenly say it is not right, which neighbors should intervene? No neighbor is willing to intervene in other people's business. You can never do it ah! ... The enforcement of this law will fail altogether. Although there is some progress [in China], there's

⁴ This is a Chinese proverb, meaning that it is difficult for upright officials to judge family matters.

⁵ This is a Chinese proverb, meaning the less trouble, the better.

still a long way to go when compared with the USA. Maybe we will reach that level in 30 to 50 years.

In other words, parents generally believe that intervention in parental child battering in China is not yet feasible, and enforcement cannot be realized.

The differences in opinions between parents and children, indeed, reflect their different standpoints. First, children who are the battered, of course, hope that the state and community will enable them to avoid physical sufferings. As for the parents who are the batterers, they are unwilling to give up the power of parental child battering and allow other people to intervene in their family affairs. Second, children are more receptive to the new Western concepts and their views are clearly influenced by the American culture. Of course, parents are also affected by the American culture, but they give more consideration to the Chinese "*national conditions*" as they can affect the feasibility of such suggestions. Besides, the traditional concepts are more deeply rooted in parents.

It can be said that any society, and every generation has some changes in values, and the culture will change with time. It seems that parents' attempt to pass on their values to the next generation is only partially successful. This is why even the most effective parents can not be perfect value guides. The concepts of children can not be the same as those of their parents. Due to the rapid development of information technology today, parents are not the only source affecting the ideas of children. There are many other channels leading to change in the values of the new generation. This explains why parents and children may not agree on every aspects of the national culture. Moreover, as the personality, growth experiences, education,

etc. of different individuals are different, their cultural perception and identity are also different. Children will, in accordance with their own life experiences and feelings, judge for themselves what is right or wrong, and draw their own conclusions, no matter what their parents think. So in the same social and cultural contexts, different individuals in different generations or different individuals in the same generation may have a different understanding of the same issue and may behave differently.

Myths of Child Abuse in China

As discussed previously, the construction of "child abuse" is deeply affected by society and culture, and there may be a totally different understanding of child abuse in different socio-cultural contexts. Many Western countries have a clear definition of child abuse in their laws, though the definitions are more diverse in the academia. Therefore, they are considerably more sensitive to child abuse. They cannot help suspecting that there is a case of child abuse whenever they face an injured child.

Myths refer to false beliefs that tend to hinder both public recognition of the problem and effective professional practice. Here, we do not take for granted the definitions of "child abuse" in the United States and Europe as the standard to judge what myths Chinese people have. Instead, based on previous scholarly research, the findings of this study, existing fact and the laws in China, I try to analyze aspects of understanding child abuse that may be problematic and of which most people may

not be aware. It will hopefully raise people's vigilance and reflection. This study identified the following six major myths:

Myth One: It is impossible for biological parents to abuse "their own child"

There is a common belief among the informants of the study that it is impossible for biological parents to abuse "*their own child*". This myth is the Chinese version of what Dobash and Dobash (1979) termed as "the myth of family bliss." Chinese people emphasize *guanxi* (relation) between persons (King, 1985), and are accustomed to placing themselves into this relation when understanding and interpreting their behavior. In this study, children and parents believe in parent-child affection and that biological parents love "*their own child*". Therefore it is impossible for the parents to abuse "*their own child*". Their logic is that *guan* (discipline) comes from love -- parental child battering is a kind of *guan* – thus parental child battering is love and for the good of the child, so it is not child abuse.

According to Gelles and Cornell (1990), there is the myth among people of the West that love and violence do not coexist in families. Chinese parents and children participating in the study do not have this myth, as witnessed in their blending of love with violence. They believe that love and violence can coexist, as violence can be an expression of love. However, informants generally think that love and child abuse cannot coexist. As indicated previously, they consider that abuse and violence are two different things, as abuse is malicious and is not for the good of the children, but parental use of violence against children may be an instrument of child discipline and be well-meant – an act of love for the children.

The reasons why the common belief that the biological parents are not likely to abuse/maltreat "their own child" is a kind of myth is mainly based on the following analysis:

Firstly, not all biological parents love their children. Emerging cases of infanticide, child abandonment, and child abuse prove this point (see Cai, 2001). It is not uncommon that some selfish parents do not do their duty in caring for, educating and protecting their children. In some extreme cases, some parents even lend their children to the others for begging, while some others decline to pay child support after divorce. Although this involves only a very small number of parents, it can still be used to illustrate our point.

Secondly, even if parents love their children, love does not mean favor. The parent-child affection involves first and foremost feelings of familiarity and closeness, based on blood ties. There may also be feelings of favor or enjoyment resulting from likeable personality and the ability of the children. However, in-depth interviews found that many parents are not satisfied with many aspects of their children, such as personality, ability and habits, because the children cannot live up to their own ideals and expectations. Based on parent-child affection, parents do love their children, but there may still be certain aspects of their children that they do not like, and because of this, they may batter their children.

Thirdly, even if parents like their children, it does not mean that they will never harm their children. This research has found that in families, people are most likely to indulge themselves by losing their temper with family members. Parents sometimes tend "*to do whatever they want to their children*". Many interviewed

parents said that their emotions are uncontrollable when they are angry with the children, and they are likely to not know how heavy the force is when parental child battering occurs, hence commonly resulting in harm to the children. Parents may not intentionally harm their child, but harm sometimes does result. Therefore, the occurrence of abuse is not impossible.

In contrast with biological parents, step-parents are considered as the greatest suspect of child abuse by informants. In Chinese culture, step-parents, especially step-mothers, have been demonized, and are described as people with a malevolent heart towards their step-children. Much folklore with this story line have contributed to this social attitude. Therefore, many informants share the views of Juanjuan: *"In a normal family, child abuse is not likely unless there is a stepmother or stepfather in the family."* In fact, some step-parents are very kind to their step-children, whereas some biological parents are cruel to their own children. Due to their fear of public opinion, step-parents may be cautious when dealing with their step-children and will refrain from *"doing whatever they want to them"*. The survey results of Tian and He (2003) prove this point: corporal punishment of children is done by biological parents, rather than by step-parents. Western survey data also do not support the claim that stepparents are more violent or abusive than biological parents (Gelles & Harrop, 1989).

Myth Two: Well-meant parental child battering is not Child abuse.

Both parent and child informants pay much attention to the subjective purpose, motive and intention of parental child battering, and believe that it is not child abuse if there is no malice. They think that child abuse refers to malicious acts

with bad intention and motivation to cause injury deliberately, for instance, burning a child with cigarettes. If the parents mean to discipline their children for a good purpose, only very few child informants in the study considered serious harm caused to children as a result of parental battering as child abuse. Most informants agree in varying degree with the view expressed by Huanhuan's mother: "*whether it is abuse or not is only related to the purpose of the battering.*" Because of this, Wang Chuang's case in Appendix 3 is generally not considered child abuse. It is regarded more as "*improper discipline methods*", "*corporal punishment*", "*domestic violence*" and "*intentional harm*".

The way child abuse is understood has consequences for child protection. In Western countries, the presence of a violent act, irrespective of the intent of the doer, will constitute a suspected child abuse case that leads to intervention measures in child protection. Although China does not have such intervention systems like those of the West, according to *the Application of the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* mentioned previously, the intent of the doer is not a factor to be considered in the legal definition of "maltreatment". Actually, harm with a good intent or a bad intent does not have a meaningful distinction to injured children. Disregarding the actual behavior and objective harmful consequences are not fair to the children. Subjective intent is hard to be determined, or assessed as it is not visible. If "*good subjective intent*" becomes a blanket cover protecting parents, then the rights of children cannot be guaranteed. So when a child has been subjected to non-accidental injury, it should be understood as a suspected case of child abuse.

Myth Three: Only abnormal parents with psychological illness will abuse their child

Informants often consider “*psychological illness*” as the only reason for child abuse. In interviews and focus groups, children and parents tend to label parents who have abused their own children as “*abnormal*” or “*psychologically ill*”, therefore detached from themselves and their families. Both Xiaojun’s and Jingjing’s mother are very sure that Wang Chuang’s mother (Case 1 in Appendix 3) who seriously harmed her child must be psychologically ill, otherwise, such “*human nature is not understandable*”, because “*even the vicious tiger does not devour its children*”. However, there has been no evidence to prove that Wang Chuang’s mother has psychological illness. What is proved is that she has high expectations for her only son, is very dissatisfied with her husband and is finally divorced from him after the incident.

Because child abuse is considered a rare phenomenon which only occurs in the abnormal families, it is generally not a great concern for the community, unless the children are seriously injured or killed. It is noteworthy that a small number of parents and children often laugh when they talk about their own experiences of being battered in their childhood and their own battering child experience now. This shows that they do not realize the dangers of parental child battering and many tragedies happen as a result. Some children and parents firmly believe that the cases of Wang Chuang and Xu Li (Case 1 and 2 in Appendix 3) are rare because “*their parents are psychologically abnormal*”. They believe that such tragedy will not happen in a normal family.

Such myth also exists in the West (Gelles & Cornell, 1990). As mentioned in the chapter on literature review, the psychopathic perspective is among the first models explaining child abuse. However, according to Murray Straus (1980), fewer than 10% of all instances of family violence are caused by mental illness or psychiatric disorders. This shows that only a very small number of parents who have abused their children may have psychological illness. The parents without psychological illness may also abuse their children.

Myth Four : Child battering is not child abuse because the battered child does not bear grudges and parent-child relationship is not affected

There are two aspects of this myth: First, children after being battered will "*bu jichou*" (not bear grudges) and parent-child relationship will not be affected; second, that the parent-child relationship is not affected shows there is no psychological harm done to the children, so it is not child abuse. Apparently, Children and parents base their judgement of child abuse on whether or not the parent-child relationship is affected. Whether children bear grudges can vary from person to person and from situation to situation. For instance Wang Chuang (Case 1 in Appendix 3) once said, "*I do not forgive my mother*" and Xu Li's killing of his mother (Case 2 in Appendix 3) fully illustrates the fact that children may harbour enmity after being battered. Even though most children will not hate their parents for a long time due to parent-child affection, it does not mean that they will not be angry or parent-child relationship will not be affected at all. All children participating in the study have expressed dissatisfaction with parental child

battering. For instance, they are angry; they cry, ignore their parents, do not tell the truth to their parents, or even leave homes.

A few informants are quite sure that long-term parental child battering “*will certainly affect the parent-child relationship*”. For instance, Tiantian’s mother told me that she did not like her mother and that the parent-child relation between them was not close because she was frequently battered in her childhood by her mother. Jiajia’s mother also told of the story of a girl classmate of Jiajia, which leaves a deep impression on me. The girl’s mother loved her child very much, but had an impatient temper. Whenever the child did not obey her, she would batter the child with any tools at hand, and even drew blood on the face of the child with a pencil tip. Later, there is deep animosity between the mother and daughter.

The study of Tian and He (2003) also shows that 52.04% of the children in their survey felt chagrin after corporal punishment; 31.23% bore a resentment against their parents; 15.24% wanted to run away from home; 8.18% wanted to take revenge after they grow up and 7.43% wanted to sever father (mother) child relationship. These indicate that parental corporal punishment has a very negative impact on the parent-child relationship and the psychological harm caused to the children is unfathomable. Many Western studies have proved that parental child battering not only harms the child physically, but has a negative impact on the child’s mental development (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Kim & Ko, 1990). In other words, physical harm is often accompanied by psychological harm. Therefore, even though the children are battered without “*bearing grudges*” and the parent-child relationship

does not seem to be affected, we can never be sure that parental child battering does not cause psychological harm to children, as Yuanyuan said: *"At that moment, I thought my heart was broken"*.

Myth Five: Parents with higher education will not commit child abuse

Other than attributing child abuse to the mental illness of the parents; informants sometimes also attributed the cause to parents who have not received much education and therefore with *"suzhi di"*⁶. The parents and children participating in this study tend to think that Wang Chuang's mother and Li Xu's mother (see Appendix 3) are not highly educated, and do not know how to educate their children. Therefore, undesirable consequences occur. Most of them believe that as far as child battering is concerned, parents with higher education are different from those who are lowly educated. The former does not batter their child seriously. Hence, they will not cause child abuse. Hanghang's father said,

We with higher education will consider the consequence, children's capacity of receiving battering, parent-child affection, the harm to the child, the child's feelings and self-esteem, etc. Other parents [with lower education] do not consider these when they batter their kid, and do not know how to educate their children.

However, this study has found that parental child battering and child abuse are not related to the education level of parents. The only parent interviewed who admitted to having committed *"a little child abuse"* is Hanghang's father who has a Master's degree. Dongdong's mother as a university graduate recognized that the

⁶ *"suzhi di"* is translated into "poor quality" in Chinese, meaning that people have less education and less civilized behavior.

subjective intent of her child battering was good, but her act was abusive. Similarly, Yuanyuan's parents who made their child starve both have high education. On the contrary, Jiajia's mother, Chenchen's mother and Xiaogang's father who never or rarely ever battered their children had never entered university.

This shows that education level mainly explains attitude and knowledge, rather than behavior; and parental cognition and behavior are often inconsistent. This is similar to the results of Lin Wenying and Wang Zhenwu's (1995) study of Taiwan's parental corporal punishment. In fact, parents with any education level can batter, or abuse their child.

Myth Six: The Western concept of "child abuse" does not fit China's national conditions, so China need not be concerned with child abuse problem

This myth is primarily found in the interviewed parents. The research data show that children and parents do not quite understand the Western concept of "child abuse", and believe that parental child battering is child abuse in the United States only. Based on this understanding, Yuanyuan's mother repeatedly emphasized that parental child battering could not be regarded as "child abuse" because it was a concept introduced from the West and that the situations in China must be considered, as China has not developed to that extent. Many of the interviewed parents also stressed "*China's national conditions are different from that of the United States*" and rejected the concept of Western "child abuse".

The children and parents participating in the study understand child abuse mostly from TV programs about legal matters. Only cases of suspected maltreatment crime would arouse the attention of the media, and therefore be shown on TV. It is

therefore no wonder that when child abuse is mentioned, informants will first think of “maltreatment”. Before I started collecting data in 2004, I once called the officer-in-charge of a committee for protection of minors in Beijing and asked her how she understood child abuse. She said: *"I know child abuse; I went to Hong Kong for training. How we understand child abuse is different from the people in Hong Kong. We understand child abuse based in legal term. In our view, child abuse is more serious than domestic violence."* What she means is that the Western concept of “child abuse” may not be fully applicable to the situations of mainland China.

Actually, the acceptance of the concept of “child abuse” by the Chinese rests more with the understanding and attitude of Chinese people. It has less do with the origin of the concept, as coming from the West. Other concepts that have been introduced from the West are not necessarily at odds with China's national conditions. Many of the concepts from the West have been accepted by Chinese people, such as the notions of “rights” and “equality”. Rejecting others’ concepts without analysis and identification is clearly too simplistic.

Although the modern concept of “child abuse” originally developed from the socio-cultural context of the United States and Europe, one should not draw the conclusion that China need not be concerned with child abuse. The phenomenon of child abuse is not unique in the West. It has existed in China for ages. One may reject the Western understanding of “child abuse”, but one needs to admit that there are many children who suffer different degrees of violence in the family and who need protection to ensure they live a violence-free life. This will reflect the extent to

which China is a modernized and civilized society. In the Chinese Mainland, child abuse is treated only as a legal issue. The community pays little attention to cases that do not amount to “maltreatment”. So the rights of many children who have been infringed lack protection, which is a serious problem that China needs to face and resolve.

The "myths" above not only reflect the influence of Chinese culture on understanding of child abuse, but also explain why the problem of child abuse has long been ignored in Chinese academia and society and why it does not become a "social problem". One of the reasons is that the Chinese people's understanding of child abuse is different from that of Westerners. When cases of child abuse are framed in terms of child discipline and punishment, there is at present no way to intervene for the purpose of child protection because, in Chinese culture, parents have the duty and responsibility to keep their children in proper behavior, with force if necessary. When cases are serious to warrant legal intervention, it is already too late to protect the child (Qiao & Chan, 2005). Hence, the myths not only preclude a realistic understanding of children who suffer different forms of brutalities in the family and in the community, but also forestall timely help to children and abusing parents before it is too late. Although the Western concept of "child abuse" can not be completely copied to China, its essence of protecting children should not be ignored. Perhaps, only by regarding child abuse as a "social problem" can more children be protected.

Chapter Summary

As the final chapter for presenting and analyzing the data, the findings of this study are summarized here. This chapter summarizes the similarities and differences of the children's views and parents' views on parental child battering and child abuse, their identification with Chinese culture, the internalization of parents' views by children, the myths on the issue of child abuse, as well as the unique children's views and perspectives.

The study has found that children and parents have similar understanding on parental child battering and child abuse, attribution tendencies, and cognizance of the psychological harm caused to the children. Their sensitivity to child abuse is generally low, and they share the common cultural understanding of "*spare the rod and spoil the child*", etc. The differences in children's views and parents' views are more a result of the different focuses as they construct their understanding of child abuse, reflecting for instance in their different perceptions on the responsibilities of society and parents for parental child battering, as well as their different views and expectations on social intervention.

A further analysis of the participants' myths regarding child abuse is also included in this chapter. They are the myths that it is impossible for biological parents to abuse "*their own child*"; that only abnormal parents with mental illness will abuse their child; that the battered child does not bear grudges and parent-child relationship is not affected; that well-meant child battering is not child abuse; that the parents with higher education will not commit child abuse; and finally that child

abuse as a Western concept does not fit China's national conditions. Because of the above myths, the problem of child abuse is considered a rare problem which will hardly arouse the attention of the community and is therefore not a concern in China. Such misconceptions are likely to create obstacles in the attempt to promote the protection of children's rights, including their rights to lead a life free from any form of violence.

Chapter Nine Chinese Conceptions of Physical Child Abuse and the Protection of Children's Rights

Introduction

The previous chapter has presented the findings of this study in terms of the similarities and differences between the views of the children and those of the parents. This chapter attempts to theoretically discuss the findings of the study in the socio-cultural context of China, meanwhile dialoging these findings with the related concepts and theories in the global context. I will clarify my standpoint as a researcher, discuss the contributions and limitations of this research, and propose direction for further study.

Understanding and defining child abuse is the foundation of intervention in the child abuse problem. This also affects the ways children's rights are understood and protected. The biggest difficulty in defining and intervening in child abuse lies in the cultural differences among different societies. Article 3:1 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Children* of 1989 stipulates that “the best interests of the child” shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. However, the Convention does not specify what ‘the best interests of the child’ is. The notion of “best interests” has inherent problems which may be described as the problem of indeterminacy and the problem of culture (Thomas, 2002). Different people may have different understanding of the phrase “best

interests of the child”. Similarly, what constitutes “harm” and what amounts to “child abuse” can mean different things to different people in different cultures. In the same vein, even children and adults of the same culture may hold different views and ideas on the constitution of “harm” and “maltreatment”.

Based on how children understand the concept of “the best interests of the child”, this chapter analyzes and discusses the possible influence of Chinese conception of “child abuse” on the protection of children’s rights in China, and summarizes the implications of this study on the protection of children’s rights on the ideological, policy and social work intervention levels. On the basis of my reflection on the understanding of the Chinese on problems like child abuse, and parental child battering in the socio-cultural context of China, I will point out the importance of respecting the dignity and rights of children as individuals as a strategy to protect children against all forms of abuse.

“Affectional Construction” of Child Abuse in the Socio-cultural Context of China

It can be said that compared with Western cultural tradition which pays attention to law and reason, Chinese culture pays more attention to ethic and affection. As Sun Longji (2004) argues, affection has far more weight than reason among the Chinese, or to put it the other way, the “heart” of the Chinese is better developed than their “brain”. Chinese people prefer to connect "intellectuality" with "affection"; and even regard volition, judgment and rational thinking as emotive. Yang Chungfang (1996) also believes that Chinese culture

is a culture paying much attention to affection. This trend is reflected in the understanding of child abuse, especially in the construction of child abuse among the children in this study. This I call “Affectional construction” of child abuse.

As indicated in the chapter on literature review, starting from the term “Battered-Child Syndrome” in the 1960's, the concept of “child abuse” has been continually constructed by public and professional discourses so that it has by now a richer and more expanded connotation. It is now generally taken to include physical, emotional, and sexual abuses, different forms of child neglect, as well as commercial or other forms of child exploitation. Physical abuse not only includes non-accidental physical injuries, but also pain and suffering caused to a child, or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child. Based on Western middle class and professional perspectives, everything that can cause or can potentially cause negative influences to children's survival and optimal development can be taken as child abuse. This understanding is undoubtedly very broad (Dingwall, 1989), and is the result of the conception of child abuse which has been developed and expanded over time in the past few decades. In Western countries where human rights are emphasized, there are many limits to the ways parents can discipline their children, which makes parents vulnerable to child abuse accusations. The unceasing expansion of the connotation and extension of the concept “child abuse” on the one hand endows children's rights with more protection; but on the other hand may artificially enlarge the scope and difficulty of child protection work, making it difficult for professionals to deal with so

many cases and impossible for the society to concentrate energy on solving those main problems about child protection. At the same time, it may also possibly cause parents' mental strain, making them confused when nursing their children, and constantly afraid of falling into the trap of child abuse accusation.

My research tries to answer the core question: Does parental child battering constitute child abuse in the socio-cultural context of China? In the attempt to answer this question, it is found that the construction of child abuse is deeply influenced by the social and cultural factors. Children and parents participating in this research are somewhat repellent and resistant to the current Western concept of “child abuse”, though they may not completely understand it. Noteworthy, the children’s construction and the parents’ construction are extremely alike. They are generally not willing to take biological parents battering “their own child” as “child abuse”. They are tolerant of such behaviors because of the “family-centered” culture, the close parent-child affection and power relation. In the one-child families of Beijing, parental child battering is still very common, yet both children and parents consider that child abuse is very rare, because they generally believe that only when parents batter their children malevolently, unreasonably and frequently so as to cause serious physical and/or psychological injuries can it be considered child abuse. On the contrary, it is not child abuse when parents beat their children with the good intention to *guanjiao* (discipline). Only a minority of the children consider it child abuse when good intention leads to serious harm. In other words, they think that only an extremely

small part of parental child battering is child abuse. Between the subjective intention and the objective consequence, they pay more attention to the former, i.e. whether the subjective intention is malevolent. But the intention is often not pure and very difficult to judge, thus increasing the barrier in child protection.

The research finds that the concept “domestic/family violence” is easier to be accepted than “child abuse”, because the former is generally taken as non-malignant. The Taiwan scholar Ning (1999) believes that "child abuse" may also be translated as “*wu dai er tong*” which means treating the child in the wrong way (child mistreatment). It is possibly more acceptable if parental child battering is described as “*wu dai er tong*” rather than “*nue dai er tong*” (child abuse). In my opinion, what is important lies not in the concepts used to refer to the behavior of parental child battering, but in the rationale lying behind the concepts: to protect children from injury, which exactly is the purpose and significance of constructing “child abuse”. Even if the Chinese are not willing to accept the Western definition of child abuse, the actual problems of the violation of children's rights need to be dealt with in China.

Children and parents participating in the study generally attribute parental child battering to “*guanjiao*” (discipline) or “corporal punishment”. This reflects that the definition of “domestic violence” and “maltreatment” in China’s *Marriage Law* revised in 2001 has little influence on children and parents. According to this definition, parental child battering should be considered to be “domestic violence” if injuries are caused, and continuous and frequent

“domestic violence” will constitute “maltreatment”. Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that in contemporary China parental child battering is aptly considered as child discipline or corporal punishment except for those cases that are serious enough to amount to a maltreatment crime as stipulated in the Criminal Law. There is currently no basis to intervene in parents who discipline their child through corporal punishment. In reality, however, a lot of child battering cases are not serious enough to warrant legal intervention, but they need external help such as social services. In other words, there is now no way to intervene in the overwhelming majority of child battering cases in China now. To be able to help those children who are day in and day out suffering child battering in their families, my research attempts to create a sphere for social intervention through constructing the concept of “child abuse” in the Chinese mainland. In doing so, I have paid particular attention to the grey area between corporal punishment and the maltreatment crime. My view is that help should be available to families with the child abuse problem, which is neither corporal punishment nor criminal offence in the current dichotomous understanding of parental child battering in China. If not, serious injury may be caused to children as corporal punishment spirals upwards.

Whether parental child battering is a form of physical abuse is socially and culturally dependent and has always been a controversial question in the Western academia. This is why, up to 2007, only 20 countries have outlawed

corporal punishment against children.¹ As results of this study shows, most parents and children believe that corporal punishment is to discipline children, and is therefore not child abuse. Only few children consider corporal punishment causing very serious injury child abuse, such as Wang Chuang's case (Case 1 in Appendix 3). As indicated in literature, it is difficult to distinguish "child abuse" from "corporal punishment". After all, child abuse is not an isolated and accidental phenomenon; it is a common way of fostering and disciplining children that passes through the history of our culture.

From the ancient past until now, parental child battering has been a universal way of child education in China. Its existence has deep social and psychological foundation, and it is difficult to eliminate such practice in the foreseeable future. If all parental child battering is regarded as "child abuse", then almost all parents are guilty of maltreating their children. This too broad definition defines everything as problem and does not give a focus for intervention. Such a construction is not only unacceptable to the Chinese people, but it also makes it impossible for the state and society to intervene. But at the same time, the present situation in which only a few parents who seriously beat their children to half death and with bruises all over are possibly accused of maltreatment crime also needs to be changed. This too narrow definition of maltreatment/abuse may fail to protect the rights of many children. Based on the children's and parents' narrow understandings of child abuse as reflected in this

¹ This information is obtained from the website : Global Initiative to End All Corporation Punishment of Children, at URL : www.endcorporalpunishment.org, last retrieved on 28.11.2007.

study, it is difficult to prevent those behaviors carried out under the name of *guanjiao* (discipline) from causing harm to the children. Therefore, in the socio-cultural context of China, to protect children and their rights, I think it is necessary to discriminate between different situations of parental child battering.

I am opposed to parental child battering, but bearing in mind China's culture and the reality, I do not incline to take all parental child battering as child abuse. The situation where parents hit their children with the good intention to discipline, where children accept the punishment and where no physical or psychological injuries are caused need not be regarded as child abuse; but only as corporal punishment, which is more acceptable to the public, and conforms to China's national conditions. What should be emphasized is that whether the child can accept the battering is an aspect that must be paid attention to when evaluating his/her injury. This research reveals that the interviewed children have rather high tolerance to the injury caused by their parents. Therefore, any battering resulting in injury or risk of injury which the child cannot accept should be considered child abuse, no matter what the subjective intention is, or how frequently parents hit their children. I believe that certain corporal punishment cases described in this research may already have fallen into the brackets of child abuse. One is frequently hitting the child, thus causing negative influences on his/her self-respect, self-confidence and personal dignity, and creating psychological burden, as illustrated in the different degrees of psychological injuries exhibited in Hanghang and Yuanyuan. The other is hitting the child

heavily with sticks, chairs, brooms etc., thus causing physical/psychological injuries. For instance, Tiantian and Mingming were battered by their mothers until their nose bled and Dongdong's face got swells and bruises as a result of beating by his father. That children can forgive their parents does not deny the fact that injuries have been made. Many children do feel the pain of beating and the hatred for their parents at the time of beating.

In a word, child abuse occurs in China, Europe, America and everywhere in the world. However, the conception of child abuse is different in different places. Many cases that are viewed as "child abuse" in Europe or America may not be regarded as so in China. There are different judgments on the problem and methods to deal with it. Hence, there are both political and practical significance in the social construction of child abuse.

A Challenge to the Appropriateness of Parental Child Battering

This research directly challenges the appropriateness of Chinese parents' ways of disciplining their children. Blackledge and Hunt (1987), when introducing the education viewpoints of the sociologist Durkheim, say that punishment is important, for it tells children that the rule is restricting all people, and is worth respecting. But corporal punishment can have the counter-effect, because it violates the basic principles of contemporary moral --- respecting human dignity. That is to say, corporal punishment is a double-edged sword. Therefore, instead of corporal punishment, non-violent punishment should be advocated, such as doing housework, writing self criticisms, pondering over the

mistakes in seclusion, having no access to television or the internet for a certain period of time, and so on. If rules restrict all people, will parents punish themselves for their own mistakes? Which causes lead to “reasonable punishment”? Do children have the rights to express their opinions regarding punishment? These are all questions that need to be answered. According to *the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children*, children have the rights to express their opinions on affairs related to them, and should be respected.

Parents should not batter their children, firstly because the children are also individuals with dignity and rights. The question raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (1994) is worthy of our consideration. If battering an adult is not allowed, why that done to a child is? Therefore, even if they have made some mistakes, parents have no rights to batter them. Children as minors should be specially cared for and protected. The *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of Children* of 1924, the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Children* passed in 1959, and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children* of 1989 all stipulate children's rights and special protection for them. Parental child battering tramples on children's human rights, and fails to educate children. This primitive discipline method runs counter to modern civilization.

The second reason is that battering children is not a necessary or the only feasible discipline method. Many interviewed parents insist that battering children is the only choice left when “*jiang daoli*” (reasoning things out) does not work. “Reasoning things out” is a very good discipline method, and parents

should do some self-reflection on why it does not work with their children. My research finds that parents often lack the patience to “reason things out” with children. They often beat their children because beating can bring quick results. Children in contemporary China, most of whom “only-child” in the families, are loaded with too many expectations from their parents and any insufficiency, e.g. unsatisfactory academic record, may become a conspicuous "mistake" or "problem". It may truly be ineffective for parents to attempt to solve so many “problems” through “reasoning things out”; however, battering children is not effective either. Perhaps Jiajia’s suggestion is worth thinking over, namely, that parents should pay more attention to children’s early education and foster their good habit from their childhood.

The third reason is that beating children is a dangerous behavior that is very difficult to control; beating that gets out of control may possibly lead to maltreatment. The survey of Tian and He (2003) demonstrates that corporal punishment on the vital parts of the body, such as the cheek, the brain, the chest and the abdomen is not rare, adding up to 36.79%. Once parents let slip, corporal punishment may cause consequences beyond retrieval, as well as lifelong regrets. There have already been many cases in the reality where parents lost their control and caused children to be severely injured, die or run away from home. The three cases in Appendix 3 presented to the informants for discussion in this research are not rare. The reason why only those extremely serious cases get exposed is that the ability of the children to protect themselves is so weak that most cases

are hidden inside the families. Although all parents advocate only “*moderate beating*”, this is difficult, especially when they are in a raging mood. Many interviewed parents admit that they cannot control their mood at the moment of anger -- perhaps they don’t want to control their mood at all.

The fourth reason is that beating children may cause invisible psychological injury to the children (WHO, 2002). As psychological injury is a gradual accumulative process, it is difficult to judge how much psychological damage to the child each beating causes; but once psychological problems are found, it is usually too late. Although children may not hate their parents after the beating, they may get angry and even hate their parents during the moment when they are battered, and when they reach the point of extreme despair, unexpected consequences may happen, like Xuli killing his mother (see Case 2 in Appendix 3).

The fifth reason is that the effect of child battering is questionable. Although there may be some instant effects, the negative influence and dangerous consequences caused may bring even more loss. Many people like to take Fu Cong, who became a world renowned pianist, as an example. But since we do not have access to his psychological feelings, we cannot prove that he would not have become world famous if he had not been battered by his father. Beating children is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it may have a deterrent effect on the children, but on the other hand, it may cause injury. What many children see when they are battered is that their parents are venting their

anger on them. Some children may get so angry that they will not reflect on the words and behavior causing the battering. This will cause negative influence on the children's healthy growth as well as parent-child relationship (WHO, 2002). Children have their own way of thinking as they are growing up and may not always do as they are told by their parents. When the children have enough "rebel" ability, some may even conduct violent behavior on their parents. Parental child battering sets a bad example for the children, for example, showing no respect for others or using a crude method to solve problems. This attitude will possibly also affect the children's future family life. Hence, respecting a person's dignity, value and rights must be fostered from childhood.

This research finds that neither children nor parents realize the danger of battering children or the misfortune that may follow. Parent-child conflict caused by parental child battering has become an important root of family tragedies and social problems. The book *Clairvoyance on Family Violence* (Cai, 2001) reveals a survey showing that among 100 youth criminals condemned to death, 46% had experienced psychological or corporal maltreatment inflicted by their parents. At present, there are about 200,000 "uprooted children" (Lu, et al., 2003), some of whom have left home because of family violence. If parents do not beat their children, it may possibly reduce the number of "uprooted children" and family tragedies. It is a pity that many family tragedies that could have been avoided have not aroused people's attention and alertness.

A Word of Caution about “Child Abuse due to School Pressure”

This research finds that development of the society and improvement of people’s material life has not changed the situation of children being battered. On the contrary, the generation gap, parents’ high expectation on their “only-child” and the pressures of school all increase the possibility of children being battered and the risk of child abuse. The number of cases of “*unintended maltreatment*” and “*educational maltreatment*” carried out “*for the good of the child*” has risen. “*Unintended maltreatment*” as mentioned here refers to cases in which parents batter their children and cause injury without any malevolence, especially under the pretext of study problems; “*educational maltreatment*” refers to the excessive study pressure and punitive schoolwork. The majority of parents batter their children because of the pressure of competition and the difficulty they face during the child’s education process.

This research originally did not pay special attention to issues in education, but every child and parent has mentioned school education during the interviews. I then realize that the main reason for child battering can be, more often than not, boiled down to education issues, including difficulty in study, low academic record, bad studying habit and not doing schoolwork, etc. Lying, being disobedient and talking back are often caused by study issues. Parents who usually do not beat children may do so when they get angry about their children’s study. Therefore, the elementary school stage becomes the peak time of parental child battering (Tian & He, 2003; Tang, 2006). This makes me pause to think

about the influence of children's study on families, on parent-child relationship, and especially on parental child battering. Both children and parents participating in the research hope that I can reflect to the society the problems of China's education system. I am particularly impressed by the repeated appeals of the children, like "*Lighten my study burden!*" "*Do not deprive me of my rights to rest!*" Although I cannot help them get rid of the excessive study burden, I will feel sorry if such issues are not discussed, and the causes and the common practice of parental child battering are not brought to the attention of the society.

Many researchers in the Mainland have mentioned "the study pressure issue" (e.g. Lu, *et al*, 2003). They think that a prominent problem existing in the current education system of China is the parents' overladen hope that their children grow up to be persons with social and moral attainment or success. But to achieve this, the children must overcome the heavy schoolwork burden created by the improper education appraisal system. The excessive study pressure and study assignment, as well as the conflicts with their parents and teachers on their study performance, have made children physically and psychologically exhausted; the deprivation of rights of entertainment further aggravates their psychological pain. Living long under such conditions will inevitably be harmful to the children's physical and psychological health development. However, since there are profound social reasons leading to this study pressure, such as cultural tradition, social competition, family structure and education ideology and so on, it seems that this problem is difficult to solve.

During recent years, people's thoughts and ideas about education are also changing. The Chinese Ministry of Education has explicitly put forward that elementary and middle school students' study burden should be lightened, but teachers and parents are divided into two factions; one is for burden reduction, while the other is against it. My research finds two things: while elementary students' parents like to give more assignment to their children, middle-school students' parents may not agree with it. They generally acknowledge that middle-school students who have to study from dawn to night are the busiest, but still they may not be able to complete the schoolwork their teachers require them to do; many of them have to do so much homework that callus has formed on their fingers. Jiajia who studies in Xicheng District tells me that their teacher-in-charge has required that if one mistake is found in the homework, students must correct the whole assignment; in addition, an 800-character self-examination must be written and parents have to sign on the self-examination, and add their own opinion to it. Therefore, the back of their exercise books is all filled with self-examinations. I remember one teacher shared with me his view, *"There are no other means, for there are so many people in China competing with us. We have to attach importance to 'the survival of the fittest by examination', and we must strive for a high admission rate into a good senior high school. This is a society full of competition!"* Jiajia's English teacher requires the students to make 100 sentences in one exercise using different patterns, such as "neither ... nor". Jiajia thinks that such unnecessary and

excruciating work is “child abuse”. I’m also shocked by the way teachers assign homework. Once, my daughter was absent from school for a week because of illness. On the first day she went to school again, she made mistakes in 13 characters in the Chinese dictation and was punished by being asked to copy each wrong character 50 times, totalling 650 times. To accomplish this within limited time, she had to write simultaneously with two pens in one hand. When I discussed the study burden issue with my daughter’s teacher-in-charge, the teacher said, “*We have no other means; the school has to survive, and teachers have to survive.*” Their survival depends on students’ scores, and students have to sacrifice some basic rights such as the right to rest. My daughter said angrily, “*Who cares about our survival?*”

Why do teachers and parents go out of their ways to put so much pressure on children? Their explanation is the fierce competition in the society. Actually, they are motivated by the benefits: If they win in the competition, they will obtain a bigger benefit. For the teachers, higher promotion rate will bring a higher enrollment to their school and hence more bonuses to them. For the parents, good academic achievement will not only mean a good future for their children but also less tuition fee to be paid for better schools. In this increasingly utilitarian society, competition pressure and benefit motivation make parents and teachers become “*the slave of scores*”. It is not an exaggeration to say that contemporary education in China has gone “*crazy*”, that is, the worship of school scores leads to the subsequent devastation: many children lose the enthusiasm to

pursue knowledge, and become “*the machine of study and tests*”. This is undeniably the sorrow of education. Education should be ahead of times, not behind. An education system which aims at competing for promotion rate and making money has lost its significance and has turned into an instrument of devastation and maltreatment to students. In view of this, the Law for the Protection of Minors revised in 2006 stipulates that schools and parents must “guarantee the underaged students’ sleep, entertainment and physical training time, and not increase their study burden (Article 20).”

The intense social competition brings pressure to schools, and teachers and parents in turn bring it to the elementary and middle school students. Children become the most helpless underdogs, bearing the pressures from the family, school and society, as well as suffering from the dual oppression of the power of their parents and teachers. One of the concrete manifestations of such pressure is that children are often battered or punished. This research finds that parental child battering is the result of the interactions of various factors such as social culture, social competition and social pressure, as well as the school, teachers and children themselves. Therefore, it is unfair to attribute all responsibilities to parents, who are also the victim of social ethos and the educational system; only “blaming the parents” cannot solve the problem of parental child battering.

What I gather in the research is that all three parties, children, parents and teachers are all tired, with none feeling satisfied. The contradiction between

school/teacher and parents/students has never been so intense. Most children and parents express their disaffection towards the educational system or the school teachers. Some children even describe the school as *“a living hell”*. My niece, a teacher at a junior high school in Henan Province, also sent me a mobile message, expressing her disaffection towards the exam-oriented education. She said: *“China’s education is too woeful! The children are too tired!” “This is not to educate the students, but to afflict them; this makes people feel so unhappy!”* The schoolmaster is obsessed with the goal of being number one in the high school admission rate continuously for ten years. The school requires students to arrive at school at 6 o'clock in the morning, and leave school at 10 o'clock in the evening. They also request the parents to deliver their children’s dinner to school. The students do not have any rest day or vacation. Recently, an outstanding student of hers lost her mind because she was afraid of the high school entrance examination. Therefore, my niece also hopes that I can appeal for the children.

Having to do excessive, unreasonable and punitive schoolwork, being forced to study, and the feeling of being oppressed will result in serious physical and psychological exhaustion and pain. Whether this is a new form of child abuse is worth being paid attention to. When a schoolmate of mine in Liaoning Province finds out that I am studying child abuse, she does not hesitate to say: *“China's education is child abuse!”* Surely, we should be alert to child abuse due to the study pressure, not only physical but also psychological abuse, as it can possibly cause children to get tired of studying or even commit suicide. My

research, just like other similar research work, once again highlights the difficult problems in education reform.

Implications on the Protection of Children's Rights

Since the survival and development of children is closely connected with the fate of a nation, every country is concerned with the protection of children. With *the UN Convention on the Rights of Children* ratified by the Chinese Government in 1990, the rights and interests of children are being increasingly attended to. As a minor group, the right of children to protection from injury or abuse is set out in the UNCRC:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or violent treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has care of the child. (Article 19)

No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. (Article 37)

In China, "the rights of children" is quite a new concept, even the concept "rights" is introduced from the West. Taiwan scholar Yu (1992) points out that as the concept "rights" is based on an individual-centered ideology, such a concept cannot come into being in the Chinese culture which stresses the "family-centered" ideology, "responsibility" and "obligation". Generally speaking, there is no concept of "personality equality" in the Chinese culture

(Sun, 2004, p.186). On the contrary, “the seniority-juniority order” and “filial piety” are emphasized. Therefore, promoting children’s status in the law to a level equal to the adults’ is a challenge to traditional conceptions. At present, the right to subsistence and education of the children are the most important in China (Lu, 1997). My research finds that the modern concept of “*the rights of the children*” is far from being embedded in Chinese people’s mind, not to mention being carried out in practice. Although family structure and parent-child relationship have changed a lot, the tradition of parental child battering is still passed down under the banner of “*for the good of the child*”. The construction of “child abuse” in this research is just the reflection of this tradition and has many implications on the protection of children’s rights in China at the level of ideology, policy and practice.

Re-thinking the traditional ideology of “for the good of the child”

One of the implications of this research is that parental child battering appears to be an issue in the discipline method, but in fact, it is an issue in the understanding of the idea to protect the rights of children. Adults including parents must reflect on their traditional attitudes to children, and then change the behavior of parental child battering. Adults’ fears, assumptions and attitudes affect their behavior towards children (Punch, 2002). It is difficult to change the violent behaviors of parents towards their children unless the traditional attitudes and irrational beliefs about children are changed.

The research finds that parents and children generally attribute parental

child battering to children's fault. My research challenges this typical Chinese cultural tendency to "blame children". Parental child battering is often carried out not because the children have really done something wrong, but because there are problems with the parents' understanding of children and their attitude to children, as illustrated in the three issues presented below:

Uniform requirements on the children, neglecting their individual differences

Interviewed parents expect their children to be "*the ideal child*" with good development in all aspects, including moral, intellectual and physical aspects. They also like to compare their children with other outstanding children or with their own childhood if the parents did excellently well when they were children. Parents especially like to compare their children's shortcomings with other children's merits in different aspects such as study, stature, politeness, talent, ability to take care of themselves and so on. The unreasonable comparison makes parents see more of their children's shortcomings, which may increase their dissatisfaction with their children. This will also increase children's pressure and possibly cause children's antipathy and parent-child conflict. I think this kind of comparison is meaningless, since not only is one child different from another child in the same era, but children living in the present era are also different from those living in the past era.

The traditional understanding of children and childhood is based on developmental psychology and biology, which defines children according to their chronological age and their biological immaturity. Childhood becomes an

age-related stage with everybody at that stage having the same characteristics. This understanding has already been challenged. Fundamental objections have arisen concerning the view that there is a universal, standardized and inevitable programme of developmental stages (Burman, 1994; Richards & Light, 1986).

Education as defined by developmental psychology is one that seeks uniformity. Children of the same age must study similar curriculum, complete similar tasks and have similar abilities. Otherwise, they will possibly be considered “abnormal” and will be punished or repelled. Under this requirement of uniformity, elementary school students of the first and second year, for example, have to calculate 50 mathematics exercises in 5 minutes. I once saw at the entrance of an elementary school how a child who failed to achieve the requirement was scolded by his mother: “*Why can other children make it while you can't? How can you be so stupid?*” Let us first put aside the argument whether it is too rigorous for a child to complete 50 exercises in 5 minutes; even if this is a level which most children can achieve, it is also normal that some children cannot manage it, for different children have different heredity, interest, ability and development. It is not possible that all children can study well. Children should be taken as unique individuals and not a group, and it is a violation of children's individuality to attempt to shape them based on one model.

Seeing children from an adult's position/standard that neglects their characteristics

Many interviewed parents find “*fault*” with their children using the

adult's standards and blame them for lack of principle, good manners, willpower, and self-consciousness in study, as well as dillydallying, loving to play, watching too many cartoons, etc. Many such requirements violate children's nature. For instance, it is difficult for children to concentrate on their homework for a long time, and they will usually want to play after they have studied for a while. This is a characteristic of children, but it is taken as a “*fault*” by parents. From an adult’s perspective, many ideas and behaviors of children are incorrect; in fact, they just do not conform to the adult's ideas and requirements. When parents set requirements for their children, they usually fail to remember that the subject is a child who has needs, interests, desires as well as ways of thinking, expressions and behaviors which are different from the adults’.

Taking children as parents' appendant that neglects their subjectivity and agency

Interviewed parents always hope that their children will grow up according to the parents' wish. Therefore, they often consciously or unconsciously use their own value judgment on the children and impose their own interest and expectation on the children, with force if necessary. In parents’ opinion, children are incapable, innocent, and have a bad memory. Therefore, parents are accustomed to thinking and making decisions for the children. Parents fail to respect the children’s change and their need for autonomy as they grow up. Although parents know that children also have rights, they think little of it. Battering children is one example of their failure to respect children’s rights. The children in this research complain unanimously that they

feel they lack respect, understanding and free space.

Regarding the child as a person with dignity and the subject of rights with agency is the basis for protecting children's rights. In the traditional understanding of developmental psychology, children are considered either in the stage of "growth" or in the process of socialization. In this sense, the 'becoming' children are only regarded as being in the preparation stage for adulthood, or as immature adults, being incompetent or having incomplete, unformed or proto-competencies that render them not independent subjects of rights, but targets to be protected, disciplined and educated by the adults. New discourses of childhood understand the child as "being", not just as 'becoming' or as an epiphenomenon of adult society and concern (James et al., 1998). The "being" child can be understood in its own right and in the sense of agency that can initiate actions by choice. With the widespread subscription of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Children*, the idea of children's human rights has been widely accepted.

Children should be given respect, understanding and rights. Without these, the pretext that everything is done "*for the good of the child*" will possibly become empty talk. What is good for children and what is the best interests of children can be different in different cultures. For example, parenting ideologies in Confucian traditions paint a very different picture of what is good for children from that current in Anglo-American professional circles (e.g. Chao, 1994). In China, the children are regarded as parents' hope; children's and parents' futures

are linked together. *“For the good of the child”* is in fact also for the good of the parents. Although the interviewed parents claim that they do not count on their children to provide for them when they are old, they hope that their children will bring honor for them, at least not become their burden.

The research finds that parents’ and children’s understanding and feeling of “good” is also different. From the parents’ perspective, “the best interests of the child” is their future; the standard for “good” is having a good job and living a rich life, and the only way to realize this “good” is to achieve good academic results. Everything the parents do including battering children is “for the good of the child”, namely, to help them achieve such a goal. At the same time, parents also admit that they sometimes *“ignore the children’s perspective”* and *“do not respect the children’s choice”*. From the children’s perspective, their best interests is be happy at the moment, be respected, be understood, be trusted and be given some free space, and most important of all, be not battered. In fact, under the banner of “for the good of the child”, it is possible for parents to harm their children, even to the degree of child abuse, such as the case of Wang chuang in Appendix 3. But it is the happiness at the present moment that the child’s future is built on. If the child’s body, self-esteem and self-confidence are injured, the good future of the child will possibly become a visionary hope. I really want to ask: Is it worth sacrificing the present joy for the future?

Implications on child protection policy

The Chinese laws put relatively less emphasis on the protection of

children's rights inside the family compared with that outside it. As far as physical punishment is concerned, the regulation for what happens inside the family is different from the regulation for what happens at school. While physical punishment by teachers is prohibited, legally speaking, physical punishment of children by the parents is still a grey area in China (Qiao & Chan, 2005). The second implication of this research is that a lot of injuries to children happen within the family; therefore, the state should not neglect the protection of children's rights in family. In Chinese families, the violation of children rights mainly results from conflicts relating to education purpose and process. As Feng Xiaoxia (1996) points out, harming because of love, and violating children's legitimate rights and interests under the common pretext of good intention, love, protection and education, is a major problem of children's rights protection in China. Therefore, I think that even if parental child battering cannot be forbidden at present, there should be explicit and operable law provision to limit the behavior of parental child battering. Family support policy should also be drawn up to lighten parents' parenting pressure, thus achieving the goal of protecting children (Chan, 1994).

Publicizing "the Law on the Protection of Minors"

The only law that children and parents participating in the research can refer to is the *Law on the Protection of Minors* implemented since 1991. The idea that minors should be protected has been widely disseminated, but what to protect, and how to protect it is still blurry for both children and parents. Many

parents misunderstand that this law mainly deals with the outside, but not within the family, since children are more easily injured outside. On the contrary, a lot of children think affirmatively that this law does not allow parents to batter their children, but in fact, at that time, there is no such stipulation in this law. This shows that the publicity of the *Law on the Protection of Minors* is insufficient. If the parents do not understand the law, they will easily transgress the limit. If the children do not understand the law, they do not know their rights. At the same time, because of lack of compulsory legal liability and practical operability, many law stipulations are difficult to be carried out (Chan, 1996). Therefore, this law has little authority over the parents.

At the near completion of this dissertation, the amendment of the *Law on the Protection of Minors* was passed on December 29, 2006, and implemented effective June 1, 2007. It adds the stipulation "Domestic violence against minors is forbidden" to Article 10. As indicated in the literature, parental child battering belongs to domestic violence as long as injuries are caused to the children. It can be said that the state has in some way made a limitation on parental child battering. The 2006 Amendment also increases the stipulation relating to parents' legal liability. Parents who "infringe on the legitimate rights and interests of the minor should be exhorted and detained by their work 'danwei' (unit), the residents committee or the villagers committee; whoever behaves in such a way as to constitute violation of public security will be given appropriate administrative punishments" (Article 62).

Law stipulations should not only be concrete and operable, but should also be made known to the public by means of publicity; otherwise, the law will possibly become “law on the paper” with no sanction. The 2006 Amendment does not specify what “proper means” is (Article 11) when parents educate their children, whether parental child battering is child abuse, who the child should ask for help, who should intervene and in what procedure, what the appropriate administrative punishments to the parents in “the best interests of the child” are, and so on. Although it is not possible for law stipulations to completely forbid parental child battering, they can at least provide the criteria and restraint for parents' behavior and enhance social control. According to the Exchange Theory, which is relevant in explaining family violence, human interaction is guided by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of punishment and costs. People will only use violence toward family members when the costs of being violent do not outweigh the rewards. In other words, people hit and abuse family members because they can (Gelles & Cornell, 1990). Insufficient social control increases the likelihood of such violent behaviors occurring.

Formulating children and family service policy, and establishing mechanism to protect children from abuse

Not all parents are born with the ability to raise children. This research finds that urban parents have difficulties taking care of children, raising and educating them. For instance, small children have to be left at home alone because of busy parents, and they are battered because of difficulty in study, etc.

Any parents who take on the important task of caring for and disciplining children but feel that they are not ready will have more parenting pressure and are therefore more likely to batter children. This suggests that it is difficult to guarantee children's rights and interests when parents have no means to solve the difficulty they are facing. As James Garbarino (1977) indicates, the less family support there is (e.g. day-care centers), the greater the risk of maltreatment of children. Parents need help from the state and society. In China, the main family support at present is the economic assistance for poor families and the rescue of dropouts, yet there is no other policy or measure for children and family service. This is on the one hand limited by the level of development of the society, and on the other hand possibly because of the state's attitude "to intervene as little as possible" in the family affairs of the citizens.

Different perspectives in the understanding of the relationship among children, parents/families and the state will influence the attitude of the state towards intervention in domestic affairs. Fox Harding (1997) has discussed four different perspectives and positions: the laissez-faire position, state paternalism, the parents' rights perspective, and the children's rights perspective. At present, the parents' rights perspective, which emphasizes respect for the rights and responsibilities of parents, is the international mainstream. So in terms of policy, the state's intervention ought to give priority to support the families in different stages of their development, which is very important for both parents and children.

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of Children attempts to set out the obligations and rights of the children, the parents and the state. It makes clear that states are obliged to “respect the parents’ primary responsibility for providing care and guidance for their children” (Articles 5 and 18) and “prevent children from being separated from their families unless the separation is judged necessary and in the children’s best interest” (Article 9). The right of the children is to be protected from maltreatment by caregivers, including parents, and the state has to act in the best interest of the children, given that children also have a right to life (Articles 3 and 19). The state has the power to intervene and set aside the parents’ rights once it establishes that their actions are not in the best interest of the children. But the state will not intervene into parents’ rights so long as they do not violate “the best interest of the child”.

In China, the state will not intervene in parents’ rights so long as the children are not seriously wounded or dead. While it is true that the people’s courts may withdraw the guardianship of the parents if they fail to fulfill their responsibility or have violated the rights and interests of their children and have not adjusted their ways of parenting after being advised to improve (Article 53, Law of PRC on the protection of minors), this is unlikely to happen because few people would file an application (Qiao & Chan, 2005). This is also due to the fact that China lacks a developed state tutelage system to protect children. In case the guardianship of the parents is withdrawn, these maltreated children will probably have nowhere to stay (Tong, 2002). This is a dilemma.

Therefore, in order to protect children from abuse/maltreatment, on the one hand, the state should provide some help to those parents with tremendous parenting pressure. With the development of the society, the change of family structure and the intensification of competition, it is true that some Chinese families are not able to support themselves. It is therefore necessary for the state to establish more policies and measures to provide family support and service to help reduce parents' pressure of raising and disciplining children. This is the basis for protecting children from maltreatment. On the other hand, the state should also protect those children facing serious "risk" of abuse. It is necessary for the state to establish child protection centers to provide those maltreated children with a sanctuary, and to exercise the temporary rights of guardianship. But this research finds that most maltreated children are unwilling to leave their own families; therefore, I believe that for children who can express their idea clearly, their wish whether to leave home or not must be taken into consideration.

Child abuse includes not only physical abuse, but also psychological abuse and sexual abuse. It is a common phenomenon in all societies, and mainland China should also pay attention to the problem. Currently, the establishment of a "Central Registry of Child Abuse" seems not feasible and unlikely in China. This is because there is a wide range of child problems in China such as uprooted children, migrant children, left-behind children, AIDS-affected children, abandoned children, and child trafficking. Child abuse is generally not regarded as a social problem, but a family one. For the very serious

cases, they are considered as legal ones. Therefore, child abuse has not yet received sufficient attention from the society and the government. Now, some NGOs and scholars are making efforts in this direction, and they explore the possibility for such a child protection registry in China. It is possible that such a system can be realized in the future.

Implications on the practice of social work intervention in child abuse

In China, there is at present only compulsory legal intervention in maltreatment crimes in China; as for those maltreatment cases in which no serious injuries or death are caused, the principle “*Bu gao bu li*”² is adopted. When I visited the person-in-charge of the Law Department of Beijing Minors Protection Committee at the beginning of 2004, he said that “we can hardly find time to handle the serious cases; there’s no time at all to handle the less serious ones!” As it is a fact that many cases are neglected by the law, social work intervention is all the more important. In 2006, the Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed the tentative plan of establishing a social work system in China. Maybe in the near future, social work intervention in child abuse can get started. But social work intervention should pay attention not only to serious child abuse cases, but also to how ordinary cases can be prevented from evolving into serious ones. It should

² According to the Criminal Law of the People’s Republic of China, cases of maltreatment not involving serious injuries or death will “*Bu gao bu li*” (only be handled only if there is a complaint (Article 260), either by victims themselves, by their relatives or by the People’s Prosecution Department in case the victims are being threatened or intimidated not to report (Article 98).

take the community as a foundation, providing supportive services and preventive intervention to the family. Based on the data of this research, I put forward the following four recommendations:

To train up the community workers to become professionals and enhance their sensitivity to child abuse.

The research finds that children, parents and the community workers all lack the sensitivity to child abuse. The community workers only deal with problems regarding the relationship between husband and wife, relationship between mother and daughter-in-law, neighborhood relationship and family asset dispute, but nobody intervenes in parental child battering, because no one has asked them to do so. Tingting's father is a community worker. He said to me, *“If some one has asked for our help, we will intervene, but if nobody does, we will do nothing.”* As the director of a resident’s community committee, Jiajia’s mother said that they *“will intervene if they come across such things, but if they do not, they will not”*. Obviously, the community also adopts the passive principle of *“Bu gao bu li”*.

As mentioned above, children generally do not like to take parental child battering as child abuse. Furthermore, parent-child affection and power relation, as well as the cultural tradition of “filial piety” and “do not wash your dirty linen in the public”, all make it difficult for children to accuse their biological parents; they are either not willing to or they dare not do so. Even if children do want to accuse their parents, it is also difficult to be achieved because of the limitation of

their legal capacity, as well as the lack of known effective routes for making such accusations. Other relatives will not report it to the authorities either, because battering children is usually taken as the discipline rights of parents. Therefore, many cases of child abuse get neither the intervention of law nor the help of social service, making the problems worse.

Every family lives in a certain community, each with a residents' autonomous organization. Although residents committees do not have legal power, they can establish close relationship with the families. At present, communities in Beijing generally lack specialized social workers. With the development of the society, the community will need professional social workers or have to provide training to the existing staff who are familiar with the conditions in each family in the community, and are hence able to identify those children or families that need help at an early stage to prevent parental child battering from evolving into child abuse. Many child informants express their desire to get help, hoping that they will not be battered any more or that someone will dissuade their parents from battering them. Some children have even considered leaving home. All these suggest the necessity of social work intervention and child protection training.

To transform notions and social attitudes through public education

This research finds that parents generally lack the consciousness of respecting the rights of children, and the alertness to possible problems caused by corporal punishment. They are therefore quite tolerant of parental child battering.

Liu (1996) indicates that although China has a complete system of child protection laws, the absence of a supportive public ideology as its social psychological base has led to the situation where the laws cannot be effectively implemented. Accordingly, I suggest that the community publicizes the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Children* and our own *Law on the Protection of Minors* as well as other laws related to child protection in forms of cartoons, classes, lectures and so on. More importantly, the community should publicize new concepts and ideas about respecting children, introduce the definition of child abuse and the international practice of intervention in child abuse, and demonstrate the negative influence of parental child battering as well as the proper methods of disciplining children, in order to help the adults/parents to reflect on and change their behavior.

The interview experience in this research is a good demonstration of how important it is to make known and publicize certain social issues. Although my interview did not point out the problems of the parents in disciplining their children, nor was it a kind of intervention, it played a publicity role to a certain degree, causing parents to reflect on their behavior of battering children. Some children told me in the second interview that there were improvements in their parents' attitude and behavior towards them. Hanghang said, "*Father's attitude to me becomes better, and the stick used to batter me is not used anymore.*" Mingming also said, "*[After the interview] there is a slight improvement in my mother's attitude to me and the discipline method is slightly better than before.*"

This reveals that many parents' behavior can be changed as long as they become aware of the problems of battering children or know that parental child battering may not be endorsed by the community.

In China, which is a developing country with a large population, few resources, insufficient professionals and insufficient social welfare fund, propaganda work can prove very efficient in transforming parents' concept. It can even achieve double the effect with half the efforts paid. Through publicity, more folk organizations and the public may be mobilized to participate in the work of protecting children.

To provide support to families, help parents to solve problems in child discipline so as to alleviate their parenting stress

Because the family is a private sphere, it is difficult for social workers to get access to the children without the parents' consent. Moreover, because of the special parent-child affection and power relation, children rarely seek help from "outsiders", not even when they are being battered. Therefore, for the ordinary parental child battering, intervention of social work should first help parents, and then further help the children through the change of parents. Social worker should first help parents to lighten their parenting pressure, which will then help lessen the possibility of parental child battering. Merely empowering children might encourage them to resist against their parents and hence initiate new parent-child conflicts.

This research finds that the parents' desire to educate their own children well is extremely intense. The education they received in the past was the traditional authority education, but now they want to educate their children in a more democratic way. But having no proper idea and method, they often find their intent and behavior contradicting each other. The interviewed parents batter their children mostly for discipline purpose, even though some may not believe in the effectiveness of corporal punishment. This indicates that parents lack the ability and method to educate children. If they have learned other effective ways of education, they may use less violent methods. In the interviews, I have learned many experiences of disciplining children in non-violent ways. Some interviewed parents want to introduce their experience to others, while some want to get help. Therefore, I suggest that the community organize "parents cooperation group" regularly, where parents can participate voluntarily to communicate with each other their experiences and worries in disciplining children and seek mutual help or counseling from the experts. I believe that such interaction groups will conveniently and effectively improve the parents' discipline methods.

Parent education is very important (Smith, Perou, & Lesesne, 2002). *The Law on the Protection of Minors* amended in 2006 also stipulates that "Parents or other guardians should study family education and correctly fulfill the guardianship responsibility to foster and educate the minors. The related state agencies and the social organizations should provide instruction on family

education for the minors' parents or other guardians" (Article 12). Currently, there are some informal "parents schools" in China. They provide classes to parents on how to educate their children, but there is no course on parenting and protecting children. My study shows that parenting classes to support parents to discharge their parent roles more effectively in families are needed.

In Beijing, there is a lack of "child care centers" for working parents who are in difficulty or have emergency. There are only kindergartens attached to the educational institutions. If community can provide care service for children under 3 years old³, or in the winter and summer vacation, parents' pressure will be lightened and then the risk of child battering and child abuse can be reduced.

To establish "a hotline for the minors" to give children a channel for confiding and seeking help.

My research finds that the desire of many children to confide themselves cannot be satisfied, as it is difficult for them to communicate such desires with their parents. Mingming told me, *"I hope that I can talk with someone after being battered, and that there is a place for me to confide my secrets. One cannot always suppress the grievances in one's heart. Many people commit crimes because they do not have a channel to confide themselves, so too much hatred is accumulated within them. Hence, confiding is really very important."* I also believe that establishing "a hot line for the minors " is extremely essential. Members of the hot line should compose of expert volunteers specializing in

³ In Beijing, 3-year-old children generally begin to attend the kindergarten.

child work. To avoid the possibility of "generation gap", it is advisable to absorb those senior high school students who have been trained, as it is easier for them to communicate with the minors.

To enhance social work research on child abuse problem in China

The Western concept and intervention of child abuse can be a reference to China, but it cannot replace the research studies conducted locally. This research urges us to further study the following questions: If we do not accept the Western concept of "child abuse" in the mainland Chinese context, how should child abuse be defined in China then? How should we establish effective mechanisms for protecting children from being maltreated according to China's national conditions? How are we then to proceed legislating child protection laws for the responsible authorities to intervene in the private family sphere to protect the children? These are burning questions in the field of child protection in the Chinese mainland.

Social work research and practice in child abuse must consider the characteristics of the Chinese culture and the situation of the Chinese family and social development. It is not realistic to copy the Western intervention mode now. Take America as an example. America has an integrated policy and a law system and service network. Its mandatory child reporting laws typically stipulates compulsory protection services, with child protection teams composed of family or juvenile courts, child welfare institutions, the police, social workers, medical officers and psychological counselors to provide service for emergency cases or

to provide preventive measures. America's child protection services (CPS) intervention has several stages: reporting, screening, investigating, assessment and service planning, ongoing service provision, case review and case closing. In cases in which a child is at immediate risk of harm and cannot be protected at home, the CPS agency may take steps to obtain legal custody of the child and/or to place the child in "substitute care" (Waldfoegel, 2001). Faced with the increasing child abuse cases in West, people have been questioning the effect of social work intervention. Now they turn their attention instead to the "risk" of child abuse, trying to prevent such cases from happening. This has become the core of child welfare policy and practice (Parton, Thorpe & Wattam, 1997). When practising this policy, social workers have to abide by two principles: one is to make sure that children are protected from injuries in the family; another is to make sure that parents' responsibility and rights of autonomy in the family are not reduced.

At present, it is generally believed that it is in "the best interests of the child" for them to stay in the family of their biological parents. This is consistent with the Chinese family-centered tradition, as well as with the desires expressed by most of the children in this research. Yet although the family is regarded as the best place for children to live in, not all families are safe for children. Thus in child protection work, it is also very important to take into consideration the specific conditions and needs of each child. Especially in the vast rural areas and multi-cultural areas, there is also a need to examine the conception of child abuse

among the rural residents and among different ethnic groups so as to provide evidence-based practice in child protection in different areas of China. All these suggest the need for more social work research in child abuse and protection in China.

Contributions and Limitations of this Study

In dealing with any social issues, we need to change the social perceptions first before we can change the social practices (Kempe & Kempe, 1978). To change social perceptions, we must first understand what they are. This research is a preliminary step to understand and analyze the Chinese conceptions of child abuse.

The contributions of this research are mainly to fill the research gap in the problem of child abuse in China and to identify a new perspective when looking at child abuse: parent-child relationship. This research has used parent-child affection and power relation to interpret the Chinese constructions of “physical child abuse”, and has dialoged them with the definition of child abuse in the West. It is hoped that such insights can enhance the understanding and communication between China and the countries in the West regarding the problems of child abuse. When people know that the problem of child abuse is an international hot topic, which is paid great attention to in many developed countries and regions but not in China, they will ask “why”. This research has answered the question from one angle; namely, because of the different understandings and definitions

of child abuse, there are different judgments on its seriousness, and indeed on whether it is a “social problem”. Hence, the attention paid to this issue and the ways of treatment are also different.

As an exploratory study, this has served to throw light on the research topic which is currently under-researched. However, Limited by the researcher’s standpoint, ability, experience and research data, as well as the environment, this research, like many others, has its limitations, but it also provides possibility for further studies. The main limitations as follows:

One is that the design of the research was initially aimed at giving prominence to children’s voices, but some of the children’s views may not have been exposed. Children are different from adults in understanding and feeling something (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell & Britten, 2002). Due to the researcher’s status as an adult, the poor experience in studying children, as well as limitations of time and space, my communication with children is affected to some extent. However, the experiences accumulated in this research have built the foundation for further research related to children.

The other is that the number of research about child abuse in mainland China is small. The concept of child abuse, in particular, is still a research gap. Therefore, limited by poor literature in China, this research lacks a platform on which to launch an in-depth discussion on the definition of child abuse, and on child abuse policy in China.

Understandably, the results from this research in the one-child families in Beijing city cannot be generalized to all families in Beijing or in China. Obvious differences exist between the city and the countryside, especially in those outlying and less developed areas, where people live in completely different conditions and have different life experiences. Their understanding of child abuse is possibly different from that of Beijing's children and parents. However, in families with a similar background, the results of this research are more representative.

Research on the problem of child abuse in China has just started. This research hopes to arouse more attention and discussion about child abuse in China. Only then will the consciousness and effort of the whole society to respect and protect children be stimulated, hence ridding the abused children of their misery. As Ms Gu Xiulian, President of the All China Women's Federation, said⁴ *“any form of violence against children is unacceptable and it is the responsibility of the society at large to protect children from violence.”* Most importantly, we must act now! As Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (2006) emphasized that, children want to see adults fulfill our promises in the present, and enjoy their right to be protected from violence today.

This research makes me pay more attention to the child protection system and policy in China, and to the survival conditions of “children in difficulty”, such as those being maltreated, uprooted children and impoverished

⁴ A speech in 2005 China's first ever National Consultation on Violence against Children in Beijing.

children. These will become the emphasis of my future study and work.

Chapter Summary

As a conclusion, this chapter has not only made a summary answer to the research questions, but also declared the researcher's standpoint and viewpoint.

The informants believe that only when parents batter their children malevolently, unreasonably and frequently so as to cause serious physical or psychological injuries to the children can it be considered child abuse. Their understanding about child abuse is very narrow and affectional. Based on the standpoint of human rights, I advocate respecting the dignity and rights of children as individuals. I oppose parental child battering, a dangerous behavior which may not only risk becoming child abuse, but may also bring on a series of bad consequences. However, based on China's social conditions and the findings of this research, I do not believe that all parental child battering is child abuse, nor do I agree with the view of the children and parents that “only parental child battering with a malevolent intention is child abuse”. It should be considered as child abuse as long as physical and/or psychological injuries that children are unable to accept have been caused, and therefore, a portion of the corporal punishments in this research amount to physical abuse.

This chapter has made a focused discussion on a series of issues investigated in this research. I specially stress that various “unintended maltreatment” and “educational maltreatment” cases must be paid attention to. The large study pressure and study burden has become a kind of devastation for

the students. Therefore, the parents, teachers, as well as the whole society must reflect on our education and discipline method. This chapter has also discussed the implications of this research on children rights protection in China, mainly in the following three aspects:

In the notional level, it has implication on the parents. They should reflect on the traditional understanding of children and to think over what is “for the good of the children”. Children’s views on corporal punishment and child abuse make it necessary for parents to rethink whether their behaviors are really “for the good of the children”. In the policy level, it has implication on the state. It should pay more attention to child protection within the family, clarify the related law stipulations, legal responsibility and ways of remedy, and endow children rights protection with operability. In the practice level, it has implication on social worker, it is emphasized that copying the intervention mode of the West is not realistic; the characteristics of Chinese culture and society development should be taken into consideration in the intervention of child abuse. Incorporating the above considerations, four proposals have been put forward.

In any attempt to understand and define child abuse in the globalization age, the spirit of “cultural consciousness” is important. It is necessary to respect the differences between different social cultures, and reflect on our own culture to see whether any aspect needs improving. What is important lies not in whether to accept the Western concept of “child abuse”, but whether to accept the idea of protecting children’s rights, which lies behind the concept. When dealing with

the actual problems of violation of children's rights, not only should the national conditions of China be taken into consideration, but most important of all, the experiences in other countries and regions and indeed the attitudes and views of the children themselves should also be referred to.

Personal particulars of 40 interviewees

	Child-interviewees					Parent-interviewees		
	Name	Age	Sex	Grade at school	Relationship with child	Age	Occupation	Education
1	Huanhuan	12	F	Form 1	Mother	42	Financial planner	Diploma
2	Xiaojun	12	M	Form 1	Mother	41	Accountant	Degree
3	Yuanyuan	12	F	Form 1	Mother	37	Civil servant	Degree
4	Ningning	10	M	Primary 5	Mother	37	Immigrant worker	Junior High school
5	KK	11	F	Primary 6	Mother	36	Community worker	Senior High School
6	Jingjing	9	M	Primary 4	Mother	36	Community worker	Senior High School + Diploma
7	Dongdong	10	M	Primary 5	Mother	40	Housewife	Degree
8	Tiantian	12	M	Form 1	Mother	41	Journalist	Master
9	Hanghang	9	M	Primary 4	Father	40	Editor	Master
10	Lulu	12	M	Form 1	Father	41	NGO employee	Junior High School + Diploma
11	Mingming	13	M	Form 2	Mother	51	Doctor	Diploma
12	Lanlan	10	M	Primary 5	Father	40	Police	Special Secondary School + Diploma
13	Xiaogang	14	M	Form 3	Father	42	Unemployed	Senior High School
14	Tingting	12	F	Form 1	Father	45	Community worker	Senior High School
15	Maomao	10	F	Primary 5	Father	42	Civil servant	Degree
16	Qingqing	11	F	Primary 6	Mother	36	Primary teacher	Diploma
17	Jiajia	15	F	Form 3	Mother	47	Community worker	Special Secondary School
18	Xiaoqiang	15	M	Form 3	Father	52	Worker	Senior High School
19	Chenchen	11	M	Primary 6	Mother	37	Nurse	Special Secondary School
20	Fangfang	12	F	Form 1	Father	39	University teacher	PhD

Appendix 1 (Cont'd)

Personal particulars of 20 child participants in the focus groups

Focus Group		Name	Age	Sex	Grade at school
Group 1	1	Xingyue	11	F	Primary 6
	2	Leilei	10	F	Primary 5
	3	Xiaoxiao	11	F	Primary 6
	4	Dagu	10	M	Primary 5
	5	Xiaoyu	11	M	Primary 6
	6	Xuenan	10	F	Primary 5
Group 2	7	Dajie	12	M	Form 1
	8	Mingren	12	M	Form 1
	9	Shanshan	12	F	Form 1
	10	Honghai	12	M	Form 1
	11	Meimei	12	F	Form 1
	12	Zhuzhu	12	F	Form 1
Group 3	13	Xiaolong	13	M	Form 2
	14	Yulu	13	F	Form 2
	15	Xiaoyan	13	F	Form 2
	16	Xiaotang	13	M	Form 2
	17	Yiyi	13	F	Form 2
	18	Juanjuan	13	F	Form 2
	19	Zhenzhen	13	F	Form 2
	20	Wutong	13	F	Form 2

Guides for Data Collection

1. Interview Guideline in the First Round Interviews

1.1 *Guides for interviewing with children:*

- Experiences of growing up and the daily life;
- Parent-child relationship, especially power relation in the family;
- Understanding of childhood and the child's rights;
- The causes and impact of parental child battering;
- Perceptions and attitudes to some Chinese proverb;
- Understanding on child abuse;
- Expectation on social intervention in parental child battering and child abuse.

1.2 *Guides for interviewing with parents:*

- Background and experience of growing up in childhood;
- Parenting practices and the daily life;
- Parent-child relationship, especially power relation in the family;
- Comparison of parent-child relationship today with that of the past, as well as today children and past children;
- Understanding of child, childhood and the child's rights;
- The causes and impact of parental child battering;
- Perceptions and attitudes to some Chinese proverb;
- Understanding on child abuse;
- Views on social intervention in parental child battering and child abuse.

2. Interview Guide in the Second Round Interviews

2.1 *Guides for interviewing with children:*

- The difference between your mother and your father on the *Guanjiao* (discipline) methods;
- Any resistance to parents' *Guanjiao*;
- View on filial piety;
- Parental expectation to you;
- Views on three cases of parental child battering (see Appendix 3): whether these children should be battered by their parents; whether these cases are child abuse and why;
- Whether your parents abuse you when they hit you, and why;
- Differences between *Guanjiao*, corporal punishment and maltreatment/abuse.

2.2 *Guides for interviewing with parents:*

- Differences between you and your spouse on parenting and *Guanjiao* methods;
- The effect of parental child battering;
- Understanding on *Jiazhang*;
- Expectation to your only-child;
- View on filial piety;
- Views on three cases of parental child battering (see Appendix 3): whether these children should be battered by their parents; whether these cases are child abuse and why;
- Whether you abuse your child when you hit him or her, and why;
- Differences between *Guanjiao*, corporal punishment and maltreatment/abuse;
- Satisfaction towards your child and regret in parenting and *Guanjiao*.

3. The Topics Discussed in Three Focus Groups

3.1 Parent-child relationship in one-child family, including:

- Whether you feel you are a “spoilt child”;
- Views on filial piety;
- Whether parents should have rights and power to batter their child;
- Whether parental child battering affects parent-child relationship.

3.2 Differences between *guanjiao*, corporal punishment and abuse, including:

- What is child abuse?
- Do you think parental child battering is child abuse?
- How is child abuse different from corporal punishment?

Vignettes for Discussion in the Interviews and Focus Groups

Case 1. In April 2000, Wang Chuang, an 8-year-boy in the Fangshan district of Beijing, was battered by his mother with a broom for several hours because he often failed to finish his schoolwork. This caused him acute renal failure and a large contusion and dropsy on his buttocks and legs. The forensic report graded Wang Chuang's injury as "severe". The Fangshan District Court gave the first-instance judgment that his mother was guilty of intentional injury and gave her 3 years fixed-term imprisonment suspended for 4 years (*Beijing Evening Newspaper*, 15 April, 2000 and 13 August, 2000).

Case 2. Xu Li, a 17-year-old-boy in Jinhua city of the Zhejiang Province, was required by his mother to be one of the top ten students in each subject in his grade. Otherwise, he would be beaten and scolded. "She frequently uses the stick, broom and leather belt to beat me, sometimes to the extent that the broom was broken. I did not strike back. I had tried to explain to her, but she never listened to me." In January 2000, Xu Li killed his mother with a hammer. He said he could not endure his mother's long-term beating, scolding and demanding discipline. He was condemned to 15 years fixed-term imprisonment in the first-instance judgment. What is unfortunate is that many middle and primary school students thought that their mothers were very much like Xu Li's mother (Lu, 2001).

Case 3. Wen Xueping, a 12 year-old-girl in Changji city of the Xinjiang Province, was frequently battered and scolded by her parents because she habitually told lies behaved badly. One day, a classmate suspected Wen Xueping had stole her money and told Wen Xueping's mother. The mother interrogated her after she went home. She refused to confess stealing the money. Therefore, her mother battered her, hung her up on the house beam, and then used a leather belt to lash her.

GLOSSARY

- aoshu* 奥数（奥林匹克数学的简称） International Mathematics Olympiads
- bang da chu xiaozi* 棒打出孝子 the rod makes an obedient son
- bu da bu cheng cai* 不打不成才 spare the rod and spoil the child, or the rod makes a successful child
- bu jichou* 不记仇 not bear grudges
- bu ting laoren yan, chikui zai yan qian* 不听老人言，吃亏在眼前 not obeying the elders and suffering losses right away
- bu zhi wang* 不指望 not expecting to rely on
- cha xu ge ju* 差序格局 the differential mode of association
- chao nü* 超女 super-girls
- chikui* 吃亏 suffering losses
- chouren* 仇人 potential enemy
- chu ren tou di* 出人头地 standing above others in life, or standing out among one's fellows
- da haizi* 打孩子 child beating, hitting, or battering
- da qi wan cheng* 大器晚成 late-bloomer
- daren* 大人 adults
- da shi qin, ma shi ai* 打是亲，骂是爱 beating is caring and scolding is love
- da si jiang zui de, yan si hui shui de* 打死犟嘴的，淹死会水的 talking back may be beaten to death and swimming may be drowned
- da yi bazhang, rou san rou* 打一巴掌揉三揉 giving one slap and soothing three times
- danwei* 单位 work unit or agency
- dingzui* 顶嘴 talking back, or arguing back
- duo yi shi bu ru shao yi shi* 多一事不如少一事 the less trouble, the better
- dong shou* 动手 beating (using the hands)
- en* 恩 favor
- fei kou she* 费口舌 wasting your breath talking

ganqing secai 感情色彩 affectional color, or emotional feeling
gei ta ji xia 给他几下 giving a few hits
guai 乖 obedience
guan 管 controlling, discipline, looking after, and teaching
guanjiao 管教 discipline
guanxi 关系 relation, or personal relationship
guoqing 国情 national conditions
hen tie bu cheng gang 恨铁不成钢 dissatisfaction that iron could not turn into steel
Hu du bu shi zi 虎毒不食子 even a vicious tiger will not eat its cubs
jiang daoli 讲道理 reasoning, or reasoning things out
jiazhang 家长 the family head
ke lian tian xia fu mu xin 可怜天下父母心 parents always worry about the well-being of their children
ke wai ban 课外班 extracurricular classes
kexing 克星 something that overrides another
kezhi 克制 constraining
mianzi 面子 face or social honor
mei da mei xiao 没大没小 no differentiation between adults and children
niai 溺爱 spoiling
nuedai ertong 虐待儿童 child maltreatment/abuse
pianxin 偏心 giving more love to one than to the other
qing guan nan duan jia wu shi 清官难断家务事 to be difficult for upright officials to judge family matters
renqing guanxi 人情关系 interpersonal affectionate relationship
saqitong 撒气筒 something to vent one's anger on
sangang “三纲” the three outlines, or the three bonds
shaojiao 少教 inadequate discipline from parents, or lacks family education
shengshi 省事 saving trouble

sheng zai fu zhong bu zhi fu 生在福中不知福 not content with the happy life they
already have
shu zai qi pao xian shang 输在起跑线上 losing at the starting line
shuang bai 双百 double hundreds
suzhi di 素质低 poor quality means less education and less civilized behavior
taoqi 淘气 naughtiness
tian zhi jiao zi 天之骄子 the proud son of the sky
tian xia wu bu shi de fumu 天下无不是的父母 no wrongful parent under the sky
tinghua 听话 listening to and following parents' words and advice
wang nü cheng feng 望女成凤 expecting one's daughter to be a phoenix, or
hoping one's child will be a high-flier
wang zi cheng long 望子成龙 expecting one's son to be a dragon, or hoping
one's child will be a high-flier
wu dai er tong 误待儿童 child mistreatment
wulun “五伦” the five ethical principles
xiao 孝、孝道 filial piety
xiaojing 孝敬 filial respect
xiaoxin 孝心 filial love (heart)
yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo 养不教，父之过 the father's fault to only raise but not
discipline and teach the child
yang er fang lao 养儿防老 raising child to provide for old age
yang er fang zhi fumu en 养儿方知父母恩 only when you have a baby do you
start to realize how difficult it is for your parents to take care of you
zhang jixing 长记性 remembering the lesson
zhen bu zhu 震不住 could not subdue
zheng kou qi 争口气 putting up a good show
zuoren 做人 conduct oneself as a person

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